IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN GIRLS AND WOMEN:

THE STORIED SELF

By

DEBORAH A. BRANSFORD

Bachelor of Arts
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington
1982

Master of Arts
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington
1984

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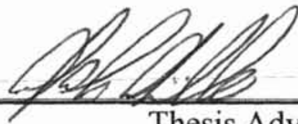
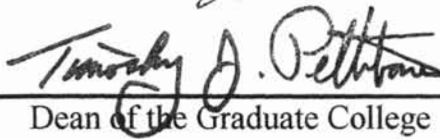


Thesis Adviser



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CHAPTER I

Introduction

I proposed to conduct a descriptive qualitative research project that would examine the concept of identity development in girls as they mature into young women. I planned to do this from a narrative approach, by studying the stories that I collected from young college women. I wanted stories that would convey to me the storyteller's sense of identity, in her own words. I called these "stories of self."

Many years ago I took a beginning art class in college, Drawing 101. Sometime near the beginning of the course, the artist-professor told the class an anecdote that I still remember today. The story was about the art teacher's wife, who was also an artist, and their young son, who was just learning how to draw on paper with his own crayons or colored pencils. Supposedly, one day the mother suggested to her son, "Why don't you draw while I paint?" After the child worked on his drawing for a time, the mother took a break from her painting and looked at what he had done. The drawing appeared to be a large circle with four lines emanating from its circumference like rays: one line heading east, one west, and two longer parallel lines heading south. Inside the circle were markings that could represent eyes, nose, and mouth. The mother asked her son what he had drawn. He stated in a firm, clear voice, "It's a person." Then the mother said, "Oh, but that's not a person." "Look at me," she said, standing up tall before him with her arms and legs spread out. "Do my arms and legs come straight out of my head? Are my eyes little straight lines?" And the boy looked back and forth from his creation to her and replied, "Well, but I wasn't drawing *you*."

Whether the art professor invented this story does not matter. What does matter is that it meant something to him. Evidently, one meaning he got from the story made it useful in his efforts to teach Drawing 101, but as a father, husband, and artist, it probably meant more as well. For example, as a father, the story might have held meaning regarding his son's cognitive developmental level or his son's ability to assert himself socially, as an individual. As a husband, the story may have held more meaning to him through focusing on his wife's role in the story, especially as a coparent. As an artist, he may have formed meaning by considering emerging elements of his son's aesthetic sense.

The story must have meant something to me, as well, since I have remembered it for more than three decades. I probably remember it differently from what the professor actually told and differently today from when I first heard it. The same might be said of all my fellow art students. I remember thinking that the mother's response did not include a compliment for good work done or even for good effort, but rather, it sounded like an unnecessary, tactless critique. And if it were a true story, it probably meant something very particular to the father, mother, and son—then and now. What did the story say about the son? Or say about the mother? Or what does it mean to me? Or, now, in retelling, what does it mean to you, the new audience?

The story is a benign anecdote, but it serves as an example of the power and complexity of the narrative, of storytelling. It reflects the universality of the storytelling technique—that it can be employed for a variety of effects and purposes, that stories can be told and retold over time, that people share their stories, and that teller and listener are vital roles. Whether the art professor was conscious of this or not, on some level he was aware of being able to effectively "reach" his students through the use of storytelling.

Stories play a crucial role in the development of human lives. It is the conviction of psychologist Susan Engel (1995), author of *The Stories Children Tell*, that "the stories we tell ourselves, aloud or silently, play a vital role in shaping what we feel, think, and know about our lives" (p. 5). Through the stories we hear and tell we learn and participate in our culture. We think, organize, create, and acquire or give meaning to our experiences. Particularly as developing children, storytelling is crucial,

> ...because in the telling the child is both practicing telling stories and building up an inventory of stories that contribute to a life story and a *self-representation*... Because to a great extent we are the stories we tell, and our memories of personal experiences are what give us a history and a sense of who we are—past, present, and future. (Engel, p. 14)

It is this relationship between a developing sense of self and the use of the narrative or storytelling, to convey and to construct identity that I propose to explore in this project.

The temporal element—past, present, and future—is of particular interest not just because of the developmental aspects to identity formation, but because it implies continuation and an element of continuity to the storytelling process—that is, stories are or can be ongoing, evolving, and revised or even "re-authored." The term *re-authoring* is used in a narrative therapy approach to psychotherapy, referring to the therapeutic process of therapist and client collaborating to reconstruct alternative meanings to incidents, experiences, problems, interpretations, or stories (Michael White, 1995, as cited in Lee, 1997).

It is also important not to overlook *our* involvement in the construction of *our* stories, because, though influenced by the stories of our parents, families, and societies,

our stories are also the result of *our* meaning-making process, of *our* choices, and of *our* interpretations. Through re-authoring or revising one's story or narrative, one can construct a story that agrees more with what a person wants for him/herself. In this way, our stories can be seen as self-representations, "constructions" of the self. For purposes of this study, it is especially important not to overlook the meanings given to the stories that reflect or identify the self—our self in story form.

The scope of this project will be focused primarily on identity development with girls and women, with little attention given to gender differences, per se. I assert that the traditional focus of identity development with an emphasis on gender differences has been overdone and with fairly staid results, meaning that differences have been identified, but that knowledge has not been fully utilized. What needs further attention is not *whether* there are differences in identity development between the sexes, but rather, *how* women do identity work (Horst, 1995).

In addition, there seems to be an underutilization or underappreciation of the role of storytelling, personal narratives, as a meaning-making process or device, especially as it relates to developing or constructing a sense of self. In other words, examining the stories may contribute to answering the *how* of identity work. It is in this vein that I suggest taking a few steps "back" and a few "aside" when considering the prevalent research, before stepping "forward," possibly, into new territory, new ways of looking into how girls/women do identity work.

Stepping Back

Historically, as the field of psychology grew from its Freudian psychoanalytic base, theories of developmental psychology evolved, with their main focus being changes within the human psychological world *over time*. Long considered preeminent in the field, Erik Erikson proposed his now well-established, though still often debated, *epigenetic* principle of development, especially including its *psychosocial* emphasis (in Miller, 1983). Briefly stated, Erickson proposed that, as humans, we are not born with fully developed personalities. Rather, over a lifetime of social experiences and physical maturation, our personalities, our identities, "evolve" through stages—one building upon the previous, successively differentiating in the process. Erikson (in Miller) had a more positive and socially oriented theoretical approach than Freud, particularly in that Erikson believed that

> …a main theme of life is the quest for *identity*. This term refers to "a conscious sense of individual identity…an unconscious striving for a continuity of personal character" (Erikson, 1959, p. 102)…Stated differently, identity is the understanding and acceptance of both the self and one's society. (p. 159)

Erikson recognized that physiological maturation and societal expectations combined to create certain crises or issues that a child/person would have to resolve. These, he proposed, came in sequences, in stages (in Miller). Based on research and observations made exclusively on males, Erikson proposed eight age-related, sequential stages that emerge over the person's life span. The fifth stage, which occurs during adolescence or approximately from twelve to eighteen years, is primarily concerned with issues and/or crises of identity. It is referred to as the "identity and repudiation versus identity

diffusion" stage (in Miller, p. 165). Although Erikson proposed that identity formation was the major developmental task of the adolescent years, he also believed the work done during the *identity crisis* had a great and continuing influence later on in life.

More recently (i.e., from mid-1960s through 1980s), another developmental psychologist, James Marcia, expanded Erikson's work, especially with respect to the "identity stage" (in Evans, 1996). In his work, Marcia defined four identity statuses that stipulated whether or not an individual had experienced a *crisis*, that is "related to vocational choice, religion, or political ideology," (in Evans, p. 166) and had experienced *commitment*, that is the degree to which the individual was personally invested in a particular choice. Crisis and commitment were two main factors defining each of Marcia's four styles of identity resolution.

Marcia's work included studies with men and women and is primarily oriented towards traditional age college students (i.e., late teens and early twenties). Also, his work does not constitute stages, hierarchical development, or strict sequencing (in Evans, 1996). Essentially, his work accommodates differences in pace, needs, and experiences in an individual's identity development. Marcia's later work expanded further to include the dimension of sexual values as well.

Stepping Aside

Challenging the rigidity, standards (norms), and exclusivity (solely male-based research) of Erikson's work, feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982) asserts that "when women do not conform to the standards of psychological expectation, the conclusion has generally been that something is wrong with the women" (p. 14). Gilligan's work indicates that women develop differently from men and differently

within Erikson's stages, especially, for example, with respect to intimacy being incorporated within women's identity development, not separated from it. She interprets and disputes Erikson's ideas on the task of identity development with women—the stage of "intimacy versus identity"—as going into "abeyance as she prepares to attract the man by whose name she will be known, by whose status she will be defined" (p. 12). Instead, Gilligan explains how she sees identity stage development in women—"Intimacy goes along with identity, as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others" (p. 12). Thus, Gilligan's work suggests significant elements left out of Erikson's stages or which were misunderstood or incorrectly defined or sequenced. These elements include the concept of care and being responsible for others, importance of relationships and connections, separation equated as independence, and attachment equated as dependence, for example.

Stepping Forward

In 1987, Ruthellen Josselson published her study on identity development in which she used and expanded the works of Erikson, Marcia, Gilligan, Margaret Mahler, and others. Josselson interviewed sixty women, mostly seniors in college, identifying and selecting the women according to Marcia's four identity statuses. About ten to twelve years later, she interviewed thirty-four of them again. Josselson defined identity as "the interface between the individual and the world, defining as it does what the individual will stand for and be recognized as" (p. 8). What she found in her study, after conducting both sets of interviews, was that in contrast to identity development with men, women "orient themselves in more complicated ways, balancing many involvements and

aspirations, with connections to others paramount; their identities are thus compounded and more difficult to articulate" (p. 8).

Josselson's (1987) work steps "forward" in approaching and understanding identity work in women for several reasons. One is in its recognition of and emphasis on object-relations theory assumptions that stipulate—

> that humans are born object seeking. Issues of relatedness—among them separation-individuation—replace libido as organizing aspects of ego development... Self-definition and object relations are inextricably linked. (Josselson, p. 26)

Thus, if humans—that is, girls—are born object (other people) seeking, and if the primary caregiver is (usually) the mother, then relating to and forming significant attachments with the same-sex parent would necessarily be a unique, involved, and wholly different occurrence for them than it would be for boys. As Josselson proposes,

> a theory of the separation-individuation process that underlies identity formation in women must appreciate that women never fully separate from their mothers. This relationship is crucially important to women at least through their early adulthood. (p. 190)

Recognizing and appreciating the difference in separation-individuation for men and women is one way of stepping forward. Though in another way it reverberates historically as well, that is, if stated differently—in its acknowledgement and validation of women's "lived experience." As the narrative therapy approach evolved out of hermeneutics, it retained the significance of what German philosopher Wilhem Dilthey called *Erlebnis* or *Erlebnisausdrucke*, the "lived experience": one's phenomenological

perspective or "expressions of lived experiences" (Ermath, 1978). Combined with Josselson's proposal, the lived experiences of men and women and their subsequent expressions would necessarily be unique to their respective sexes.

Dilthey discussed this phenomenon within a larger debate between the value of research within the human sciences and within the natural sciences and what can be learned from each. According to Dilthey, this "class" of expressions of lived experience can be "a gesture, a written text, an action," (Ermath, 1978, p. 271) poetry, music, or art, for example. He felt expressions are particularly valuable in the human sciences because

> They are direct manifestations of inner mental life...These expressions disclose the deepest recesses and resources of the human mind...The interpretation...is often...also the most revealing of individual life and human life in general. (Ermath, p. 273)

Considering stories or narratives of selves as *expressions* in this light, there is great potential for understanding an individual's meaning(s) within the stories. Stories of identity can be heard as expressions of an *inner self, revealing* the individual, and how the storyteller *interprets* her self.

Additionally, an enriching element in this process is that, as the interviewer/ inquirer, my understanding and appreciation of these stories will be *re*-presented in my retelling, in *my* expressions—that is, through the whole process of the project: listening, interpreting, analyzing, critiquing, and writing. This added dimension has been termed *connoisseurship* or *the art of apperception*, in Elliot Eisner's version of "contructivism" in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b). It is important, especially when considering stories and storytelling, because of the significance and value it places on

"what the connoisseur [here, the researcher] perceives or experiences are qualities—the sensory features of a phenomenon" (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 244). In other words, the interviewer/inquirer/critic or connoisseur must use and be sensitive to an "aesthetic form of knowing."

> The critic describes, interprets, and appraises the phenomenon and thereby aids in the reeducation of the reader's perception. This narrative, storied mode of re-presenting the connoisseur's experience is particularly significant because it points to the importance of an aesthetic (versus scientific or propositional) form of knowing in human inquiry. The narrative accounts can themselves be evaluated or appraised for their "rightness" through the judgment of their coherence, referential adequacy, and instrumental utility. (Eisner, 1991, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, p. 245)

The individual lived experience—focusing on defining the self—can be heard in the personal story because it is an expression constructed from an inner interpretation, using an aesthetic way of knowing, and because it requires being heard from the same "form" of knowing. Approaching expressions or narratives of self and appreciating that they are created from this aesthetic form of knowing, to me, seems another step "forward" in focusing on how women do identity work.

Identity Today

Practicing clinical psychologist, Mary Pipher, disclosed in the forward to her book, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (1994), the realization that times had changed from when she was an adolescent girl growing up to what girls

today—her clients—were experiencing. She shared her efforts to understand her clients' world and to incorporate this knowledge into her clinical practice.

> Cassie awakened me to an essential truth: In 1993, girls' experiences are different from those of myself and my friends in the 1960s. When I tried to understand them based on my own experience, I failed. There was some common ground, enough to delude me that it was all common ground, but there was much new, uncharted territory. To work with girls in the 1990s I had to understand a new world. I had to let go of my ideas and look at the girls before me with fresh eyes. I had to learn from them before I could help. (p. 233)

As Mary Pipher offers this fragment of *her* story of self, we are given an opportunity to appreciate and benefit from "hearing" it too. It appears Pipher gained clarity, perhaps insight, when comparing her story to those of her clients.

Certainly, I, too, draw on my own years growing up and my own experiences as a resource for working with young women (counseling internship and volunteer counselor at a neighboring four-year midsize university). And I am aware that times have indeed changed, but I had assumed changed *for the better*. Just two years ago (1999), I was jarred into "reality" about where our culture is concerning how we contribute to identity development or socialization of "our" girls today.

My, then, two-year-old granddaughter, Hallie, was on her first Halloween trick-or-treat experience. She had got it into her head that she wanted to be a king for Halloween. She got the idea from numerous viewings of a favorite songs-and-dances-for-preschoolers videotape, which featured a man dressed as a king: long red royal robe flowing down from his shoulders, an ornate crown on his head, and a bejeweled scepter

in his hand. Each time Hallie watched the video, she would invariably ask me to wrap and position her favorite "blankie" around her head so that it replicated the feel of a crown and royal robe. Wearing that blanket, Hallie was King. She strutted around proclaiming, "I King."

Come Halloween, Hallie's blankie was replaced with a homemade, but a more regal-looking robe with artificial ermine trim; her paper crown was covered with leftover shiny buttons, beads, and costume jewelry; and her cardboard scepter was topped with "gold" glitter. As her mother accompanied her to an early evening open-house-type event put on by the local retail merchants, Hallie was in her element. She was King.

Approaching the doorway of her first store, Hallie was complimented on her fine outfit, "My what a beautiful queen you are." Hallie corrected the shop-owner and said, "I King." A similar exchange happened at the second store when Hallie volunteered that she was a king and the shop-owner "corrected" Hallie by suggesting she meant "queen."

It only took three stores, plus a few encounters along the sidewalks, for Hallie to stop declaring that she was King. She had changed her story. When adults would inquire or suggest that she was a lovely queen, Hallie became mute. She would look at them with a puzzled expression, because less than an hour ago, starting out from home, she had been *sure* that she was King.

I cried when my daughter first told me this story. Now, two years later, my daughter sounds a little more philosophical about the experience. She claims that Hallie enjoyed herself, that she disregarded the opinions offered, and that she concentrated on acquiring the treats. I am still concerned. I heard the power to shape or misshape a little two-year-old girl and in the most benign setting. This story served as a wake-up call to

me—how many times had I acted or spoken in that way? How often did/do I impose my assumptions onto others and to what effect? How often do I allow myself to hear the corrections when they are expressed? I do not recall how often I did in the past, but I try very hard not to any more.

Thus, in a similar vein to Mary Pipher's disclosure, this small project could be a vehicle for personal exploration and growth for me. It may also prove useful to other counselors entering the field or to anyone interested in the process of identity development in girls and women or in the role storytelling plays in our lives.

Purpose of Study

The intent of this project is to listen to the stories of young college women as a viable and valuable means of hearing their development of self, to listen for clues to their developed or developing sense of identity. I hope to hear from a few young women *stories of self* that represent to them who they are. I would like to hear from the informants' stories, anecdotes, vignettes, or recollections that each woman thinks conveys or portrays the person she sees herself as being: her identity of self, today *and* when she was younger. What does *self* mean to each informant as revealed in her story?

I would like to compare and contrast the stories from the different women—that is, compare both stories from each participant and, later, contrast all of the stories from everyone in the study—listening for what is there and for what is absent. I hope to learn from these contemporary young women (about nineteen years old or older) what their world is like for them today—that is, to learn how their identities are developing within today's society. What are these young women dealing with today that either helps or

hinders their developing sense of self? How has that changed for them from the self they recall themselves being at about nine years old?

Age nine is chosen because usually at nine a girl would have the clarity to recognize her competence and confidence and would most likely reveal these in her story of self. According to Emily Hancock (1989), nine is the age women returned to find or to rediscover "the true self, for even in unhappy circumstances a girl this age possesses an uncommon clarity" (p. 16). But after nine,

> the older girl succumbs to the culture's image of the female, her childhood displays give way to hiding—skills, excellence, aspirations, parts of the self—first from others in order to please, eventually also from herself... Female roles impinge; stereotypes take over... Self-confidence yields to self-consciousness as a girl judges herself as others judge her—against an impossible feminine ideal... She loses her self-possession; she loses her sense of self as subject; she senses that she is now "other" and becomes object in a male world. (Hancock, pp. 21-22)

In this way, nine years old could be seen as possessing an identity that is "pre" crisis. At nine a girl would be in the middle of Erikson's fourth stage of personality development, the stage immediately preceding the "identity crisis" stage. Though, according to many researchers (Gilligan, 1982; Hancock, 1989; Josselson, 1987; Pipher, 1994), she would also possess a clear, well-defined sense of self, which I hope will be recalled and articulated by the nineteen-year-old informants.

The current, actual age of the student-informants was chosen for two reasons. One reason is that at nineteen or twenty the informants will be about ten years past the nine-year-old girl's idea or sense of self. It was assumed that she would have had ten years

worth of experiences to drawn upon for her contemporary story of self. For practical and legal concerns, the nineteen-year-old young woman is considered an adult and can participate in a research project on her own consent, no additional parental consent required.

The second reason was that it is, now, about nineteen or twenty years since the first publication of feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan's (1982) seminal work, *In A Different Voice*. Gilligan's research on identity and moral development was one of the first to be conducted that included females in the study. Her findings, especially if seen as part of the growth and development of feminist therapy, challenged much of the previous dominant theories and paradigms in the area of psychological development. One of the work's major contributions was the attention given to the salient differences between the experiences of men and women growing up in our culture. Gilligan and other feminist psychologists had many insights that, by now, have "already been incorporated into the mainstream of psychotherapy practice" (Brown & Brodsky, 1992, p. 56). I wanted to be alert when listening to the informants' stories for evidence that issues described in *A Different Voice* are having or did have an impact on young women today. Given the growth and numerous contributions of feminist therapy generally over its first twenty years (roughly, 1972 to 1992), particularly in the areas of gender roles and gender-based discrimination, it seems a viable timeframe for setting the upper age to collect data in this study (Brown & Brodsky, 1992; Enns, 1993).

<u>Research Questions</u>

I will listen closely to the *language* used to tell the stories, listen to *how* the stories are told, and try to interpret whether or not the young women recognize

differences in self from nine to nineteen. Are there any? How and when did they happen? Can I hear why and to what purpose? Have values or goals changed? Do they sound competent and confident in each story: the one at nine and the one from today? I will listen for similarities and differences between the stories of the different informants. Asked another way, have their stories of self, like Hallie's pretended identity at Halloween, been revised, rewritten, or re-authored for her or by her?

Definition of Terms

Dissociation. Carol Gilligan (1982) refers to *dissociation* as the coming not to know that one knows, the difficulty in hearing or listening to one's voice, the disconnection between mind and body, thoughts and feelings, and the use of one's voice to cover rather than to convey one's inner world, so that relationships no longer provide channels for exploring the connections between one's inner life and the world of others (p. *xxi*).

Epigenisis. *Epigenisis* is a term Erikson borrowed from biology and fetal development to help explain his theory of stage development in humans, called the *epigenetic principle*. He proposed that "the personality becomes increasingly differentiated and hierarchically organized as it unfolds in and is shaped by a particular environment" (Miller, 1983, p. 158).

Identity. For purposes of this project, I use identity in a global sense, an overall sense of self, which seems encompassed in the following definition: as "the organized set of images, the sense of self, which express who and what we *really* are" (Widick, Parker, & Knefelkamp, 1978, p. 2.)

crystallizes these personally meaningful aspects for storyteller and listener alike" (Hancock, 1989, p. 11). In addition, storytelling has a developmental aspect: the process is enriched as we mature from children to adults. But the main purpose remains the same. As Emily Hancock (1989) explains, it is a human condition to

> think through stories...cognitive psychologists have suggested that narratives are the forms in which we organize experience, and that stories, or the outlines of stories, guide not only our memory but also our experience of what is happening and what may happen in the future. (p. 9)

Voice. Carol Gilligan (1982) describes the use of voice as it is used in this study by the following.

> By voice I mean something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self. Voice is natural and also cultural...Voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds...Voice is a new key for understanding the psychological, social, and cultural order—a litmus test of relationships and a measure of psychological health. (p. *xvii*)

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Foundations

For decades now some psychologists have suggested that a child's first six years of life are a significantly powerful influence on a person's adult life or adult identity. The concept has its roots in the theories of Freud (from birth into the *latency* period), Adler (especially as one's *fictional finalism* becomes a *life goal*), Erikson (into *industry versus inferiority* stage leading to the notion of *identity crisis*), among other key figures in psychology (Corey, 1977; Mosak, & Maniacci, 1999). In addition, it could safely be asserted that the quest for one's identity—finding one's sense of self—is an undercurrent running throughout the life span, through each developmental stage, and is a recurrent theme of our times (i.e., the 20th and now the 21st centuries) (in Miller, 1983). And today, one can also assert and generally agree that women and men, girls and boys, develop differently, physiologically, emotionally, morally, and psychologically. In addition, generally speaking, we can claim to be more multiculturally enlightened (to a degree), which allows us to recognize developmental differences and influences within our mainstream American culture and with respect to other cultures.

It is safe to say that the scope of view on development has been sufficiently widened to be more inclusive, but in this section, the literature focus is primarily on girls and women. Literature is reviewed that moves beyond the fact of notable differences between genders and steps "forward." To step forward means to consider how these differences may come about for girls and women and, in some cases, how to deal with differences as they are currently manifested in our society. In addition, the selected

literature are useful in their orientation towards the practical application of counseling girls and women today. Any examination must begin from a base, thus, as stated earlier, a step not too far back, to the work of Carol Gilligan, will establish a necessary, effective starting point.

Recent Perspectives

In Her Voice

In 1982, psychologist Carol Gilligan published her book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Though now widely known, praised, and criticized, this groundbreaking work challenged the existing theories and assumptions regarding the identity and moral development processes of girls and women in our society. In her words Gilligan explains one of the major motivations for her research and writing in these areas: "At the core of my work was the realization that within psychology and the larger society, values were being taken as facts" (p. *xv*). When examining the "facts," Gilligan detected differences in the development for girls from what had been prescribed for them primarily based on research done with males only. Rather than viewing these differences as deficiencies, Gilligan (1982) states

> I reframe women's psychological development as centering on a struggle for connection rather than speaking about women in the way that psychologists have spoken about women—as having a problem in achieving separation. (p. *xv*)

From this position, Gilligan and her colleagues with the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Development of Girls (1982) discovered and described a phenomenon peculiar to the lives of many females growing up within our culture, a separation of self

(*dissociation*) and a loss of *voice*. This seemed to take place at a crucial time in the development of identity and sense of self—

> a place [in time] where we heard a distinct shift in girls' voices and observed that this change in voice coincided with changes in girls' relationships and their sense of themselves. For example, we began to hear girls at the edge of adolescence describe impossible situations—psychological dilemmas in which they felt that if they said what they were thinking and feeling they would be all alone, no one would know what was happening to them. (p. *xx*)

The researchers found girls who were at cultural, emotional, and developmental crossroads and choosing behaviors or dogma that would allow them to cope or, at least, to make sense of what their roles were supposed to be at those junctures. Gilligan claimed the phenomenon required that the girls experience a

> coming not to know what one knows, the difficulty in hearing or listening to one's voice, the disconnection between mind and body, thoughts and feelings, and the use of one's voice to cover rather than to convey one's inner world, so that relationships no longer provide channels for exploring the connections between one's inner life and the world of others. (p. *xxi*)

Thus, previously self-assured, confident, outspoken girls of nine, ten, or eleven began to silence themselves at twelve and thirteen in order to maintain increasingly "all important" relational ties. "Losing one's voice" was a necessary sacrifice and coping strategy in order to retain a sense of belonging. And belonging—meaning relationships and attachments to others—is a key element in how girls and women define themselves in our culture.

To Gilligan (1982), voice means

> something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self. The voice is natural and also cultural... Voice is a new key for understanding the psychological, social, and cultural order—a litmus test of relationships and a measure of psychological health. (p. *xvi*)

It is through this concept of voice that Gilligan's work makes a major contribution to understanding the development of self, especially with girls to women. It is crucial to understanding the girl's sense of self, her sense of identity, by listening for when her voice is silenced and when it speaks: whether it is *allowed to* speak or has the *strength to* speak.

Circling Back

In 1989, psychologist Emily Hancock published her book *The Girl Within*, which reports findings from her study of life stories of twenty adult women. In some ways, Hancock's work could be said to build on Gilligan's, though she uses a new approach, by taking the retrospective life stories of older women reflecting back on their identity development. Again, we get an explanation and development of what it means to be female in our American culture. Hancock's carefully chosen words make her work very accessible to the nonacademic reader as well as to her colleagues (psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors). The following passage from *The Girl Within* echoes the turning-point place that Gilligan and the Harvard Project (Gilligan, 1982) researchers described.

> The official culture—a patriarchal structure that places its lock on her mother, aunts, cousins, friends, *and* her father—defines her as a female instead of as a

> person. The link between who she is and what she does is twisted. She gives up "doing" in favor of "being" a good girl. Instead of suiting herself, she tries to please those around her. Impressed with the importance of others' opinions, she molds herself to what she thinks they want her to be. (p. 19)

Similar to "silencing her voice," Hancock found with each of the women in her study experienced that a time in her life when she had to relinquish a sense of identity in order to retain a sense of belonging within her culture. By the age of about nine, the women reported having a very strong sense of self, but by the time of adolescence, that "girl within" had disappeared. Much later in their lives, when for various deliberate reasons or because of various unexpected crises (e.g., death in the family or divorce), each of the women had to finally define or redefine who she was. In telling their life stories to Hancock, each woman detailed

> the crisis that threw them off course and forced them to confront the "false self" that stole in to take the girl's place—a crisis that, for the lucky, helped to dismantle and demolish that false self. Most important, they relate how they unearthed the girl from beneath the rubble and reconstructed an adult identity from the natural materials she had preserved. (p. 39)

Each woman could no longer be "silent" or be just a label—wife, mother, physician, musician, or other role. As Hancock reported with one of her participants, Wendy, "Her life study reveals just how shaky a foundation marriage can be for a woman's adult identity, for if marriage confers adulthood, its loss, by simple corollary, nullifies it" (p. 80). Time and again, the women in Hancock's study reported being lost, invisible, muted, or unheard altogether when in relationships with husbands, fathers, mothers, or others.

What each came to learn was that "freeing of her self depended not on independence from relationships but on a sense of self within them" (p. 172). Thus, forced with building or rebuilding an identity, Hancock (1989) found the women in her study reverted to an earlier, stronger, but buried sense of self and began reconstructing from there. In this way, they rediscovered "a primary childhood identity. Those who circle back to her find in the forgotten girl a key to unlocking the essential female self" (p. 39).

Saving the Selves

In 1994, practicing clinical psychologist Mary Pipher published her book *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls.* She claims in her preface that she wrote the book for a wide audience: parents, educators, health and mental-health professionals, policymakers, among others. But she also emphatically states that "It's for girls" (p. 12). *Reviving Ophelia* is shocking in its relentless message regarding what our society presents to girls today (and, less so, in the past) as a so-called developmental environment. Pipher, offers her book in order "to help them [i.e., girls] see their lives in the context of larger cultural forces" (p. 13). In that way, she stays focused on what she has learned directly from the stories of her clinical work with girls and their families. It is through their words, their stories, that she and we learn what silences girls even today, what forces them to cultivate false selves, and what truncates the identity development of strong, confident nine-year-olds into misshapen adolescents.

Though serious and sobering on the status quo for many adolescent girls today, Pipher's work (1994) also offers hope and direction. She covers a wide-ranging, long list of challenges: eating disorders; divorce; rape; "lookism" (society's overemphasis on appearance for females); drug and alcohol use; sex; peer pressure; violence in the media,

at school, and at home; relationships; and much more. Pipher succinctly states issues and problems, but then she also suggests possible interpretations and means for solutions or understanding.

> Girls have long been trained to be feminine at considerable cost to their humanity. They have long been evaluated on the basis of appearance and caught in myriad double binds…Another way to describe this femininity training is to call it false self-training. (p. 44)

She goes on to explain—

> Alice Miller said, "It is what we cannot see that makes us sick." It's important for girls to explore the impact the culture has on their growth and development… Once girls understand the effects of the culture on their lives, they can fight back. They learn that they have conscious choices to make and ultimate responsibility for those choices. Intelligent resistance keeps the true self alive. (p. 44)

Intelligent resistance requires some energy, some amount of internal strength, or just enough vigilance for a girl to honor, respect, and validate what she hears and sees. If there is enough, it can feed on itself and grow. As Pipher enumerates, strong, healthy girls may have problems with their parents, may push to distance themselves from families before their families are ready to accept them as adults, but even as they rage, "a part of them remains loyal and connected" (p.265). She goes on to list that "it's a good sign" if girls "are fighting to save themselves," "to maintain some memory of their preteen selves," "to keep interests and relationships of elementary years," and "to resist the pressure to become ultrafeminine" (p. 265). These are signs of intelligent resistance,

and “resistance means vigilance in protecting one’s own spirit from the forces that would break it” (p. 264).

Pipher’s (1994) subtle disclosure of her self is a powerful technique. It suggests strength in daring to be the person she chooses to be. With humility and humanity, Pipher uses herself as an example in her struggle to understand today’s girls and women, in seeing herself as a product of this culture too, and in her use of intelligent resistance. “Much of my adult experience has been the slow trip back to my preadolescent androgynous personality” (p. 264). The result is refreshing and hopeful when reading that an obviously successful, intelligent woman could battle and beat society’s challenges to growing up female; though in doing so, it also reveals the extent to which women have gone in order to belong to their culture and exposes the extent to which culture has shaped or misshaped them.

Later, with clarity and salience, Pipher focuses on how to “save” our girls from being “silenced” and from creating a “false self” in order to cope with life in the world today. She suggests to girls and to their parents viable ways to resist. In fact, *Ophelia* (1994) lists many characteristics of “strong girls,” demonstrating that it is possible to obtain or maintain personal strength.

> Strong girls manage to hold on to some sense of themselves in the high winds… have a sense of place...identify with an ethnic group… know who they are and value themselves as multifaceted people… [though their families are not perfect] manage to stay close to their families and maintain some family loyalty...[and] can articulate a sense that things are much tougher and not quite right in the outside world. (p. 265)

Thus, *Ophelia* truly "revives" traits to be listened for when hearing stories from girls and traits to be cultivated within their developing sense of self. This is an important aspect when focussing on identity work with girls and women, primarily because these "lists" are more often absent than present in their lives as they grow up in our culture.

Regression or Resistance

Interestingly, in the same year Pipher's *Ophelia* (1994) was published, researchers Annie Rogers, Lyn Mikel Brown, and Mark Tappan (1994) published findings of their 5-year longitudinal study of development of girls ranging in age from 7 to 18.[1] Agreeing with general research and clinical consensus that adolescent years can be a tumultuous period, these authors felt there was a clear "need to understand what is happening in the lives of girls... why adolescence is such a time of psychological distress and risk" (Rogers, Brown, & Tappan, p. 3). The researchers hoped to discover to why so many girls succumb to depression, lose their self-esteem and self-confidence, seem to falter in their academics and aspirations, develop poor body image, and are prone to eating disorders, especially during adolescence.

Proposing to incorporate both an empirical and a qualitative focus to their study, Rogers, Brown, and Tappan were intrigued by Jane Loevinger's (1976) stage theory work on ego development and her development and use of the sentence completion format in data collection. Very briefly stated, Loevinger's theory proposed nine distinct stages (though earlier it had been four stages and later ten) or levels of development, ranging from impulsive to integrated. Progress through these stages entailed a series of transformations of "structures," from the less complex to more complex. Loevinger

[1] The authors noted that an earlier version of this chapter was presented at the American Psychological Association 99th Annual Convention, San Francisco, August 1991.

(1976) referred to structure as the ego's "frame of reference." Like other cognitive developmental theories, Loevinger's theory

> assumes a universal path of human development—assumes that development is unconstrained by culture and that all people move into and out of "conventional" ways of thinking and feeling with equal ease. (Rogers, Brown, & Tappan, 1994, p. 6)

In other words, though the authors found much usefulness to a developmental stage theory study, they were also conscious of its limitations. By providing a basis for comparison, Loevinger's stage theory facilitated establishing ego levels of the girls, but movement through the stages was not always as predicted or applicable to each individual. For example, movement through the stages and acceptance of defined conventions were not always congruent with differing cultural perspectives.

When the authors (Rogers, Brown, & Tappan, 1994) applied Loevinger's theories and her Sentence Completion Test to the data collected from their pre- and adolescent girls, they found support for their suspicion that something had been "lost or endangered between ages 12 and 14" (p. 4). In their study they heard examples of what Gilligan would call that place/time when there is a distinct shift in a girl's voice, a loss of voice, or silencing of self, what Loevinger would call "regressing" to a less differentiated, less independent, and more self-critical self. Hancock (1989) might call the phenomenon the process of circling back, but it did not readily appear to be circling back to a more assertive, confident self.

Rogers, Brown, and Tappan (1994) used the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (SCT) in their longitudinal study. They administered the SCT twice to

their two cohort groups, in the first and third years of their study. The authors claimed many of the girls in the study had "regressed" one or more stages during those years: 50% of the 28 seventh graders and 45% of the 56 tenth graders (p. 4). They had expected "that experiences of crisis and struggle with the conventions of any culture, creating disequilibrium, would precipitate growth or movement forward into the postconventional stages of ego development" (p. 7)—given the underlying assumptions of Loevinger's theory. Instead, they found regression. Their question then was "Does regression accurately describe what is happening in their ego development?"

> Or is the regression captured by the SCT a sign of girls' resistance—a political and/or a psychological resistance—to the pressure on girls at adolescence to conform to debilitating gender stereotypes that negate or devalue what they know from their experiences in childhood? (p. 9)

This was the crux of their study, and through it they offered a new perspective from which to view the experiences of girls and their ego development in adolescence: regression or resistance?

Rogers, Brown, and Tappan (1994) combined empirical data from the SCT, which captured the sense of loss of self, with the qualitative data from the interview analyses, which picked up the shift in voice over time with the girls. An excellent example the authors cited concerned a subject named Janet. When interviewed at twelve she sounded very clear about what constituted being her true self, in relation to herself and with her friends: "Janet's capacity to disagree openly is linked to her sense of being herself in connection with others" (p. 2). Two years later, when Janet was fourteen, the authors found that "Janet no longer clearly distinguishes when she is being herself and when she

is wearing a mask, but instead protects herself from engaging in conflict by silencing herself and leaving relationships" (p. 2). In other words, at twelve, "speaking up" and being straightforward with her friends meant being herself and contributed to strong relationships. At fourteen, *not* speaking up, "wearing a mask," was "required" so often, in order to keep the relationships, that Janet claimed to feel confused at times about whether or not she was wearing a mask or being herself. Rogers, Brown, and Tappan interpret this period

> not a loss, or what would be described according to Loevinger's stage theory as a move to a less full and complex view of herself and of the world, but rather a developmental struggle for knowledge and voice that began in early adolescence and has culminated in psychological resiliency, a healthy resistance to cultural norms of femininity, a new sense of integrity. (p. 31)

Thus, Janet's time of confusion is not automatically equated with regression.

The Storied Self

General Story Development

Psychologist and author Susan Engel (1995) asserts that "the most interesting developmental changes have to do with the emergence of a child's personal narrative voice" (p. *ix*), "a way of communicating their [sic] unique experience and view of the world" (p. 2)—as revealed in his/her storytelling. Engel elaborates on this premise by including her conviction that "those stories that we tell ourselves, aloud or silently, play a vital role in shaping what we feel, think, and know about our lives" (p. 5). It is through this storytelling that we can be shaped into the "product" of our identity work and can also hear the "process": including the *how* it is told (e.g., emphatically, with emotion), the

when it takes place (at what developmental stage), and the *what* is told (the content, e.g., problem areas). In fact, Ochberg (1994) contends that the process or "style" of telling is now more in vogue with narrative interpretation than the actual stories—"In short, interpretation has shifted its focus from the told to the telling" (p. 113). Regardless, from both the story and the telling much can be learned about how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and relationships—"life stories are a way of fashioning identity, in both the private and public senses of that word" (Ochberg, p. 114).

Stories in Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapy uses the metaphor of story as the pivotal tenet of its perspective. It does so to define the psychosocial therapeutic approach to counseling, to demonstrate its intent, and to do its therapeutic work. Generally speaking, the narrative perspective "assumes that humans are interpretive beings in the phenomenological sense, active in the interpretation of everyday life and in the attribution of meaning through stories or self-narratives" (Lee, 1997, p. 6). Lee explains further—"These self-narratives facilitate the particular expressions of lived experience; they shape who we are and how we live with ourselves in families and communities. In this sense we are as many potential selves as the stories we create" (p. 6). Thus, we can hear people create—or construct, to use the narrative therapy term—stories as a means of understanding their lives, their worlds, their relationships, and their experiences—to make sense of or to finding meaning in their lives.

We use stories to convey these meanings to others. Understanding the lives and meaning making of people is key to being able to connect with others in therapy—this crucial phenomenon is accomplished through language. Narrative therapists Parry and

Doan (1994) claim "narrative is intrinsically the language of therapy" and from that postulate that

> each person's stories become self-legitimizing. A story told by a person in his/her own words of his/her own experience does not have to plead its legitimacy in any higher court of narrative appeal, because no narrative has any greater legitimacy than the person's own. (pp. 26-27)

The goal of narrative therapy is to encourage each person to "legitimize" his or her own story; this begins by telling it.

Stories in Qualitative Research

In qualitative research, stories obtained from the informants could be considered abbreviated versions of the more in-depth *life history*, which represents "one of the purest forms of descriptive studies. In the life history, the person tells his or her story in his or her own words" in order to capture *thick descriptions* (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 135)—descriptions that convey the informants' perspectives, meanings, and choices. When investigating the processes involved in identity development generally and between the genders, specifically, there are still problems and disagreements concerning "accurately" capturing the meanings and understanding. One researcher and professor of women's studies, Janet Lee (1997), is convinced of the usefulness of a narrative approach, especially a feminist narrative approach to learning about and helping women with identity issues and with their everyday lives. This is partly because of the approach's emphasis "that stories and their meaning systems are gendered," (Lee, p. 2) and "it is impossible for a story *not* to be gendered (p. 11). As Lee explains,

> the many self-narratives that make up our perceptions of ourselves are shaped against dominant cultural stories ("meta-narratives") about gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and other differences, as well as ongoing interactions with significant others in our lives… it is the meaning systems associated with these stories that are of most interest to the psychotherapist practicing from a narrative perspective. (p. 2)

In other words, being aware of the forces or influences of gender, race, class, and such within our culture and recognizing them and the meanings they hold is essential to a more complete and accurate understanding of our stories, their construction, and the narratives of others.

Telling Women's Stories

In 1988, author, college literature professor, and feminist Carolyn Heilbrun published a short book called *Writing a Woman's Life*. Though aimed at examining how women's lives have been portrayed—or "contrived"—in literature, Heilbrun's work reads like a text for narrative therapy. It deconstructs and exposes in a postmodernist light example after example of misreading, miswriting, or misrepresenting women's lives. Her aim in examining women's lives in literature is, in part, to expose what has been absent from the fictions and to reveal "the woman's quest for her own story" (p. 18)—two important aspects to the narrative therapy approach in psychotherapy. As an example, Heilbrun recounts a seminar she gave entitled "Gender and Literature," in which her students were required to read "four stories of women who, feeling trapped in a script

they did not write but were slowly beginning to analyze, look about them for a way out, a way to a different life" (p. 42).[2] What her students discovered, Heilbrun claims,

> was not alone the gender arrangements, the appropriate behavior, that had confined these women in stories that had always been assumed to be intelligent and fair; they also saw the absence of any narrative that could take the women past their moment of revelation and support their bid for freedom from the assigned script. (p. 42)

The students were able to recognize the protagonists' roles and situations as contrived, limited, and confined, yet they were also very realistic. The story lines reflected real life.

> Various dramatic events await these women as they strive to break free, or to satisfy a longing for identity and psychic space: suicide in two cases, murder in one, a more confined marriage in the fourth. (Heilbrun, p. 42)

Heilbrun was trying to emphasize the lack of narrative from which women can draw for the formation of their identities or for constructing their stories. She was trying to encourage her students to make the connections between the portrayal of and offerings to women in literature and those for women in real life. The revelation to the students was in their recognition that none of the characters was allowed to "escape" from the situations—it was their lot, they had no future, the scripts were rigidly written—the verisimilitude was disturbing and enlightening to the readers.

In addition to critiquing literature's portrayal of women, Heilbrun (1988) also suggested "new ways of writing the lives of women, as biographers, autobiographers, or, in the anticipation of living new lives, as the women themselves" (p. 18). This

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[2]The four stories were "The Awakening" by Kate Chopin, "To Room 19" by Doris Lessing, "A Jury of Her Peers," by Susan Glaspell, and "Cousin Lewis" by Jean Stubbs.

prescription for new ways of writing could also be translated into new ways of thinking about women, including how/what women think about themselves and their own life stories. It was Heilbrun's conviction that our identities and our lives are developed and shaped by the stories we hear and tell. Also, like Engel (1995), Heilbrun (1988) firmly believed

> What matters most is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that... We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard... Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives. (p. 37)

It was also Heilbrun's complaint that, for women, the models have been missing, except for the relatively few "misfits." The misfits' stories were of women who were thrust out of society or chose to catapult themselves out. Historically, if women did not want the only narratives available to them—marriage or erotic plots—they became society's misfits. "Misfits are often our most gifted children and, for girls, those most likely to require a different story by which to write their lives" (p. 106). Thus, in many ways, the misfits can serve as examples of the "intelligent resistance."

Heilbrun (1988) contended that making up stories to live by is extremely difficult, especially for women. She asserted that it is not just a question of "narrative and tone," but "it is also one of language. How can women create stories of women's lives if they have only male language with which to do it?" (p. 40). Her message was not meant to be one of bashing male authors, patriarchal society, or males generally, but a plea and contention that women must learn their own language in order to write stories of women in another/other ways: stories with a "quest plot." A quest plot for a real or fictional

woman's life represents, essentially, anything other than "the conventional marriage or erotic plot" (p. 48). Heilbrun's description of and plea for quest plots echoed Pipher's criteria for strong girls, Hancock's girls within, and Gilligan's unsilenced girls' voices. Historically, in women's "storyless times," these have been the only options, unless some event was "invented to transform their lives, all unconsciously, apparently 'accidentally,' from conventional to an eccentric story" (p. 48). Heilbrun proposed, for women to gain their quest plots in other ways, they must "turn to one another for stories; they must share the stories of their lives and their hopes and their unacceptable fantasies" (p. 44).

CHAPTER III

Method

Design

The overall design of this qualitative research project could be called a "collective case study"—"it is not the study of a collective but [an] instrumental study extended to several cases"—in this instance, extended to three participants or informants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998c, p. 89). The study was designed to elicit from three young, self-reflective college women narratives about themselves: stories that reflect the "self" that they think that they are: their *stories of self.* I wanted to hear from them, in their words, stories of themselves that "paint" for me a picture of how they see themselves today *and* when they were younger, perhaps about nine or ten years old. I expected to hear both continuity and change as the *self* is portrayed in the stories. I hoped to hear their *real self*, as described by psychologist James Masterson (as cited in Klein, 1995) in his psychoanalytic/ psychodynamic understanding of human development:

> The "real self" is the sum total of the individual's intrapsychic images of the self and of significant others, as well as the feelings associated with those images. Moreover, it is the capacity of the individual for action in the world guided by those images (Klein, p. 5).

Each participant was asked to tell two stories of self, each story from a different developmental stage or time in her life. These two stories were compared to and contrasted with each other as well as with the stories from the other participants.

Through actively listening to the stories of self, I was especially alert for references to identity and identity development, as these elements might have been

embedded within the stories. In particular, I listened for *a personal narrative voice* (Engel, 1994), or for *different voices*, *silenced voices*, or for *places* where it seemed voices got lost (Gilligan, 1982). I listened for hints in stories of recovering earlier confidences and strengths, when, perhaps, a young woman *circled back* to build or rebuild her sense of identity (Hancock, 1989). I listened for signs of the *cultural forces* that were or are at work on the girls'/women's development of *authentic selves*, possibly forcing them to create *false selves* (Pipher, 1994). I listened to the stories for the presence of *models* or *misfits* in the developing lives of these young women (Heilbrun, 1988). And, perhaps most important, I listened for the *meaning* of the story and for what *the process of telling* the story meant to the storyteller (McRae, 1994). For it is through stories and storytelling that we make meaning of our experiences in the world, form our perspectives, and develop our sense of identity. Viewed in this light, "...if identity is strengthened through the self-narrative, then *telling one's story is a means of becoming, just as much as is having a story to tell*" (McRae, p. 215).

Informants/Participants

This study was conducted with three informants (interchangeable with participants): three female students who were at least twent years old and who were attending a local four-year state university. Adult students were utilized because of their assumed availability (easily accessed within the campus environment), nonminor status (i.e., no parental consent to participate required), potential for interest or receptivity to the thesis project, and ability to be self-reflective and articulate. Since "descriptive studies are communicated through the data" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 135), it was especially important to have articulate, self-reflective women participate, as they provided the data

of the study: the stories or narratives that they chose to tell. Their selection was made from suggestions from personal and professional contacts, based upon knowledge of the students' ability to participate in situations that required similar skills: being introspective and communicative.

Keeping with the small scope of this qualitative study, that is, keeping the focus on identity development with girls and women only, excluding boys and men, the number of informants was kept small. Though three participants could be seen as a limitation, according to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), "the actual number of cases studied is relatively unimportant. What is important is the potential of each case to aid the researcher in developing theoretical insights into the area of social life being studied" (p. 93). Thus, again, the selection of three participants who were willing to and capable of being open and self-reflective was vital to the study. In addition to the informants' abilities, the general process of and the atmosphere created within the project contributed to their receptivity and ease in participation. In other words, it is not just the "quality" of the informants, but their comfort level during the process was also an important consideration and contribution to the success of the data collection.

Another viable option available to a small (as opposed to larger focus, more participants, and/or more time) three-person study such as this would have been to conduct a single-case study. In support of the single-case or [N=1] designs, researchers Lundervold and Belwood (2000) took a very close look at the advantages and disadvantages to experimental designs based on one; they ultimately referred to it as the "best kept secret in counseling." As a project towards completion of a master's degree in counseling, the small-study format, especially the single-case, seemed an appropriate and

valuable segue into the world of work of psychotherapy. The authors' examination and analysis resulted in presenting about seven different supportive arguments for their final "best-kept-secret" conclusion; three arguments seemed most applicable to this project and are as follows.

1. Single-case research designs provide practitioners with an evidence-based decision-making tool, thereby improving counseling effectiveness.
2. Single-case designs are directly relevant to counseling practice and to the science of counseling. Consequently such designs bridge the scientist-practitioner gap that is so frequently bemoaned and as frequently ignored.
3. Practitioners can directly engage in clinically relevant research and evaluation. (Lundervold & Belwood, p. 100).

Though strong evidence is presented for the single-case [N=1] design, by expanding the number of participants to three in this study, I had hoped to increase the opportunity to hear more cultural, ethnic, and racial factors incorporated into the data collection. I had hoped to enrich the small study through personal stories that included aspects of identity development that were also related to the particular informant's culture, ethnicity, and/or race. Thus, as the opportunity arose, I selected student-informants from as many diverse backgrounds as possible, resulting in Caucasian American, African-American, and International participants.

Paradoxically, while simultaneously trying to expand the study through diverse backgrounds, another limitation was the necessarily restrictive view into the informants' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. In other words, this was not a study of racial, ethnic, or cultural identity development, but at the same time, I wanted to be cognizant

of, sensitive to, and attentive to how those significant, relevant aspects were incorporated into the stories of self. Just as it was suggested earlier that intimacy and identity development work are done differently by gender, so too, I suggest, racial, ethnic, and cultural developmental identity work are inextricably woven *and* done differently by gender. What Rogers, Brown, and Tappan (1994) succinctly stated, as a "warning" to themselves, in their study on "Interpreting the Loss of Ego Development in Girls" seems to apply equally to this study as well.

> We needed to consider girls' relationship to the cultural conventions that are part and parcel of constructivist stage-theory models of development; that is, if particular conventions of relationship and of personhood are assumed in the definitions of stage development, then we have to consider what these conventions represent and how they have been defined, before interpreting "developmental" findings. (p. 32)

The cautionary note, then, for this study was the "cultural conventions," possibly stemming from a White, Eurocentric, and patriarchal base, potentially may have influenced each informant in dramatically different ways. Hints of these influences surfaced in each of the three participants' story of self and surfaced differently between each participant's earlier story compared with her later story of today's self.

Procedure

Once three potential informants were identified, the first step in the procedure was to contact and meet with them individually, to explain the general outline of the project, and to request their consideration to participate. For those who agreed, we arranged for two subsequent meetings, each with its own agenda. Each meeting was held in the same

location—namely, in one of the private, secure rooms in the counseling clinic on the university campus. Each meeting was scheduled at a convenient time for the informants and took about 60 to 75 minutes.

First Meeting

The preliminary meeting served as a get-acquainted time as well as a time to disseminate more information about the study. Thus while attempting to establish rapport and trust and to create a comfortable environment, I also used this time to explain the demands asked of the informants (e.g., the number of hours involved), the specifics of making an informed consent (e.g., the potential risks and benefits), and the procedure for exiting the project at any point, if desired. A copy of the informed consent form used with each informant is in the Appendix. Every effort was made to answer questions about the project, the process, and any other concerns the students expressed.

Without wanting to unduly influence the forthcoming stories, I carefully explained the type of narratives I anticipated hearing—specifically, hearing a story which would allow me to have a fairly clear idea of who this informant is: how she sees herself. Thus, before the next scheduled meeting, the informants had time to consider what stories they would choose to share: one that reflected an earlier time in her life, at about nine or ten years old, and another that reflected to how she sees herself today.

The first meeting was important for two main reasons. The first was the accurate dissemination of enough information about the project so that the student could make an informed decision whether or not to participate. The second was that the participant would feel comfortable enough with the procedure to be able to be an *authentic* storyteller. That is, I hoped that each would share personal stories of herself that truly

represented her and not stories that she "edited" or created to please me, to fulfill the requirements of the project, or to meet some other arbitrary standard of how she "ought" to appear in the story.

Second Meeting

The second meeting was the data collection period. After initial greetings and answering any questions that may have arisen since our earlier, first session, I began asking for the stories of self. These stories were in any form the participant chose. For example, she may have disclosed a recollection of her own or one she had heard being told of her by family or friends, but which she agreed accurately depicted how she saw herself. I asked for two stories: one that described or "told" who she was today and another that conveyed who she was at an earlier age.

The stories were audiotaped and transcribed by me later. I took a few notes of my impressions or thoughts that seemed significant enough to note for reference later. I used a semistructured format by following the same interview guidelines with each informant. The guidelines are explained in the following section, "The Instrument." After the participant told both stories, I reminded her that the audiotape and any electronic reproduction of the interview session would be kept secure, private, and confidential. Each participant was assigned a fictitious name. This name, rather than her real one, was used throughout the study on all transcribed material and with all other references made to each participant, such as during interpretation and analysis.

General demographic material was also collected, but no identifiable information was used when writing up the results of the study. I wanted to collect demographic

information that I anticipated would be of use in understanding each story fully and would help during the analysis phase of the project.

Tapes of the second meeting were kept in a small locked metal storage box whenever they were not being used for transcription or for listening during the analysis phase, and they were transported from the university to my home office/study in the same metal box. That box was stored in a closet in the same office/study whenever it was not transporting tapes. I also agreed to provide a copy of the transcribed stories for each participant at our next meeting, should she desire to have a copy for herself. We arranged for a third and last meeting, which would be after I had completed the transcription and interpretation/analysis phase of the project.

<u>Third Meeting</u>

Just as the preliminary meeting was meant to help set up the procedures and requirements, the closure meeting was meant to ensure that the informant felt comfortable with her participation, the process, and the collection of the data. The final meeting was an opportunity for the informant to read through the printed version of the taped stories and for her to offer any further thoughts, refinements, or ideas that she may have had since telling her stories. My interpretations of these stories may not have corresponded with the informants' intended meanings. I hoped that an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect established in the first two meetings allowed for each informant to feel as fee to offer corrections or clarifications in this last meeting as she was to divulge her personal stories earlier.

This meeting also served an opportunity to thank the informant for her participation and to ask for her impressions of the project overall. This was especially

important if I sensed or heard evidence of a negative reaction from each participant, for example any disturbing recollections or emotions related to the process of telling her stories. I did not intend or expect any adverse effects, but was alert to the possibility. In addition, I did not attempt to conduct individual counseling myself, but I did provide a sheet of campus and local mental health and service agencies to each informant. (See Appendix B.)

The final meeting required about one hour or less. I reminded each participant of my responsibilities and agreement to dispose of all taped and electronic materials once the thesis had been accepted and to continue to respect their confidentiality. I offered each participant a small token of appreciation in the form of a $5 gift certificate to a local coffee/tea shop. I reminded each participant that she had my telephone number and e-mail address on her copy of the consent form, should she desire to contact me regarding anything to do with the project.

The Interview

The interview of each informant in this project was, essentially, the "instrument" of the study. In order to effectively "administer" this instrument, though, certain factors had to be considered. Establishing rapport, trust, and respect between me and the informants and providing a secure comfortable environment for the interview meetings were, arguably, the most important factors to the study's success. Though not technically an in-depth interview, the "listening" to the stories was the sole source of the data. The listening that took place was meant to mean more than just the time hearing the stories, "but also the hours we spend later listening to tapes or studying transcripts, and even more broadly, to the ways we work at interpreting respondents' accounts" (DeVault,

1990, p. 101.). With the "proper" environment of the interview established, I would be able to convey to each informant what was being asked of her and then listen to the stories with openness and respect. At the same time, each informant appeared to fully participate with stories that represented her true self.

Interview Guide

Though the interviews were conducted in a semistructured manner, that is, without a strict protocol, a general guide was followed to cover the main areas of interest to me. At the first interview, the informant was asked to think about two stories of self that she would be asked to share at the next meeting. These stories were to be recollections/memories she had, or stories or vignettes that others (e.g., family, friends, teachers) have told of her, but still capture how she sees herself. I wanted to hear a story of self that depicted who she is today, how she images herself in today's world, for example, as a 20-year old university student. And I wanted to hear a story that painted a picture of the girl she was at a much earlier age, perhaps at about nine or ten. As an example, I suggested that she might recall being on a soccer team and recall a particular episode during a game that exemplifies how she saw herself at that time in her life, at that developmental stage.

Again, being careful not to interfere in the creation of the stories, the following questions were used as prompts to aid the informant in the storytelling process. The order might have varied with each interview, depending upon the general flow, pace, or need of that particular informant. In addition, I did not ask every question of each informant, because her story might have already included the elements in a number of my questions or prompts.

The questions/prompts were:

1. Can you recall a story of yourself from an earlier period in your life: perhaps a time when you felt very confident and competent. That time might be at about nine or ten years old. Was it hard to come up with this story? Hard to remember? Easy to remember? Were there any stories that you thought of but decided not to use (not to tell me)? One/s you rejected? Can you tell me why you rejected it/them?
2. Now can you tell me a story of self that captures who you think you are today—how you envisions yourself? Was it hard to come up with this story? Easy to do? Was there a story or stories that you thought of but decided not to use (not to tell me)? One/s you rejected? Can you tell me why you rejected it/them?
3. What does it feel like telling these stories to me?
4. What other sorts of thoughts or feelings surfaced for you during this storytelling process? Anything?
5. Are you surprised about any element in your stories? If so which one/s?
6. Do you recall having a role model when you were younger, at the age of your earlier story? Was this someone you knew (a family member, friend, neighbor, e.g.) or a character in a story, play or movie, or a celebrity (musician, artist, actor, author, e.g.). Do you have a role model now? Do you have a mentor?
7. What is it about that person that inspired/inspires you? What did/do you admire? Do you aspire to any of these traits yourself? If so, which ones?
8. Would you consider that person a "misfit," an unconventional person, in our society? What about him/her makes him/her a misfit? Do you admire and/or aspire to any of these traits yourself?

9. Do you think you are a model for anyone else? What makes you think that? How does that make you feel?
10. Do you have a "future" story? A story of how you see yourself at some time in the future. Does this story capture your goals or aspirations?

In addition to the above questions, a few other questions were asked of each participant in order to collect some basic demographic information. Those were as follows:

1. Date and place of birth
2. Current year/level of study at university
3. Current major or emphasis of study
4. What state or country raised in, including where high school was attended
5. Number of siblings
6. Who was/were the primary caregiver(s) or brief description of family of origin

The demographic information facilitated to a more complete presentation of the participants' perspectives and worldviews, which allowed me to have a more enriched understanding of the contexts from which each story arose. I believe the story context is a crucial contribution to any knowledge that may be gained from the study. But at the same time, all identifiable demographic features were altered only in order to maintain the participants' confidentiality and not to negate the significance of the feature. For example, if a participant came from a very small, rural town, that would be a significant feature in her particular circumstances, the context of her stories, thus I changed the name of town to another town of similar population and locale.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this descriptive, qualitative research project, the collection and analysis of the data was an ongoing process. Each in-depth interview, the second meeting with each informant, was audiotaped. Later I transcribed each tape myself in order to have the opportunity to hear all the stories retold and, in a way, to experience of "reliving" each interview. I wanted to be able to hear the repetitions of words, phrases, references, or sentiments *or* to hear aspects that seemed to be missing, for example some developmental mile marker. By doing the transcriptions myself, I hoped to capture the overall or "big picture" of each story as well as specifics and nuances: to hear the plot, themes, protagonists, setting, and details. In addition, I recorded any personal impressions and thoughts during the data collection, which would be used later in the analysis/interpretation phase of the project and would be a record of how the project affected me as the researcher/interviewer.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Introduction

As stated in Chapter III, the stories of self constitute the data of this qualitative research project. This chapter presents that data, divided into two sections: "storytellers and stories of self" and " my interpretations." The first part presents abridged versions of all six stories collected—two stories from each of three participants. Though some discernment was used in the abridgment process, I made an effort to keep to the "facts" of the stories and to omit evaluative and interpretive comments. The second part of the chapter contains my "findings" or my interpretations of the complete stories as the participants told them to me. I arrived at these by carefully listening to each story several times, including during transcription. I was listening for word choices and repetitions; for story themes; for characters within the stories and their roles; and for the presence or absence of significant aspects that might be influential in identity development. Some of these were found in the contextual details of the story, such as the locale or setting, socioeconomic or cultural factors, and the make-up of the family of origin. I also compared each participant's two stories with each other and then compared all six stories. I found some common elements, such as the importance of relationships or of a sense of belonging. I also found story elements that were unique only to that individual's story, such as the experience with sexual abuse.

Basic demographic information on each participant is placed ahead of the stories as an aid to the reader in forming a mental image of each participant as her stories unfold. Though, of course, all names used are fictitious and other identifying material has been

deleted or altered to protect the confidentiality of the actual participants, the resulting characterizations of informants recreate the pertinent make-up of the each individual.

Storytellers and Stories of Self

Anaïs

Demographic information. Anaïs is a 20-year-old Caucasian female. She was born and raised in a very small, rural town in the Midwest. Anaïs has spent all of her life in the Midwest. She is currently a junior in college, majoring in theatre, but thinks about becoming a writer. Raised by her mother and stepfather, Anaïs has not been involved with her biological father since she was about 3 years old, when her parents divorced. Besides her mother and stepfather, Anaïs lived with a brother, 2 years younger, and a stepsister (daughter of her stepfather's), 6 years younger. Anaïs also knows of a half-brother, from her biological father, and "there's a possibility of a few others," but she has never lived with any of them. Thus, Anaïs's birth-order placement in her family as she was growing up was as an oldest child.

Her story at nine. Anaïs's story of self at 9 years old portrays her, primarily, as the eldest daughter in a "very religious family; that [religion] played a very big part of our family life. In how we related to each other." In fact, in her story, she claims there was a "kind of competition" within the family for "who could be the very best Christian." Anaïs wanted "to be as close to God as possible," but today she is not sure if that was for herself or "whether that was to please my family and to be the good daughter." Her story lists some of her many efforts to reach her goal: "I was grounded in this family situation where I, in order to *be* the good daughter, I *had* to sort of fit this mold. So I was *very* religious." Anaïs says whether or not she was successful in her religious efforts

determined whether or not she "felt confident in myself." Her happiness "as a Christian was first and foremost" to her. At one point, Anaïs believed that God blessed "me with the Holy Spirit," part of which meant that she could speak in tongues. She was "thrilled" with this reward for her dedication and devotion, "but what it ended up doing was separating me from my family because they wouldn't believe that I actually had these gifts."

A story within her story of self told of Anaïs starting to attend a second church, "an apostolic Pentecostal church": which was "very charismatic" and "where women [including girls] wear dresses, they can't cut their hair, no make-up, no jewelry, all that sort of thing." She won a "little competition" at this church, in which the children were to keep a record of how often they comply with their parents' wishes "without complaint or without hesitation." But after receiving her "award" in front of the congregation, she remembered "getting a lot of funny looks from people," because she "didn't really fit into their little mold." Outside of the Pentecostal church she "would wear jeans" and "would look like any other middle schooler." Thus, even though she was the most obedient youth within that church, Anaïs felt "another sort of separation. The idea of condemnation regardless of what you're trying to do…from being an outsider."

Addendum. Another important element to Anaïs's story at 9 was actually something that started when she was 8 and continued until she was 13: her stepfather sexually abused her. The story did not reveal many specifics, such as when or if she told anyone about it, and in fact, this "molestation issue," as Anaïs called it, was only offered as an addendum to the story. Today, what Anaïs still finds "odd" about "the situation" is that her stepfather "didn't act as though this was a shameful thing." Instead, it was "I am

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your father, I love you, I'm allowed to touch you this way. This is the normal fatherly sort of relationship." But in Anaïs's story of self at 9, she told of beginning to "see that there were hypocrisies in a lot of ways." In her story after 9, Anaïs became more fully aware "of these issues of hypocrisy:"

> that he [her stepfather] can do certain things and not finding judgment from other people. And yet I was trying to do everything I could to do things the right ways and I was finding judgment... he was exempt from any sort of responsibility for his actions.

Though she did not incorporate this element directly into her story of self at 9, Anaïs provided it, eventually, because it is vital to a more complete understanding of her story then and of the one she told next, her story of self at 20.

Her story at twenty. For her story of self at 20, Anaïs told "a true story of something that I have been dealing with for this past year or two." She told of meeting "a guy in my Freshman Comp. Class." She asserted that "he taught me so much about living... about life, in a very short amount of time." She likened him to *Maude* in the film, *Harold and Maude*, because "he opened up gateways to art, and music, literature, self-introspection, theory, and just so many different things." The story told that they dated for a short time, broke up, and then last summer, Anaïs learned that he had died in a car accident. In trying to cope with this loss, of someone she felt was her "soul mate," Anaïs listened to another friend, who asked her, "what did he [the ex-boyfriend, soul mate] give you that is absolutely irreplaceable?" This became Anaïs's new focus and she decided—

> What he ended up giving to me is the sense that every person in my life that is more than a passing acquaintance is absolutely irreplaceable and they inform so

> much of who I am as a person, my mental health, and how I get along with other people. And they provide me with *so much* material… for my writing… for everything that is important to me.

So, during the intervening months, Anaïs adopted a new perspective and appreciation for what her ex-boyfriend meant to her. She expanded this to other areas of her life—for example, with friendships, romantic relationships, academics—and today believes "it's led me to a sense of ease in my life, a… place of happiness." In addition, she has the "confidence now that I can do anything," because "I was able to turn something so negative into something so positive."

Her story ended with this summation:

> And so where I am currently in my life is just this place of real contentment. Knowing I'm capable of putting in that much hard work and not just with anything, but something that difficult, and being able to make it turn out okay.

Though the story was brief, it covered a period of months or years in her young adult life.

Chanel

Demographic information. Chanel is a 20-years-old African-American female. She, too, was born and raised in the Midwest. She is a sophomore in college, majoring in health sciences, but is also interested in psychology. She lived in one Midwest state for most of her life, but lived and went to school in another from the 5th through the 8th grades, about four years. Chanel's biological parents divorced when she was about 6 or 7 years old; after that she lived only with her mother, until she and her mother relocated back to her birth state for Chanel's high school years. Though, Chanel's mother remarried when Chanel was 11 or 12, for job reasons, it was a commuter marriage for

about three years. Chanel and her mother would drive to a neighboring state to visit her stepfather, where he lived. Then on alternate weekends, he would drive to visit Chanel and her mother. Chanel has one biological sibling, a brother who is fourteen years older. She has two stepsisters on her stepfather's side, one 27, the other 34. Chanel claims to hardly remember her older brother living at home, thus, with respect to birth-order placement, she could be seen as an "only" child, or definitely, the youngest child.

Her story at nine. Chanel's story of self at about 8 or 9 years old was based on a memory of her and her mother sitting beside each other on the back porch [of their home]. Chanel was telling her mother about an upcoming talent show at the private grade school she was attending and she remembered "telling her all the things that I could do, but I couldn't think of anything that I really wanted to do." She considered singing or dancing or acting because

> back then I did everything. I did all kinds of dance lessons. I took tap and ballet and jazz, and I sung [in church]. I played like the tambourine in church and everything. I did acting, I took acting classes.

But Chanel was undecided. After listening to Chanel talk and explain her dilemma, Chanel's mother told her to "hold on," and she got up, went away, but came back, writing on a paper. Chanel thought her mother had to write down something related to her mother's work, but she was actually recording everything Chanel had just told her.

> It had turned out to be this poem like thing... it was called "I don't know what to do." And it was the things I was talking about: I could sing, but I don't want to; I could dance, but I don't want to. I know how to tap... and it turned out to be *really good.*

Later, Chanel performed her "poem" for the talent show, "it was well received," "because the nature of the poem was *comical.*" In fact, she won: "It wasn't really a *prize-winning* contest, but I won whatever it was." And she said it felt "really good" because

> everyone else did something like a monologue or they sang a song or they did a dance. And this was something I came up with *myself.*

<u>Her story at twenty.</u> Chanel's story of self at 20 years old was told in two parts. The first part she called "the sister story" because her "sister," actually a very close friend she made when first arriving at college, helped Chanel tell a story of self that captures who she is today. What the friend suggested was an image that Chanel agrees with, especially because it includes her sister.

> I was basically the only child in the house and I *always* wanted a sister. And I always wanted like a best friend; I never really had a best friend... when I met her we just clicked, like we are like so in-tuned with each other.

The sister suggested that Chanel's story at age 20 should be, essentially, a description of how Chanel treats her friends, how she is on an ordinary day in her life, and "how you and I are":

> Just any current, any day, when I need you or anyone else needs you, like you're sitting at home and you're studying on the computer or doing anything, writing, drawing... and I... call you and then you always come.

Chanel admitted that that is "a *big* aspect of my life" and she said that she does still "do all that stuff": the writing, drawing, and other things.

Chanel provided all of the second part of her story of self at 20. She wanted to include a part "that really says how... like *confident* I'm growing to be, because I wasn't

always." Her story described how well she thinks she performed at two recent, long interviews: one for a sorority, the other for a job on campus. She said, "I've been proud of myself if just for the simple fact that I persevered through all the circumstances and that I'm *making* it through." She listed good time management and preparation, self-reliance, and "walking" everywhere, even in bad weather, because she did not have a car. Chanel also credited her sister in this part of her story, too, with helping her "grow" and being "really accepting." Chanel stated that this has allowed her to be "how I am," to develop the attitude of "whether or not you like it, this is who I am and I'm *going* to be me," and to learn "to do what I know that I can do."

Jamie

Demographic information. Jamie is a 22-year-old female from Southeast Asia. She is a junior in college, majoring in mathematics. Jamie was raised by her biological parents, who are still married to each other. Although Jamie's parents lived in the United States during her junior and senior years of high school, they moved back to Asia when Jamie began college. Jamie lived and went to school in her native country until her move to the U.S., which was when she was about 15 or 16 years old. She has two older brothers: one is two years older, one is four years older. She also has one younger brother by about six or seven years and a sister younger than that. Thus, Jamie's birth order in her family of origin is the middle child of five children.

Her story at nine. Jamie's story of self at about 9 years old took place in Southeast Asia, where she was born, raised, and attended grade school. Her story was based on an incident that took place during recess at school one day, when she was in either the third or fourth grade. As she was walking with a few classmates, down the hallway, on their

way back to class, she noticed that her shoelaces were untied. When she said this out loud, one of the girls in her group immediately dropped to her knees and tied Jamie's shoes for her. Jamie was surprised by this quick, unsolicited action. Jamie did not say anything to the girl or anyone else; she just resumed walking. But her story told of her continuing to think about the incident and that she began observing how other people treated her as well. She "noticed that certain people would come to me... they follow me and they tell me like what's their problems." When trying to understand why people treated her this way, Jamie thought, "maybe they thought that I know more than them," because at that time she was "the top student in [her] class." Also, she thought maybe it was because "I like to give my opinion... I speak whatever I think... I always speak out and tell like if I see something wrong." Thus, Jamie believed she earned her classmates trust and respect. So beginning with that one incident, Jamie felt "hey, I'm somebody different. I think I could have followers... I can tell... people [things, like my opinions] and then people do what I would say." She thought she could use this opportunity to help people, even though, she also calls herself "a mean person" for speaking out.

Part of Jamie's story was the distinction she made between "faking friendship" and being "really my friend." She never liked faking friendships, which, she said, took place a lot in her grade school. But Jamie never faked friendship, that was why she always tried to speak out honestly. Jamie decided that those people who did not like her manner "always stay away from me... and I was comfortable with that," but "some, most, people they're okay with that. They feel... trust here." Her story ended with her not being able to remember who that girl was who tied her shoelaces.

Her story at twenty. For Jamie's story of self at 20, she began by going back to when she was 16 and 17, and still in high school, because that was when she first joined a university student association, which figured prominently in her story. She explained that after her first year in the United States, which was "really, really quiet," no extracurricular activities or much involvement with people, she decided to "get back to normal": "Normal is where I started to have friends again and start contact." Jamie felt that joining a student organization, "the committee," would allow her to "help others" and to make a significant contribution. She also felt she was "a leader" and would eventually lead the committee, the organization, because

> I always feel like I can do something: either help others [or] give others the opportunity to do some activity together, organizing something for them.

In Jamie's story the operative word was *help*. She said,

> I feel like I can help my friends especially. This, okay, when I say *friends* here now, it not like the close friends, but anybody that want to be friend with me and wants to get help from me.

She went on to explain, further, how important helping others was to her:

> I feel, I always feel good if I can help somebody, that's what I mean. Yeah, so anytime that I can help somebody, I feel like I feel satisfied.

Eventually, last fall, Jamie did become leader of a student association. She dedicated many hours to performing her responsibilities to the best of her abilities, but it proved to require many sacrifices, especially of her time and energy, and it began to affect her grades and her relationship with her close-knit group of friends outside of the association. In addition, whenever there were problems within the big organization, Jamie sought the

advice and comfort of her small but culturally diverse group of friends, who usually urged her to resign. Her friends told her she had contributed enough help and that other people could take their turns at contributing. But Jamie said, "I just feel like…to be a good student, to be a good *person*, I should be able to manage my time, to get *everything* done."

Ultimately, one of her friends from the small group confronted Jamie and told her she had changed and "finally he…tell[s] me the truth": he felt there was a racial element to her difficulties with the association. His opinion was that, since she was not the same race as the majority of the association, that was the root of her problems with them. Then he told Jamie "as long as you're still involved in this group of people, I don't want to have anything to do with you." Jamie was stunned and saddened: "how could a *friend* do that to me?" Being "thrown out of a friendship because of that" and with her academic work getting "worse and worse, so finally I decide to resign." This, she said, is "the real story." When she met people from the organization who asked about her resignation, she told them "I have a lot of things to do…But I never tell the whole story to them." Resigning as leader "was a big, big, sad moment for me, because I had to do it. And I cannot figure out…what exactly the reason why I resigned."

My Interpretations

The major task for a qualitative researcher is trying to make sense of, to analyze, the data she has collected—in other words, to *interpret*, something Denzin (1998a) refers to as an art form, "the art of interpretation." Further, he (Denzin) summarizes that "the art of interpretation produces understandings that are shaped by genre, narrative, stylistic, personal, cultural, and paradigmatic conventions" (p. 329). Thus, as I present these

interpretations of the stories of self as mine, I must also acknowledge, as a researcher, that I make these interpretations through my own personal lenses and through my critical efforts to transform the interview material into a public text. This central predicament is "that of how to keep respondents' voices and perspectives alive, while at the same time recognizing the researcher's role in shaping the research process and product"(Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 119). The following interpretations are the result of multiple readings of the transcriptions, doing the transcriptions, and conducting the interviews originally. In addition, the analysis was ongoing during all these phases of the project and continued throughout the writing stage, which continually reflexes back to the transcribed stories for substantiation. Thus, the reading audience gets a resulting product grown out of a multiphased and multilayered process.

Stories of Self at Nine

Each participant was able to provide a definable image of self at about 9 years old, but when analyzing and interpreting the stories, it is important to remember that there are many potential influences on these images. This earlier story of self is perhaps more "artistic" than a contemporary story because it is a portrait being "drawn" from the past—where the stories are fixed, but drawn in today's "colors." That is, the participants are unavoidably recalling their stories through a filter of today's perspectives and experiences. The stories are from when the participants were at earlier cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional developmental levels. The period roughly between 7 and 11 years old, Piaget called Concrete Operational, generally, when children demonstrate more sophisticated cognitive development such as conservation and less egocentrism (Miller, 1983). Six years old to puberty corresponds with Erikson's Industry versus Inferiority

stage, when children focus on learning, at school, at home, and in their community. This can be seen as their "work" and can develop an internal sense of industry, competency, and mastery (Miller, 1983). Emily Hancock (1989) described girls at 9 years being

> between the make-believe of preschool and the thrall of adolescence…an intermediate zone of childhood, an interim space between fantasy and reality that fosters creative self-ownership. (p. 8)

And regardless of where in the world the participant was living at 9, their stories are set in the social, political, and economic years from 1989 to 1991.

Anaïs. The image Anaïs gives of a 9- or 10-year-old girl is particularly vivid because of the depth of detail her story provides. To me this implies her ability to put herself back into that timeframe and context and to recollect what life was like for her on a day-to-day basis. The story is a rich narrative that conveys the tremendous amount of energy, time, and focus that was demanded of the young Anaïs to be able to be who she was striving to be back then: included, saved, and "good."

The young Anaïs is zealous in her pursuit of the gift of the Holy Spirit from God: she develops increasingly elaborate and specific nightly prayers; she regularly attends church with her family, but joins a second church, an apostolic Pentecostal, as well; and she initiates "self-flagellation, in a way," by denying herself access to radio, television, and other pleasures. The story reveals a devout young Anaïs who seems to have convinced herself that she has communed with God, when she starts to speak in tongue one night during her prayers, "I started to make these odd sounds: *la, la, las*." When the young Anaïs entreats her mother to believe her, the image is of demoralization and abandonment as her mother rejects the assertion with "you haven't been saved," "you

haven't been baptized," and "you haven't publicly professed your faith in front of the church." From the complete story we get an overall image of a girl who is basically alone in her struggle for salvation and, in fact, is somewhat ostracized by her family and by her churches. Anaïs's conscious and conscientious drive to obtain her salvation from God also appears to be a drive for "salvation" from the sexual abuse she experiences from her stepfather. Eventually, Anaïs sees "hypocrisy" in her family situation and with respect to what she believes her church(es) should have provided her.

> I began to see that there were in a lot of way hypocrisies in fact. That I was being judged when I was trying to attain this…I was trying to do everything I could to do things the *right* ways and I *was* finding judgment…*because* of him being the father figure…he was *exempt* from any sort of responsibility for his actions.

In her story of self at 9, Anaïs repeatedly describes herself as "happy" in her efforts to be "as close to God as possible," "the very obedient one," and "the most obedient daughter." But ironically, that is the first descriptor the 20-year-old Anaïs refutes when answering the question: "What are the first thoughts that pop into your head about that girl?" The older Anaïs asserts "first and foremost, *unhappy*…very unhappy."

Chanel. The story of Chanel at 9 or 10 is not as detailed, but is just as strong because it is drawn from a single clearly recollected incident that seems to have made a lasting, powerful impression on her. Chanel can "remember sitting on the back porch with my mother and it was afternoon and the sun was starting to set. I remember *all of that.*" The image is of a girl and her mother, sharing some moments alone together that result in a collaborative, artistic effort that highlights all of Chanel's talents and interests, which ultimately, infuses her with a sense of confidence and accomplishment. The crucial

point of Chanel's story is the mutual respect, interest, and cleverness in both the mother and the daughter. The mother listens with sincerity to her daughter's words: to the content and to the presentation. Then she offers back to Chanel her own words, but from a new, poetic approach. Because Chanel can listen with sincerity, too, she is able to accept and use the proffered material. Chanel is pleased with her choice of story to tell because it

> really symbolized what I was doing at that point in my life. I was very *open* to trying new things. I was very well rounded, I suppose…so that's why I chose that story.

Later she also says that she chose the story because it was "my first *unofficial* writing experience. And…it was a positive one…and I've always been *competent* [sic] about myself as well as my writing." These statements may be true, but I think she glosses over the important role her mother played in the story. It's only with further probing and prompting that Chanel sounds pleased to articulate the "*odd*" thing about the story: that she doesn't remember the actual performance, or the prize, but she does "remember it *happening*." The happening, she explains, is "us sitting on the porch and it was afternoon and the sun was starting to set. I remember *all of that*." The story is of the mother-daughter relationship as much as it is of Chanel.

From Chanel's complete story, we learn that she has received many advantages: responsible, loving, and involved parenting; good schooling and childcare; and extras such as music, dance, and singing lessons. But Chanel has also had to deal with the divorce of her parents, spousal abuse in that marriage, and twice being uprooted and relocated from her extended family and friends at significant times in her childhood (at

10 and 14). Throughout the story, though, we get an image one of a young girl who is nurtured, respected, and provided for.

Jamie. The story of a young Jamie also comes from one particular, memorable incident when she was in her native Southeast Asian country. She recalls an incident, which took place at her school, in the middle of the day, when she was in either the third or fourth grade. In her story, Jamie remembers walking down a hallway after recess, on her way back to class. She was with a few "friends"—though an important distinction, to Jamie, is that these friends are probably more like acquaintances and not a group of close-knit classmates. Young Jamie looks down at her own shoes and notices that the laces are untied. When she states this out loud, a classmate suddenly drops to her knees and ties the laces. This sudden, unsolicited action startles Jamie. After this event, she begins to observe others and to think about how they treat her as well. She begins to see herself as "somebody different. I think I could have followers... people can listen to me, I can lead somebody... like being a leader." This epiphany, seeing herself as a leader, causes her to examine how she should use this "power." In her story, Jamie never questions whether being a leader is a "good thing" or not; to her it simply allows her to "help others... I have their [trust]" and they "have respect on me." In trying to understand why she is seen as a leader, Jamie believes it must be because "at that time I was always like kind of the top student in class," so "maybe they thought I know more than them." Also, the trust and respect Jamie's friends exhibit towards her comes, she believes, from the fact that she always speaks her mind. The young Jamie is not afraid to offer her opinions, "I speak whatever I think... I always speak out and tell, like if I see something wrong." But she

also sounds conflicted or troubled as she labels this trait of hers as being "mean": "*I know* I am a mean person."

From Jamie's complete story, we see a girl who discovers that she is a leader, that she has some power to influence her peers, but more important, that she must be responsible, namely, she must help others *because* she is different in these ways. The overall image is of a girl who revels in her newfound leadership role, but who never sees herself as being directly responsible for it, rather it is a role that is bestowed upon her by so-called friends. If she does claim ownership or personal responsibility, she diminishes it by relabeling her truthfulness as "mean" and herself as a "mean person."

Stories of Self at Twenty (or Twenty-two)

The following are interpretations of the stories offered by each of the participants as images of who they are today. These contemporary images of self appear more malleable than the fixed images of their earlier selves—especially as they are "embodied" in the participant's actual presence. It remains as important, when analyzing and interpreting the stories and their protagonists, to consider that the images emerging from these stories reflect developmental levels of 20- or 22-year-old college women. It is important to remember that the year is 2002—socially, politically, and economically—and not 1989, 1990, or 1991. They and their worlds have changed in the intervening 10 to 12 years; that said, the participants do appear to fit established models for "traditional-age" college students. Expanding on the work of Erikson and his identity stage, Chickering's (Widick, Parker, Knefelkamp, 1978) comprehensive model of development of traditional-age college students focuses on their concerns relevant to the college environment. His model incorporates social, emotional, and intellectual elements of

developmental work, with special emphasis on identity development that typically takes places during this period. Another model to keep in mind comes from the work of Josselson (1987), who is particularly focused on identity work of women. Josselson asserts that meaningful relationships, crises in relationships, and connection and separation from families (especially with respect to mothers) are the fertile ground in which college women grow their identities more than any other factors related to that developmental work.

Anaïs. The story Anaïs tells in her story of self at 20 years old is based on what she calls "a true story." The storyline is of her reconciliation and acceptance of the death of someone with whom she had been very close: an influential friend, her former lover, mentor, "soul mate," or even, her "Maude," from the character in the film *Harold and Maude*. Anaïs claims that it is from that "negative experience," his death, that she is able, today, to appreciate her life, her mental health, every event, no matter how minor, and every person, including mere acquaintances, as "absolutely irreplaceable" contributions to who she is. She uses *happy*, *happiness*, *contentment*, and *comfort* numerous times in her narrative presentation of this image of herself in today's story, echoing a similar usage in her earlier story. Acquiring this perspective, in her words, "has led her to a sense of ease in my life… a place of happiness, where this seemingly negative thing has turned into a recognition of what I have to do to be happy in my life." Anaïs claims a fine distinction between "informing who I am currently" and "explaining where I am presently." She further asserts that it "is the most *important* thing for explaining my current disposition and my…." Anaïs abruptly truncates the elaboration of her "current disposition" and immediately addresses the "the molestation issue." It is as though she

has literally changed images as one would do by turning over a coin. As important or as valuable as she extols her newfound, current image to be, she is unable to sustain it continuously. She has not completely reconciled with the sexual abuse she experienced from her stepfather and she cannot exclude it from her story of self at 20, though she seems to try. If Anaïs follows her logic of every person and every incident being "absolutely irreplaceable" to her, she cannot overlook "the thing that I have been working on since I was 9 or 10 is, or actually, really working since I was about 13 was figuring out the molestation issue." Thus, the story of self Anaïs provides at 20 seems haunted by the self she was at 9. She is still struggling to try to make that extremely "negative experience" into anything positive for herself, as her friend suggested she try to do with the death of her former soul mate. The "lesson" of her second story sounds like a metaphor or prescription for what she wishes she could do with the material of her first story:

> Knowing I'm capable of putting in that much hard work and not just with anything, but something that difficult, and being able to make it turn out okay.

Here Anaïs clearly prizes her accomplishment—her "hard work"—at 20. But, to me, the story's repetition and proclamations of her present-day "contentment" echo too strongly the 9-year-old Anaïs's numerous claims of happiness, which she ultimately acknowledged were false. Thus, in this way, Anaïs seems to still be looking for salvation and a sense of belonging. She seems aware of this, as well, when she admits there are aspects of "the molestation issue" she has yet "to figure out.'

Chanel. Chanel's story of self at 20 is really made up of two parts or two stories. In the first of the two, Chanel reveals that she relied upon a "sister," a term of endearment

she uses for a very close college friend, to help her think of a story of self that would tell who she is today. Ironically, the sister suggests drawing upon their relationship for the story, much as Chanel drew upon her relationship with her mother for her earlier story. In the story of the 9-year-old Chanel, we hear how her mother helps Chanel by essentially describing her strengths and abilities through poetry, which Chanel later performs at a talent show. When asked for the help with the story of a 20-year-old Chanel, we hear the sister describing Chanel's strengths, especially highlighting how she "performs" as a constant, reliable, hard working, and somewhat maternal friend and role model. The main difference from the earlier story is that now we get an image of Chanel as the "mother," and her sister-friends are more like "children." Chanel confides that within her tight group of friends—"4 girls and 3 guys"—she is "Mama Chanel or Miss _____ to everyone." Chanel seems to agree with this image stating "that [it] is one aspect, it's a *big* aspect of my life, including that "many of the things that I do, like we do together." Chanel and her friends have replicated a family situation at college, placing her as the maternal head: "... we all *are* adults and I just have this *slightly* elevated... for some reason I just exert maternal, and I can *see it* in myself."

The second part or story of Chanel at 20 is one that she relies upon herself to tell, but claims "I couldn't really think of a story that really says how... like *confident* I'm growing to be." She offers evidence that demonstrate the image she is trying to convey: one who takes risks, works hard, and perseveres. She tells of how she applied to a sorority she wants to join and of how she performed at the job interviews. This part of her 20-year-old story seems important to her, she wants to recognize it and include it because, she says, "I've been proud of myself, if just for the simple fact that I persevered

through all the circumstances and that I'm *making* it through." This part of her story shows progress in her image of self—she has not always felt this confidence and pride She credits her sister—from part one of this story, what she calls the "sister story"—in helping her achieve "coming into myself and being more comfortable," especially when under stress.

> I guess it ties into the sister story because my sister has really helped me grow. And she's been really accepting. This is Chanel, this is how I am. And whether or not you like it, this is who I am and I'm going to be me.

Once again, in this second part of the 20-year-old story, we see images mirroring images of the earlier story, when she was 9. Here the sister encourages and supports Chanel to be herself and to present herself as such at her interviews, just as the mother encouraged and supported Chanel for the talent show. But the addition of the second half of Chanel's story at 20, and her insistence of its inclusion, demonstrates Chanel's acknowledgment of her own strengths: she is beginning to validate herself as well and she has learned "to do what I know that I can do."

Jamie. The image that Jamie paints today, at 22 years old, is one of a person in flux and in some discomfort because of it. Her story is of a person who is not just in the midst of redefining herself, but one who has yet to come up with or decide upon a new definition. In her own words she states "…the problem here right now is…maybe I'm not who I am…who I'm thinking I am, you know? …what am I supposed to be? If I'm not that person that I thought, I don't know who I'm supposed to be." In contrast to the incident that Jamie experienced in grade school, her earlier story, which seemed to bring her clarity, the current events in her life have contributed greatly to an unclear image of

self today. Though in both stories of self, Jamie seems to fashion her self-image primarily from the input from and in relationship to others. In grade school her peers saw her as a leader. In her later story, Jamie is confused because she "resigned" from being a leader, "it was a big, big, sad moment for me," and she still cannot figure out "exactly the reason why I resigned." In the earlier story, Jamie claims "the problem" is "I don't remember who the girl *is*" [who fell to her knees to tie Jamie's shoe laces], "...I wish I could remember." In the latter image, from today's story, it is Jamie who has figuratively fallen to her knees by resigning from student association. No longer a leader, she cannot remember who *she* is.

Today's story is more complicated in its presentation of Jamie's image because today a significant part of her image, or sense of self, is directly tied with having or not having "real friendship:" namely, her small, diverse, and close group of friends who were not part of the large student association. In today's story she divulges genuine dismay and turmoil when she learns from one of her small group that he chooses not to be involved with her as long as she is "the leader" of her student society: "I was like how could a good *friend* tell me that?" In her earlier story she claims to "feel comfortable with that," that is, if people choose not to accept her outspokenness or who she is. Also, at 9, Jamie claims not to have had any close friends. But today, the threat of losing her small group, or even one member of it, has cost her much anguish, soul searching, and she is very uncomfortable. She seems to be pitting the large group, which represents being a responsible leader, against the small group, which represents not faking friendship. Jamie says she is "afraid" to figure out the reason for her resignation, because it may prove to be "because of influence of my other friends": her small group of racially diverse friends.

Jamie also reports that she has discovered, in working with the large student association and later from resigning from it, that racial undercurrents contributed to the larger picture of her involvement with the society, with her small group of friends, and with her role in each. She "doesn't want to believe that," that her race, played a significant part in her difficulties running her student association, but as time goes on, she has "started to believe *maybe it's true*." Jamie's reluctance to believe stems from several factors, but one important one has to do with her image of self. She saw herself as a leader: a just, trustworthy, intelligent, dedicated leader. In her view, that should be sufficient. She had no previous experience with including her race or nationality into her description of herself as leader. To Jamie, the description of a leader was one who would and could help others. Her goal since high school was to become the leader of "the committee":

> Sometimes I believe that I can, that I can do it [make it as leader]. I can help. Yeah, I think that the word help is the main part of it. I feel like I can help my friends especially. This, okay, when I say *friends* here now, it not like the close friends, but anybody that want to be friend with me and wants to get help from me.

In addition, part of defining herself as a helper, being a leader allowed Jamie to gain much personal satisfaction—"I always fell good if I can help somebody... so anytime that I can help somebody, I feel... satisfied."

At 9 or 10, in grade school, Jamie recognized what she called "faking friendship," and she chose not to contribute to or to have faked friendships—in fact, she fairly defines herself then by that particular decision. But at 22, in college, and even in another country,

Jamie seems to have come upon, in her mind, a very similar phenomenon. Today she finds herself wrestling with it all over again and, consequently, it is forcing her to redefining herself. This is the "whole story," her "real story," the one she doesn't tell most people she meets on campus; she just says, "I did enough, it's time for me to go. I have a lot of things to do."

Themes

Two dominant themes emerge from all six of the stories of self. The first one is the theme of relationship or one's connection to others. The other theme is the work of identity formation, which surfaces as a certain amount of self-focus, self-absorption, or self-evaluation. In each story, there appears to be an assessment made by the storyteller of her competence at that particular time. These two main themes permeate both the earlier and the later stories. The themes cross racial or ethnic lines, as well as religious, cultural, and socioeconomic ones. A third, less powerful, theme also surfaces that of the role of family, which could be seen as just a part of the theme of relationship. By family I mean in the traditional sense of one's parents and/or family of origin, and in the role of psuedofamilies, creations of strong friendships with small groups of unrelated people.

The theme of relationship figured prominently in every story. Anaïs's story at 9 revolved around the theme of her wish to belong, to connect with someone or something. She was convinced that the only way to obtain this was to be an exemplar: within her family as "the good daughter"; within her church as "the most obedient child"; and with God as "the best Christian." In her story at 20, Anaïs still appears to be struggling with belonging: "divorced" from religion, estranged from her mother and stepfather, and separated by death from her soul mate. Her story at 20 chronicles her hard work to "turn a

very negative into a positive" and, in that way, would excel and could feel connected, but sadly, it is with her former soul mate, who is no longer living. Thus, both her stories tell of her desire for relationship with others.

Chanel's story at 9 also revolves around relationship: her relationship with her family, primarily, her mother, though she idolizes her auntie as well. She appears to flourish in these family relationships. At 20, in college, she has solidified relationships with at least two other young women. She feels so strong about them that she calls them "sister," thus acquiring an addition to her family she claims to have always wanted.

Jamie revels in her relationship with her grade-school peers at 9. She gloms onto the role of being their "leader" as if it were her destiny, her calling. Though, paradoxically, she also keeps her distance from them by clearly defining and assessing who is a "true friend" and who is "only faking friendship." In her later story, at 20, she appears to continue this distinction in types of relationships—she the "leader" to her college peers and between real friends and "unreal" ones—until she is dumbfounded by relational conflicts that arise on both fronts.

Equally prominent and interrelated to relationship is the theme of identity formation in all of the stories, but in a more serious or sophisticated way in the later stories. I use the term *identity* here as "the organized set of images, the sense of self, which express who and what we *really* are" (Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978, p. 2). I use the term *formation* as the work that one does to acquire a sense of self.

For decades, psychologists have consistently espoused adolescence and young adulthood as the developmental period primarily devoted to identity work, with the college environment being particularly conducive to exploration. Not surprisingly, in

each participant, at 20 or 22, is in varying degrees, or at differing stages, of defining who she is. Equally unsurprising, was the discovery that the protagonists in these later stories were doing identity work in connection with or as part of their work on intimacy or relationships.

Josselson (1987) uses the term *anchoring* to explain this aspect of women's identity work. Anchoring is that "communion aspect of the separation-individuation process after late adolescence" (p. 174). To Josselson (and Gilligan, 1982; Hancock, 1989; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1998; Horst, 1995; and others), the participants in this project, as the protagonists in their later stories, exemplify the developmental factor that most influences *women's* identity formation, namely, relationship issues: with parents, with romantic interests, with peers, and with any meaningful relationship.

In addition, another feature to the theme of identity work, as told in the stories, is the subtle, personal interjection of the storyteller's evaluation of her competence. Each story—at both ages, by all three participants—includes a self-assessment of sorts, not equally prominent, but consistently present in each story. Competence appears as a dominant theme in both of Anaïs' stories. Her story at 9 overflows with diligence and devotion; she is an exemplar in her story of the competent "obedient" daughter and Christian. Her story at 20 tells of her competence in turning a negative into a positive in her attitude toward and use of the death of her soul mate in her identity work. Chanel's story at 9 tells of the competent, talented performer—singer, dancer, poet—though, she did have help and support from her mother. At 20, Chanel has some difficulty coming up with a story of self to tell. She relies on her "sister," who voluntee a definition of Chanel that is, essentially, a list of her competencies and caring. Still this only makes up the first

half of her story; the second half is Chanel's own definition of her current competence, of which she is very proud—"a story that really says how… like *confident* I'm growing to be...I've been proud of myself." Lastly, Jamie's story at 9 revolves around the characterization of herself as the most competent student among her peers. She is their "leader." Competence is also central to her story at 22, but that story Jamie somewhat berates herself for not being more competent—"I just feel like… to be a good student, to be a good *person*, I should be able to manage my *time*, to get everything done, *but*…." She ultimately had to accept that she was not getting everything done: her grades were falling and she serious relationship difficulties.

Thus, competence was also a theme that figured into each story. It was often woven into other themes, such as relationships and identity work. And the rating of one's competence, whether consciously included or not, was a recurrent element offered by each participant/storyteller.

Contexts

All six of the stories of self are told in the "context" of the actual lives of the participants, from their "lived experiences" (Ermarth, 1978). Understanding the contexts of the stories or, at least, acknowledging the contexts allows for a more accurate "reading" of the stories. A more accurate reading means closer understanding of the storyteller's world, her perspective, her worldview, thus her subjective experience. All of which is invaluable accessibility in a counseling setting.

Jamie is an international student from Southeast Asia. Including that element into an interpretation and analysis of her stories allows for the inclusion of cultural factors that may have a bearing on her stories. For example, Jamie asserts that

culture back home and culture here are really different to me. And I think it really make a difference. If I didn't come here and I grew up there, I don't think I would be the same, like I am right now.

She summarizes the difference by claiming, basically,

> there's so many things back home that I could not do. But here I be able to, not that I want to, but that I be able to experience and know that it's not right to do.

As a woman and as a Muslim, back home Jamie says she would not have the "opportunities" to date or have boyfriends; drink alcohol; live alone, away from family; or to have the dilemmas she is having over her career choice, because the choice would be made for her. After telling me her stories, Jamie volunteered this additional detail—being Muslim—which implies, to me, that she wanted me to be aware that there was much more to her stories than what she told me in only 60 minutes or so. Thus, with this added information, I am reminded and recognize that aspects of Jamie's story that reflect indecision, confusion, identity crisis, and relational difficulties probably have deeper, wider-reaching, or just different roots than those that I imagined as a non-Muslim listener.

Chanel is a Midwesterner: born and raised in the south central Midwest states; but she is also an African-American. She claims that in this town and on this campus, especially, that "the African-American population is very small. And it's so spread out. A lot of people live off campus…" and Chanel's housing is at a far perimeter of the campus. When she goes to a larger city where the Black population is much more visible, she notices. As part of her "future story," Chanel wants "to go someplace, I've never really been a place where there are a *lot* of Black people. And I would like to experience

that." Chanel thinks that that future experience will feel "comforting." She tells of friends who have attended all-Black colleges and she has attended a Black student conference where she was

> around so many Black people that were *positive* and trying to do something in their life and in their schools and in their community. It was just a really good feeling. It's just *encouraging* because like out here it kinda feels like you're the only person struggling and alone.

Knowing this about Chanel's context, the context from which her stories are created, contributes to a fuller appreciation of Chanel's desire to include the "confidence" element in the second part of her story of self at 20: "I've been proud of myself if just for the simple fact that I persevered through all the circumstances and that I'm *making* it through."

The role that religion plays in Anaïs's story of self at 9 is self-explanatory to any reader, but including the contextual element that Anaïs was born and raised in the Bible belt of the United States gives a greater understanding. The extremeness in her efforts to commune with God, her hopes of receiving the Holy Spirit, and her "self-flagellation" to get herself "to a higher level" sound more plausible given the context, the milieu of widely practiced Protestant Fundamentalism. She chose an avenue or a means to get her needs met that was familiar to her, that she had grown up with, and that was readily available in her culture.

Though only three participants in the study, the diversity of their cultures and backgrounds adds unique elements to their stories and to the analysis of the data. Interestingly, all three participants seem to fit with cultural value preferences generally

assigned to middle-class White Americans, Asian Americans, and Black Americans (Sue & Sue, p. 109). For example, at least as far as the stories and the additional research questions/guidelines reveal and *generally* speaking, Anaïs seems to have a future time orientation, individualistic in her relational dimension and drive for autonomy, and her preferred mode of activity is doing. Similar, *very general* statements can also be made about Chanel and Jamie, though both seem more oriented to the present. In addtion, Chanel and Jamie definitely are—as evidenced in their stories—more focused on collateral relationships, with both having formed strong ties with psuedofamilies while away from their "real" families.

Circling Back

I discovered that at 20 or 22, at least with these women, there was no explicit sense of deliberately, consciously "circling back" to build or *re*build an identity based on the strengths previously exhibited or acquired by the 9-year-old selves, but which were subsequently "lost." At least, there seemed no evidence in the stories that the participants recognized and articulated that they were drawing upon earlier, "buried" selves.

On the other hand, each story of self at 9 had a protagonist who exhibited strength of character—just not the "mistress of excellence" that Hancock (1989) found. Anaïs's story certainly told of strengths, but unfortunately, her abilities and energies had to be focused on finding a place for herself (within her family, her churches, or her faith in God) and surviving abuse, rather than on developing her identity. I question her choice of "the most obedient daughter" as being truly her own sense of self or the result of undue external influences, especially those of her mother and stepfather.

Jamie's and Chanel's stories were closest to describing a sense of self at 9 that I had anticipated hearing. But in both cases, there was a lack of personal recognition of one's capabilities that I expected to hear in the stories from 10 years ago. With the encouragement and support of her mother, Chanel appeared to be meeting "the world on her own terms" (Hancock, 1989)—she dared to perform her own creation and "won" the prize. Jamie, too, appeared to meet the world on her own terms: she was "choosy" in her friendships, she decided not "fake friendships," and she spoke her mind. Jamie exhibited strengths and abilities, but her story described her discovery of them as serendipitous, coming through the eyes of others, and she seemed to downplay them by calling herself a "mean person."

Nine-year-old selves definitely seemed present in the 20-something selves, as Anaïs would say, "informing" who they are today, but without having *returned* to the girl they were at 9 in order to guide them through identity work today. Though, in some ways, perhaps Jamie's story at 22 contradicts this assertion. Her story began with her in high school, when she "always think of myself as a leader, a leader," and ended in the present, where "recently [it] kept coming to me. Maybe I'm not [pause] a leader…maybe I'm not who I think I am." For the first time, Jamie had to examine the label she had assigned herself from the time she was about 9—leader. Thus, in order to resolve her current identity crisis, she may be forced to circle back, though her story made no mention of it. Anaïs may need to circle back to the girl she was at 9 in order to "figure out the molestation issue," but she, too, appeared not to draw any parallels between the dynamics of both her stories.

What does the absence of circling back mean? Perhaps, it means these participants were too young. The women in Hancock's (1989) study were in their 30s, 40s, and 50s and had experienced crises, such as loss of jobs, divorces, and deaths of someone very close. Thus the question now is: Will these participants eventually view themselves at 9 differently than they do today, in their 20s and will they draw upon that self view as a viable resource in identity work?

Voice and Authorship

All three participants appeared to use their *voice* in their stories of self. Voice as Gilligan (1982) described it: that "natural," "cultural" voice that "speaks to the core of the self" (p. *xvii*). They each dared to tell stories of self, did so in their own voices, and spoke of their core selves. But as with the phenomenon of "circling back," I did not detect that their voices revealed complete "authorship" of their stories. In other words, the stories of self at 20 and 22 seemed to expose outside sources which were controlling the plot lines or directions of the stories—not completely, but still strongly influencing—for example, a boyfriend's values, relationship concerns, and societal expectations. And the participants seemed unaware of this aspect of their stories. Anaïs seemed unaware of her continuing struggles with her past. For example, she had not fully reconciled with "the molestation thing" and she appeared to be defining herself in relation to who her ex-boyfriend/soul mate was/is to her, rather than from something inside of her. Similarly, on the last point, Chanel, too, though claiming the opposite, seemed to be defining herself almost exclusively in relation to her small group of friends or her "sisters." And Jamie sounded in crisis, or perhaps, was stalled in her identity work, primarily because of losing her position as a leader. She acknowledged that she could not even conceive a future

story: "before I think about a *future*, the problem here right now is... maybe I'm not who I am, what, who I'm thinking I am, you know?"

Circumstances, society, families, and relationships all seem to be interfering with and/or influencing the structuring of current stories for these three women. Though developmentally, this appears to be where they "should" be, according to the models. The next stage will require, that "they must come to realize that they are entitled to their own story in the first place as a precursor to working on re-authoring" (Lee, 1997, p. 11). With their individual strengths and the strengths of their support networks, all three young women will most likely "author" very deliberate stories of self as they move along the continuum of identity development.

Models or Misfits

Similar to not finding "circling back," I did not find a prevalent, dominant, or conscientious use of models or misfits by the participants as they were/are conducting their identity work. That is not to say that models (or modeling) were not a significant feature to the stories. I believe they play/played a role, but that at 20 and 22, the participants do not recognize the profound sense that their "models," or the lack of a model, permeate their stories.

No one claimed a specific celebrity, historical or political personality, or a literary figure. Jamie claimed to have consciously searched for a model, but found none: "And I *did* search for that, okay... Who I want to be like, you know. I didn't find anybody." She did suggest that her father was a model for her, somewhat, but then clarified her statement by saying that they were actually just more alike than she and her mother were/are. That also proves to be Jamie's only mention of her mother. I cannot help but

think the lack of a model for Jamie to fall back on is contributing to this "confused" time of transition she is in. Jamie does comment on an anonymous woman, though, who made and impression on her. In this way she does demonstrate some sensitivity to the concept of models. She recalls recently watching a CNN television news program and noticing a Black woman who was the head of "an important thing." Jamie admitted to feeling "inspired" to see a Black, female, leader on national television: "that must feel *good* to be *that* person, you know?"

Anaïs acknowledged that she could name several people who have been greatly influential in her development and she grouped them according to whether or not their influence had been positive or negative. For example, her former boyfriend and our mutual acquaintance, John, helped shape her in positive ways and her mother and stepfather "were the two main influences of everything I did not want to be. So they provided a model, but it was *negative*." Anaïs says,

> I'm happy with who I am as a person. I don't *want* to be like anyone else. I want to be myself. And in that sense, *everybody*, paradoxically, becomes a model for me as well.

And today she claims to be her own model, but I see her as using a list of models. She still seems to be fashioning herself today, at least in two ways, by trying to represent the *opposite* of what her mother, stepfather, and God had meant to her at 9 years old. The first one surprised her: "I was surprised that religion came up because I have pretty much divorced myself from it." The second way she seems to be defining herself in opposition to her "negative" models is in her ardent support of the girl Anaïs was at 9. If she had the opportunity today, she would like to tell that young girl that—

> …she was *right* in trying to obtain these goals. She was right in not really giving up…tell her it's right of you to recognize the things that were wrong about family situation…it was right for you to recognize that your father was doing things to you that he shouldn't have done. And that you needed to act on these things. And it sort of gave bravery in a way to try to rectify the situation.

Of the three participants, Chanel has the most to say about models. She clearly delineates why no celebrity could be or was a model for her, because she "was never a celebrity chaser." The major models she has had are closer to home, all family members. When she was younger, Chanel remembers being smitten with her auntie and saw her as a role model. At first she claims it was because her aunt spoke directly to her, which was unlike how she claims most adults would speak to a child, and because she found her aunt "more daring." By more daring Chanel means living a "*grand* life," dressing up, wearing wigs, going to parties, going shopping, and smoking, something Chanel's mother "*absolutely* hated." But mostly, Chanel saw her aunt as a role model because "she was beautiful and she was *together*; she just had all her stuff together." As she gets older, Chanel says she realizes that probably her auntie did not work and had more time for recreation because an ex-husband supported her—unlike Chanel's mother, "who had to work" to support the two of them.

Today Chanel claims both her parents as role models. She admires and respects her father because he "is really intellectual…*highly* intellectual"…knowledgeable about "worldly things like religion" and "race relations." Though acknowledging that years ago he had been abusive to her mother, Chanel says she wants to spend as much time as she can with him in order to "absorb" as much as possible. She admires that both her parents

"can speak to anyone about anything," can "talk to anyone about anything," immediately putting the other person at ease. This is a trait that Chanel is conscientiously working to acquire for herself and fully believes "it's coming one day."

By far, though, the strongest and most influential model in Chanel's life is her mother. Especially since going off to college, Chanel "really realized that she [her mother] really prepared me on how to live on my own and how to be self-sufficient." Chanel cites many examples of how her mother helped prepare her and, realistically, also recalls the periods growing up when their relationship was conflictual, namely, Chanel's "terrible" teen years. Today Chanel works "to be like her":

> She's very giving and she's very kind. And like her words, she always has the words of wisdom like it's a mother. She truly encapsulates what a mother is.

Not surprisingly, this description of Chanel's mother and motherhood figures prominently throughout both Chanel's stories. In addition, the second part of her second story, includes elements of perseverance, pride, and getting it all "together," which reflect aspects from both of her strong female models: her mother and her auntie.

Regression or Resistance

Regression and resistance were not as prevalent in the stories of self as I had anticipated, but there were a few powerful examples. To me, Anaïs demonstrated extremely strong and necessary resistance in her "survival" story of self at 9. Her focus on religion, getting "saved," and being "most obedient" were what she had to do to survive in her family situation, which was paradoxically one of separation, especially cut off from the possibility of being protected and nurtured by her mother, and one of no boundaries, especially with the sexual abuse by her stepfather. If Anaïs could speak to

that 9-year-old girl today she would tell her "that she was right in trying to obtain these goals. She was right in not really giving up." Though convoluted, the route Anaïs took through religious obedience ultimately got her to recognize "the things that are wrong about the family situation," and by 13, was able to escape, saving herself from her stepfather's abuse.

Jamie seemed to use regression as a means of coping in her story of self at 20, though the "regression" she spoke of was when she was 16 years old. When she first came to the United States for Southeast Asia, a period she calls "the whole year gap," she became quiet, she didn't make friends, she didn't participate at school, and she rarely left her home. But after a year of only focusing on her academic work, she went "back to normal": "normal is where I started to have friends again and start contact." Thus, it seemed a useful "incubation" period for her to gain her inner strengths, to perfect her English language skills, and to adjust to a new culture. Today, with all the confusion and uncertainty she is feeling, as revealed in her story of self at 22, I see this period after Jamie's resignation as, perhaps, another form of regression in order to give herself time to figure out what all has happened to her, what she has learned about herself, and where she wants to go next.

Chanel's story of self at 20 speaks of resistance in subtle ways. She "resists" that sense of isolation that can be felt when away at college—separation from her family, her mother especially—by surrounding herself with the "sisters" she never had growing up and with a psuedofamily, a small group of very close college friends, of which she "mothers." (Jamie also attached herself to a psuedofamily for similar reasons: strength, support, and connection.) Chanel also seems to resist being swallowed up in a

predominately White environment. She fantasizes experiencing for herself living in an all-Black community some time in her future story. She anticipates how "comforting" it would feel. Thus, perhaps, this can be seen as another, very subtle, form of resistance to isolation, or more blatantly, to racism in the society she has grown up in.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

Close analysis of the complete stories from each participant, including their responses to additional research questions from the project's interview guide, reveals many similarities as well as differences; though in sheer numbers, the nod seems to go to similarities. The similarities are not, generally, in the details of the stories (e.g., locale, characters, or conclusions), but in the exercise of recalling the stories; in the women's experiences of retelling the stories to themselves and to me; and in the surprises that came out of the process. In every story of self, there is evidence of clear, specific images of each young girl and each young woman. Every story had one or more themes, told in a sort of hierarchy, or as a story embedded within a story. In addition, each set of stories (i.e., the two from each participant) contributed to an interpretation of the participant's developmental stages or levels, to the varying degrees of story authorship, and to the keen contextual differences, for example, as to culture, religion, or socioeconomic status.

With respect to differences between the six stories, many aspects were primarily concentrated around story details—for example, the vastly different settings in the early stories. Character roles within the stories varied greatly as well. For example, the role of mother was pivotal in Chanel's story, critical in Anaï's, and nonexistent in Jamie's.

In the end, as a group, the stories were much richer and far less trivial or superficial than I had anticipated they might be. A partial explanation for this is because the participants approached the project with sincerity and thought. They allowed themselves to be vulnerable to the "truth." They told "true stories" of who they were and

who they are. This brought a high level of authenticity in their storytelling, allowing for more inclusion than exclusion of details. Each participant reported going with a "gut-level" response to her selection of stories to tell. In other words, essentially, there were no "rejected" stories, especially with respect to the earlier stories, at 9. When a strong image of self rose to her consciousness, each participant claimed she trusted that experience and the power of her own recall and selection, even when "assisted" in the storytelling by a close friend.

Another possible factor influencing the story richness reiterates DeVault's (1990) contention that women interviewing women contributes to a "sharedness," a "tradition of woman talk," and a "search procedure," that when

> the [female] researcher is actively involved with respondents so that together they are constructing fuller answers to questions…that are part of female consciousness but left out of dominant interpretive frames, shaped around male concerns. (p. 100)

Couple this assertion with the story/narrative format of the project and the above factors and, perhaps, we get a more complete explanation for why the stories were so richly detailed.

Regardless, the stories' richness would be highly valued in a counseling environment. The personal detail offered would be rich material with which to work therapeutically—that is, the client's world richly communicated in story format to a collaborative therapist. This, I believe, is just what Mary Pipher (1994) alluded to in her foreword to *Ophelia* and what I had hoped I would hear in the participants' stories of self. Pipher recognized the importance of accessing the world of her clients, that of adolescent

females growing up in the nineties. She recognized that their world was different in many significant ways from her adolescent world of the fifties. Though Pipher could draw upon her life experiences and work with young clients because of "some common ground," she also recognized the need to "let go of my ideas and look at the girls before me with fresh eyes…and…to learn from them before I could help" (p. 233). In a similar way, I, too, want to learn from my future clients so that I can be of help. To me, in this project, collecting stories facilitated that goal. I believe I heard the world of each participant, by listening to her stories of self. I heard elements that were "common ground" for me, but also much that was "new, uncharted territory." Thus, personally, these stories, in a small or limited way, contributed to a deeper understanding of how young women *today* are doing their identity work.

Surprises

Participants' surprises. Each participant appeared surprised to be asked the seemingly benign question: Were you surprised about anything in your stories or about participating in this project or about the storytelling process? After some thought to her reply, each participant admitted surprises and surprising herself. Anaïs said she was surprised by two things: "that religion came up because I have pretty much divorced myself from it" and "because I'm just *happy*, with the way things are for me spiritually, right now. I'm not in any sort of turmoil. Um, so it *was* a surprise that that [religion] came up." Chanel was surprised that "when I told you I could see my mother and I sitting on the porch and that I can't see me performing it. And I don't remember the crowd. I don't remember the award, but remember I was sitting on the porch." In both these cases, the young women were surprised with their own stories, that is, with what their own

words revealed to them. Chanel "used" her surprised recognition of her mother's role in her story and of their relationship to "think that I really need to call my mother." It was left unclear what or if Anaïs would "use" her surprise element, though being as introspective as she appears, my hunch is that she will take time to contemplate the role religion had/has in her life.

Jamie, too, was surprised, but her surprises were not in direct response to a question, because I never asked her explicitly. Jamie's surprises come from the process of telling her stories. Concluding her story of self at 9, she was surprised with the fact that she couldn't remember the name of the girl who tied her shoe: "I don't really remember who the girl *is*…that's the problem. I wish I could." Later, she is surprised because she told me her "whole story" and, I think, because of the emotional involvement she experienced in the retelling.

> Jamie: Well, when you asked me [originally, to tell me a stories of self], hey, I don't mind telling you stories. I don't recall having any secrets that I cannot tell anybody, you know? And then when I think about a story, okay, I come up with a story, okay, that's fine. But I will, I didn't know that I would be telling this whole thing to you.
>
> Interviewer: That surprised you?
>
> Jamie: Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: You surprised yourself?
>
> Jamie: Yeah. That I'm telling somebody, you know…

Earlier in the interview, Jamie claimed "I never tell of, the real story. I just say, um I did enough." So she was surprised that she told the whole thing and to a woman she hardly

knew and that she got emotional—choked up, teary—in doing so. Concluding her story at 20, Jamie was also surprised that she still had not figured out why she resigned from her leadership position with the student organization and surprised that she was not more firmly decided on her career choice: mathematics or medicine. Again, it is my hunch that Jamie will contemplate these surprises that surfaced through the stories and the storytelling process in order to find the answers that appear troubling and difficult for her.

Researcher surprises. I was surprised about many things concerning this project, some large, some small. For example, I was surprised that *lookism* did not figure into any of the six stories. Lookism is Pipher's (1994) term for the sexist condition in our culture that exaggerates the importance of "appearance in defining social acceptability. Attractiveness is both a necessary and sufficient condition for girls' success" (p. 40). But the biggest surprise to me was finding myself wanting to counsel rather than just listen to the stories the young women were telling me. I anticipated the possibility, but did not expect to have to wrestle with the dilemma so frequently. I found myself questioning the ethics of situations. For example, if a participant tells me a story of incest, do I listen, take note, and move on, because I was there only to collect data? Or am I ethically bound to address the issues and/or the accompanying emotions that are revealed? Would I be doing a disservice by not acknowledging significant, traumatic, or even ongoing events?

When I first found myself wrestling with this situation—wearing the counselor's hat versus the researcher's hat—I hesitated voicing my concerns and dilemma to the participant, Anaïs. For a few moments, my thoughts and concentration were separated from the data collection process. Ultimately, I decided to deviate from the interview guidelines. I chose to acknowledge the serious focus of the story I had just heard—in this

case, the sexual abuse Anaïs reported almost as an addendum to her story. I stayed with the incest element, which, to me, meant staying with the sexually abused little girl in the story—thus, staying with Anaïs, more as a person than as a participant. I asked Anaïs if there was something she would like to tell that little girl, if she could, from her vantage of being a young adult woman today. Her response was "to tell her she was right," that is, in trying to obtain her goals and in her recognition of her alientated-family situation. Again, in my further attempt to "stay with the girl in the story," to acknowledge its significance to Anaïs, I rephrased her comment and, in doing so, offered an interpretation. I said, "it sounds to me as though you want to validate her"—which also seems to me to parallel what I, as a researcher, wanted to do with my participant. Thus, I chose to solve my ethical dilemma with Anaïs and the other participants later by first acknowledging to them and to myself that I felt torn between two roles. Then, secondly, I carefully worded statements to them that validated the seriousness of their stories and yet maintained the necessary boundaries for the research project. When needed, I also reminded the participants of the list of referrals (mental health and other agencies) that I planned to give them (at the end of the interviews) and of my agreement to respect their privacy and to maintain confidentiality.

Limitations

Though richly detailed and sincerely told, the overall number of stories collected—the data for the project—was limited to only six stories, from only three participants. Needless to say, a much larger number of participants and a longitudinal study might actually be able to reveal trends or generate data for generalizeable theories. In addition, from another perspective, the decision to use women in their very early 20s

could be seen as a limitation, since they could only speak from the limited developmental stages they had experienced to date. Hancock's 1989 study used women in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, who drew on many more years of experiences. Also, the verbatim transcriptions of the data could be seen or read as a limitation, with respect to *only* conveying the words that were used. To gain a fuller appreciation for the stories as they were told, one needs to *hear* the voices and see the women. To me, it is a genuine limitation not to be able to hear, even through reading, the rising and falling in tone of voice, pregnant pauses, faltering speech, sounds of laughter, changes in pitch, and more, that each young woman used in sharing her personal stories. The same is true regarding being able to see their faces, changes in expressions, and body language. The use of transcription conventions would have enriched the readings. But using the conventions of transcription, especially for the untrained novice, proved more time consuming than this project could support.

Conclusions

Taken together, the findings from these stories of self demonstrate that the story format is a powerful means for communicating ideas about one's self to someone else. Whether one tells an anecdote or recalls an overall theme during a period of her life, the story images conveyed are clear and precise. Stories of self—with the characters, images, themes, and contexts—tell of real lived experiences of the individuals. Plus, the stories and their intended meanings or messages appear to last (in memory) for a long time: ir the memories of the teller and the listener. These stories seem especially powerful in t ways: first as a clarifying, meaning-making tool for the storyteller herself and, second, a means to convey that personal knowledge and lived experience to someone else. Because of these two aspects, which affect the teller as well as the listener, collecting

stories of self is/can be used in the counseling setting to great advantage during the therapeutic process.

Stories of self seem to act as an organizational tool: the structure requires the teller to place herself within a specific context and time. Her actions and the movement of the story then seem to build towards a particular meaning or sense of self that lies embedded in the story. This makes up an overall theme or message. Telling the story of self to someone else also acts as a way of telling herself her own story: she hears her own words, her own descriptions, details she chooses to include and exclude, and ultimately, the meaning or sense she has been trying to convey. Thus the whole process can be seen as an opportunity for self-enlightenment.

Telling stories from two different times in her life allows for further reflection. She can ask herself: have I changed, have I stayed the same, do I understand who/why I was the way I was then. Or she can ask if this is the story she wants for herself today. Telling her story is a verbalization of her own self-reflections in a palatable, easily accessible form.

Responses to the additional research questions also provided evidence of and clues to how young women do their identity work. Partly, this work seems to be done through modeling the behaviors and adopting the motivations of those they admire—male or female. Wittingly or unwittingly, these women appeared to shape their sense of self from the models their lived experiences afforded them and the range was wide. The range varied from consciously choosing to emulate the opposite of a "negative" model or to feeling inspiration from a serendipitous viewing on television.

Also evidenced in all six of the stories—from age 8 or 9 to 20 or 22—was the pervasive, dominant theme of relationship: the self in relation to others. These stories covered the gamut of relationships. Just a few in that range went from a lone young girl and her relationships, or lack of, with individual family members to a girl who was carefully woven into a net of extended family to young women purposefully forming psuedofamilies in order to meet relational needs. Apparently, the participants were not able to tell a story of self without placing themselves in relation to others.

Most notably, though, is that all the young women had stories to tell. Whether struggling with particular difficulties or experiencing transition is self-definition, all three kept themselves at the center of their stories. They had plans, goals, and ideals of their own. They were not mute.

Recommendations

As a Research Tool

As a research "tool" I would recommend using story collection and the storytelling format in which to gather information concerning identity development in girls and women, but I believe a much larger study would be more useful. The information, in the form of stories of self, is out there, is accessible, and can be collected to contribute to further explaining *how* girls and young women do their identity work. Stories, at least shown from this study, illustrate where on the developmental continuum girls/women might be (e.g., how much, if at all, are they drawing upon early selves to inform who they are at present), reveal the impact of context as a factor in development (e.g., the role of religion and/or significance of culture or race), and demonstrate the continuing influence of others in shaping an individual's sense of self (e.g., peers, friends,

parents, or mentors). Additionally, the story collection method appears to accommodate diverse backgrounds, an important element in our increasingly diverse society.

As a Counseling Tool

From this qualitative research project, I would highly recommend the use of stories and storytelling as a viable and valuable counseling intervention technique. I would recommend the approach to counselors familiar with narrative therapy and to those who are not, because of the accessibility to the stories, the inherent benefit to the storyteller of having her story told and heard, and the readability of the information gathered.

This small case study—where the participants/informants stand in for potential clients and I, the interviewer, stand in as the potential therapist—demonstrated the ease in which a therapist could collect valuable, "precise" data on and about a client. Sharing their stories with me appeared to be an easy, enjoyable experience for the "clients."

Thus, seen from a counseling perspective, there are many reasons why I recommend this method as an effective intervention to meeting therapeutic goals. Collecting stories forces *both* the client and the therapist to hear the client's words. Stories offer a bit of "distance" or safety from the reality of the problems or issues, paradoxically, making them more accessible. Stories act as "roadmaps," giving details that mark the various directions for exploration. Comparing stories from different ages or developmental levels offers the opportunity to explore growth or change or continuity. Telling stories forces the client to organize her thoughts, to delete the unnecessary, and to include the important. Hearing stories keeps the therapist in the client's world—regardless of where or when that world exists/ed. Retelling stories can suggest alternative

interpretations. Collaborating on story analysis can spark enlightenment and suggest ways to re-author or to rewrite.

No matter our age, nationality, race, culture, or gender, we all create stories and their images and meanings last. Whether telling them or hearing them, we get hooked and transported into the world of the story—the client's subjective world, which is where the counselor and client need to go for productive therapeutic work/collaboration to be done. As James Bugental (1987) asserts in *The Art of the Psychotherapist*, "Life-changing psychotherapy… demands that we recognize the patient's subjectivity as the true site of our endeavors" (p. 3), for it is there that "fundamental change in the experience of being alive" can be made.

Adversaria

Adversaria is a literary term for annotation, or miscellaneous notes, something not required, but noteworthy. The material in the following paragraphs seemed to me to fall into that category. When given the opportunity to name themselves—to give themselves an identity, in a sense—the three participants chose names that interestingly and appropriately matched their stories of self.

Wanting to protect the anonymity of the participants, at the end of our second meeting, I asked each participant to suggest an alias for me to use instead of her real name. I began with Anaïs. She seemed to have almost anticipated the request and came ready with her suggestion: Anaïs Nin. Nin (1903-1977) was a novleist, critic, and diarist, among other things. She became famous or infamous for her writings, particularly for her erotic style and content: for example, incest and sexual fantasies. In her day, she was considered avant-garde, perhaps, even a *misfit*.

Next, Chanel, too, seemed ready with a name. She chose Chanel because it is a "name I always wanted to be called." The only Chanel I am aware of is "Coco" Chanel (1883-1971), the successful French clothing designer and developer of the famous perfume, Chanel No. 5. To me, this fits this participant because of the image of Chanel and/or of models in her designs as "having it all together," a trait the participant-Chanel admired and aspires.

The last participant, Jamie, could not decide on a name for herself, not even a temporary alias. The task seemed too much for her at this time. Thus, I tried finding a first name alias for her online, a female name from her native country, but I was unsuccessful. So I decided to use James, with Jamie being a feminine form. This seemed appropriate, to me, because, supposedly, historically, James means, roughly, "one who puts another aside, then takes that person's place" (subrogates)—the process that Jamie's later story seems to be all about.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

Voluntary Participation

I voluntarily consent to participant in the study as it is explained below. I understand that I will not be penalized if I choose not to participate. I also understand that I can end my participation in this project at any time without penalty after I notify the project director.

Description of the Study/Project:

This project is being conducted to fulfill requirements for a master's thesis in the School of Applied Health and Educational Psychology, College of Education, at Oklahoma State University. It is a qualitative research study that examines the concept of identity development in girls as they mature into young women. The project and thesis are entitled "Identity Development with Girls and Women: The Storied Self."

The study will be conducted from a narrative approach: through the collection of stories told to the researcher by the participants of the project. The intent is to listen to personal stories that represent or encapsulate the woman's sense of self: her sense of identity, how she sees herself, how she defines herself. Each participant will be asked to tell two stories: one story from an earlier age, at about 9 or 10 years old, and one story from today, as a 19-, 20-, or 21-year-old college student. Thus, the two stories will represent two different developmental times in the student's life. These stories can be in the form of a recollection of a particular incident, episode, or interaction with people; in the form of a vignette or anecdote; or in any other narrative form that the participant chooses. The aim will be to convey how the person sees herself today and at an earlier period in her life.

Participation will require meeting with the researcher three times, for about 60 to 75 minutes each time. The meeting times will be at the convenience of the informant. All meetings will be private, with only the researcher and participant present. The second meeting will be audiotaped, that is, when the participant tells her stories. The tape will be kept in a locked metal storage box when not in use. No identifiable information will be assigned to the tapes or to the transcribed materials. Aliases will be assigned to each participant during transcription. Electronic files will be stored on disks, which will also be stored in the locked metal storage box when not in use. All tapes will be magnetically erased at the completion of the project.

No foreseeable risks are expected for participation in this project. Reportedly, the research has shown that telling a life story is usually a pleasant, positive experience, as is the general experience of talking about oneself. Though, as a precaution, should participation cause the informant to feel uncomfortable, such as from recalling an unpleasant experience or episode in her life, each informant will receive a listing of

phone numbers for numerous campus and local mental health and service agencies from which to choose, should she so desire.

Each participant will know that she has facilitated the completion of degree requirements for this specific researcher and, possibly, contributed to the general knowledge of identity development in girls and women in our culture. A token of appreciation in the form of a $5 gift certificate will be offered to each informant at the conclusion of her participation in the project (at meeting 3).

If any questions or concerns arise, now or in the future, the researcher (Deborah Bransford) may be contacted by telephone at (405)377-4376 or by E-mail at . The following is an additional contact:

Sharon Bacher, Executive Secretary
Institutional Review Board
Oklahoma State University
203 Whitehurst Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078
(405)744-5700

Consent

I have read and fully understand the consent form agreement. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of the agreement has been given to me.

Date ____________________ Time ____________________

Participant's Signature ____

I certify that I have personally explained all element of this form to the subject before requesting that she sign it.

Researcher's Signature ____

APPENDIX B

CAMPUS AND LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH AND SERVICE AGENCIES

CAMPUS AND LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH AND SERVICE AGENCIES

Campus Resources

1. University Counseling Services (two locations)
   Student Health Center
   Student Union

2. Employee Assistance Center

3. Psychological Services
   Psychology Department

4. Counseling Psychological Clinic
   Counseling Psychology Department

5. Center for Family Services
   Family Relations and Child Development Department

Local Off-Campus Resources

(The following are just a few of the many agencies available; check telephone directory and Sunday newspaper for a more complete or specific listing.)

1. City Domestic Violence Services
2. Parents Assistance Center
3. City Area Human Resources Association
4. Al-Anon
5. Al-Anon Support Group
6. Alcoholics Anonymous
7. Grief Support Group, Hospice
8. City Red Cross
9. Individual counselors/psychologists/psychiatrists
10. Depressive Manic Depressive Association
11. Narcotics Anonymous New Hope group
12. National Organization for Women
13. City Community AIDS Network
14. Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
15. Sexual Abuse Victims Emerge Survivors
16. Phoenix (support group for women involved in physically, emotionally, or psychologically abusive relationships)

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 12/11/02

Date: Wednesday, December 12, 2001 IRB Application No ED0259

Proposal Title: IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN GIRLS AND WOMEN: THE STORIED SELF

Principal
Investigator(s):

Deborah Bransford
1701 N. Glenwood Dr.
Stillwater, OK 74075

Marie L. Miville
401 Willard Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 203 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA 2

Deborah A. Bransford

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN GIRLS AND WOMEN: THE STORIED SELF

Major Field: Counseling and Student Personnel

Biographical:

Personal Data: Married, with two children and two grandchildren.

Education: Graduated from William Winlock Miller High School, Olympia, Washington in May 1966; received Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, in June 1982; received Master of Arts in Literature, from the University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, in March 1984. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with an emphasis in Community Counseling at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in December 2001.

Experience in Counseling: Currently employed part time as a counselor, beginning 4 October 2001; volunteered as counselor from 1 June to 31 July 2001; and completed practicum/internship for fall semester 2000 and spring semester 2001 all at the Student Counseling Center, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmonds, Oklahoma.

Professional Memberships: American Counseling Association and Oklahoma Counseling Association.