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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

COMING OF AGE IN OKLAHOMA:

STORIES GIRLS TELL

ABOUT LEARNING TO LIVE WISELY AND WELL

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

DEBORAH S. SHINN

Norman, Oklahoma

2006

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COMING OF AGE IN OKLAHOMA:  
STORIES GIRLS TELL OF LEARNING TO LIVE WISELY AND WELL

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

  
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degree and Jed and I raced to complete doctoral dissertations. I won.

Mother and Daddy valued education and set the pace.

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It has been a transformational journey, and I am very grateful.

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## **Abstract**

### **Coming of Age in Oklahoma:**

#### **Stories Girls Tell of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

Deborah S. Shinn

How and from whom do Oklahoma girls learn to live? From what multiple educational agency (Martin, 2002) do they learn about living wisely and well (LWW)? By what strategies and what do they learn about LWW?

These questions arise in response to new scholarly and popular literature on girls (Harris, 2004; Brown, 1999; Pipher, 1994) and to the reported comparatively low status of women in Oklahoma (Community Council of Central Oklahoma, 2001; Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2005; Kilpatrick & Ruggiero, 2003). This culturally (Dunbar-Ortiz, 1997) and autobiographically situated narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) , studies fourteen stories (Karpiak 1990, 1996, & 2005) of diverse young Oklahoma women preparing to teach school, who emerged into three intuitively clear groups as *challenged*, *protected* and *supported*, with distinctive *life-wisdom themes*. Jane Roland Martin's concept of "learning to live" (1992) provided the framework for Aristotelian *golden mean analysis* of those themes, with particular reference also to Deborah L. Tolman's theory of adolescent girls' health (1999) and the Overeaters' Anonymous theory of body/self (1995).

The girls who gave evidence of having deliberately learned to LWW as teenagers were *challenged* by struggles and have become independent thinkers; they have made intelligent, authentic, autonomous, imaginative choices. At age

19, 20, and 21 they respect themselves and have achieved some autonomy in the construction of their own lives. Not family but teachers, health professionals, church people, and others befriend them, as Susan Laird (2002, 2004) has theorized “befriending girls,” to aid their learning to live. Parents, teachers, church people, and peers, befriended the *supported* girls, encouraging them to imagine, take risks, make decisions, and confront mistakes as they learned to live. The *protected* girl has avoided struggle and choice by following the rules and roles specified for her and by seeking the safety and approval of her family and church. She is, at 21, at risk of postponing indefinitely this learning. The *supported* girls learning to LWW is slower than the *challenged* girls, but more certain than the *protected* girl.

## **Chapter I**

### **Girls' Lives in Oklahoma: Sources and Resources**

“ . . . we must turn all our educational efforts to training our children for the choices which will confront them. . . the children must be taught how to think, not what to think. . . they must be taught tolerance, . . . that many ways are open to them . . . that upon them and upon them alone lies the burden of choice. Unhampered by prejudices, unvexed by too early conditioning to any one standard, they must come clear-eyed to the choices which lie before them.”<sup>1</sup>

Margaret Mead    *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928)

### **Context of the Inquiry**

As a twenty-five-year-old high school home economics teacher, I was assigned the junior and senior “marriage and family” class. I loved that coed semester class with juniors and seniors. We discussed things that, in my value system, mattered: knowing self, relationships, and family.

By the end of the first year, I was teaching girls who had married during the senior year, including one unmarried, junior girl who had become pregnant. I had come of age during the 60s; we had the birth control pill, and I could not understand why a girl would get pregnant when she did not want to. I could not understand why we were only showing types of birth control from a drawer in the classroom, not teaching about

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (New York: Perennial Classics Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 169.

the methods, the contraceptive devices, and how to obtain them. At that time, home economics teachers made home visits; when the pregnant girl asked if I would help her tell her father that she was pregnant, I made that home visit which was a watershed experience in my career. The girl's boyfriend was stationed at the nearby Air Force Base in pilot training; they had never seriously thought about a future relationship. In those days, a pregnant girl had to finish high school at the YWCA alternative high school. The father of the child went on to continue his career while the pregnancy changed the mother's life. Jane Roland Martin calls this "cultural miseducation." She says:

that societies---and also groups and institutions within them---can be educative, but they can also be sadly miseducative. Cultural miseducation occurs when so many cultural liabilities or such devastating ones are passed down that a heavy burden is placed on the next generation; or, alternatively, when invaluable portions of the culture's wealth are not passed down.<sup>2</sup>

Dewey described an experience as miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience.<sup>3</sup> Pregnancy certainly changes further experience for the young woman. I believed I could do a better job of teaching "marriage and family." At the end of that school year, I quit teaching, turning instead to the university, for a master's

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Roland Martin, *Cultural Miseducation In Search of a Democratic Solution*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), [g. 5.

<sup>3</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education*. (New York: Touchstone, 1938), 25.

degree in Family Relations and to birthing a second son. When I graduated, I took a job with Planned Parenthood in Oklahoma, my native state. This is where I began teaching birth control and decision making at the high school and junior high level. I offered, as Margaret Mead said in 1928, “educational efforts to train our children for the choices which will confront them . . . the children must be taught how to think, not what to think. . . they must be taught tolerance, . . . that many ways are open to them . . . that upon them and upon them alone lies the burden of choice.”<sup>4</sup> I hoped I was teaching them about life, about themselves, and relationships before they faced a decision to be sexually intimate.

I began this study with an interest in girls’ learning to live wisely and well. In the process of listening to Oklahoma girls, I learned something about my own learning to live, about learning to speak authentically, and what is more I think what I have learned is important to teacher education. As I distinguished between “protected” and “challenged” girls I identified the role of fundamentalist churches in this distinction.

### **Oklahoma Girlhood**

My subject, Oklahoma girlhood, girls growing up in families, churches, schools and with friendships, is about my growing up as well as the subject of an autobiographical research narrative by historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz.<sup>5</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz describes growing up in both urban and suburban poverty during the 50s and 60s, much as I grew up in rural

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<sup>4</sup> Mead, *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Roxanne Dunbar -Ortiz, *Red Dirt Growing Up Okie*, (New York: Verso, 1998).

western Oklahoma. We shared Western Oklahoma, but a big difference between our families was that my family had owned land for two generations and although Dunbar-Ortiz's Dunbar grandparents had owned land her parents bought their first house with indoor plumbing when she was in junior high. Grandfather Dunbar was a Socialist in early Southeast Oklahoma who was beaten and burned out because of his advocacy for laborers.<sup>6</sup>

I was born September 13, 1946 in the small Western Oklahoma town of Watonga to a family that included my mother, father, and brother who was five years old at the time. My parents were delighted to have a healthy, brown-eyed girl with a birthmark on her forehead; they had had a baby girl two years earlier who died soon after birth. Mother always included Rue Vae in the birth order of my siblings so I was her third child. I was an especially welcome and protected addition to the little family at the beginning of the baby boom following World War II. When I was six months old, my dad left Watonga and his job at AAA, one of President Roosevelt's New Deal organizations designed for soil conservation, to start his own soil conservation business. My parents bought a farm near my mother's family farms in Washita County, near the rural community of Billings. Within the next nine years I had a brother two years younger, a sister five years younger and another two sisters seven and nine years younger than me. I was the oldest girl in a family of six children; Daddy called me "little mother."

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Dunbar-Ortiz had two brothers and one sister; she was the youngest, learning to live from her older sister Vera:

[Mama] turned over my socialization to Vera, whose lessons are still imprinted in my mind, such as my compulsion to always leave some food on my plate. "Leave some food on your plate, else people will think you don't get enough to eat at home," Vera said. I stared longingly at the last bite of the best hamburger I'd ever eaten and tried to figure out the logic of my sister's warning. . . Vera was another Scarlet O'Hara, clawing her way out of rural poverty.<sup>7</sup>

I felt, much like Vera, that I was responsible for caring for and teaching my younger sisters; I was a feisty, bossy older sister making them play school or church. From my vantage point, my older brother always seemed to be independent. He worked outside with Dad, as did my brother two years younger. The girls worked in the house with mother. At nine years of age, I remember babysitting my little brother and sister at home when Mother went to the hospital for our sister Patricia's birth. I cleaned the new bedroom addition, moving the bed to a wall with a window where the sun shone in. I thought this would please mom, but when she returned, she wanted it in its original place. I was so disappointed; I had expected her to be delighted and brag on me as she often did. I was usually supported and rewarded with praise for taking care of my younger brothers and sisters. This would have been a

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 81-84.

challenge for a nine-year-old girl if I had not had the support of my parents.

Protective toward me, my family practiced a conservative religion; we gathered every night around the table to begin supper with a prayer. I learned to be politically active, involved in my community and to think about social justice from my father and mother. They participated in the rural community, and the church we attended. As a young girl, I remember Daddy would come home from School Board Meetings, from church meetings, or from being with one of the farmers he worked with in soil conservation projects, and tell us stories about his day. I thought it was great adventure. When I was an adult, Dad advised me to participate: "Show up regularly and get involved."

When I was about seven, my parents decided to move to my maternal grandmother's house about a mile from our small house, which our family of six had outgrown. My grandmother and my mother's brother, Jim, had lived on the home place where my grandmother butchered her own pigs to make sausage or killed her own chickens for the Sunday lunch that always followed Sunday morning church services. In the early 1940s, when my Uncle Jim was a young man, he left Western Oklahoma, like many others, to find adventure and work in California. When he returned, with only a dime in his pocket, my aging grandfather promised him half the land if he would stay and farm. Jim stayed but he did not

participate in the family's church<sup>8</sup> or marry. My mother told me that when he was young he wanted to marry a girl whose family members were cotton-pickers but his mother, my grandmother, would not allow it.

Jim, the favorite uncle, was devoted to farming; he would take a gaggle of pre-teen nephews for a pick-up ride through the pasture to shoot rabbits when his sisters and brothers visited with their families from nearby towns and Oklahoma City. Jim was also an alcoholic. My dad and one of Jim's brothers tried to take him to treatment, but Uncle Jim would never agree or cooperate. My mother and dad were inconsolable when Uncle Jim committed suicide in his bedroom in his fiftieth year. My grandmother, who had been visiting my aunt when it happened, was desolate; she left the farm to live with a daughter, returning only to visit.

The family came together to bury their son and brother and to make decisions about the farms and the house. It was a difficult choice for my father and mother to decide to move to Grandmother's house. I remember baking mud pies with my younger brother and sister on the front porch colonnade, when my dad walked around the corner, and I overheard him say, "If the children can play and be happy here then we can live here." I knew that I had helped Daddy make this decision. We raised cotton, wheat, alfalfa, and a big garden. My parents continued to farm their 80-acres and rented out the small house.

Even in the face of grief, I felt protected from the world that we saw on the black and white television left behind by Grandmother and Uncle

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<sup>8</sup> My family was in the leadership of the Church of Christ.

Jim. We rode the school bus to Billings schools; my brother graduated in a class of twelve and left for college at my father's alma mater. Mother's family decided to sell the home place in 1961, and mother and dad considered buying it; however, in January 1961, our family bought a house and moved fourteen miles to Collings, a town with a population of 3,000, a popular church, and an excellent school system.

Mother was the next to the youngest in her family of ten children and the only one to graduate from a four-year Normal College with a teaching degree. Dad was the oldest in his family and set an example by completing a college degree at Oklahoma's land grant university. Mom organized a private kindergarten in our new home's basement and when the public schools added half-day kindergarten, she returned to teaching in the public school. Mother welcomed all our friends to our house; she had dear, life-long friends and knew the value of friendship. Our house with the six children and friends was chaotic; I remember as a shy young girl standing behind a door facing watching the commotion. Dad continued his soil conservation business but he rarely talked about having a college degree; many farmers thought a college education was worse than worthless. Mother and Daddy shaped me most significantly.

### **Martin's Heuristics and Aristotle's Golden Mean**

I do not propose that either Dunbar-Ortiz or I have perfect wisdom, courage, loyalty, or self-assertion, and neither are the clear cases of learning life-wisdom I found in Oklahoma girls' life histories; instead we

are people who have been learning lessons that teach us wisdom, courage, loyalty and self assertion. Our experiences have not placed us at exact mathematical points that lie precisely between two points. For example, my family was very loyal when Uncle Jim died, and it required courage for my parents to move to the home place, to live and take care of the family's property. Of course, it gave mother and dad a marginally bigger house for their growing family. Several years later, my parents moved the family from the farm to a small town nearby with a good school system and a strong church congregation. When I was the new girl in town, the students looked at me as I came in the front doors of the high school as a second semester freshman. Freshman had been the oldest in junior high at my former school; now at midterm I was suddenly the youngest in high school. A shy girl, I was placed in Senior Speech because the Collings Schools did not offer the Spanish course that I had studied at Billings. I felt faint when I had to go to the front of the speech class and introduce myself. Courage has shaky knees.

Making sense of the girls', Dunbar-Ortiz's and my own stories, I have adopted Jane Roland Martin's method of discerning wisdom,<sup>9</sup> applying Aristotle's doctrine of the "golden mean" to the various virtues of living that she describes in "Learning to Live," in *The Schoolhome: Rethinking Schools for Changing Families*.<sup>10</sup> Martin discusses learning the

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<sup>9</sup> Jane Roland Martin, *The: Rethinking Schools for Today's Families*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 108.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

virtue of courage on a continuum between its deficit cowardice and its excess foolhardiness. Courage is the golden mean, as Aristotle defined the golden mean. (See Chart page 11) Aristotle describes virtues as a “state of character,”<sup>11</sup> a state that involves choice:

Every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well. In everything that is continuous and divisible. . . it is possible to take more, less, or an equal amount . . . and the equal is an intermediate between excess and defect. . . I mean that which is equidistant . . . Therefore virtue is a kind of mean, since . . . it aims at what is intermediate.<sup>12</sup>

Like Aristotle, Martin calls the intermediate the “golden mean.”<sup>13</sup> In addition to applying the golden mean to courage, Martin explains that:

in saying that the excess and deficiency in emotions and actions are wrong and that virtue is a sort of middle state, Aristotle did not suppose that the golden mean lay at some precise mathematical point between two extremes or that it consisted of middle-of-the-road, wishy-washy action. Rather, it involves feeling the right emotions and doing the right thing at the right time, on the right

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<sup>11</sup> Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics* Translated by David Ross, Revised by J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Urmson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 35-36.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38

<sup>13</sup> Martin, *Ibid.*, 108.

occasion, toward the right people, and for the right motives. The virtuous mean is on a continuum of deficits and excesses.<sup>14</sup>

I wonder if girls are learning the same things today about courage and self-assertion as when Dunbar-Ortiz and I were growing up in the 50s and 60s in rural Oklahoma in conservative, traditionally religious families. Women and girls were not to speak in the church but to speak through their husbands. In addition to my family, the church, school and friends influenced me. The church leaders never presumed that girls would grow up wanting to assert themselves or speak except to teach an elementary Sunday school class or learn to be a devoted homemaker, mother and wife. Actually, at the Sunday lunch table, following church, my parents offered another more challenging environment; they encouraged and honored the four girls' opinions as much as the boys' opinions were honored. My mother prepared Sunday lunch before she left for Sunday school at nine forty-five, often with a children's Sunday school class to teach. Since that time, in the 1980s, Belenky et. al.<sup>15</sup> researched *Women's Ways of Knowing the Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. They used "voice as a metaphor to depict intellectual and ethical development; the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self . . . intricately intertwined." In this dissertation, I am using "voice" to depict learning to speak with courage and authentically, to assert one's self.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. *Women's Ways of Knowing The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1986), 18.

Another source for girls' studies, the American Association of University Women (AAUW), describes the results of sexual harassment. In the United States in the late twentieth century, two in ten students (18 percent) were afraid some or most of the time that someone would harass or bother them at school.<sup>16</sup> As they are exposed to harassment, violence, poverty and sexism and as they enter puberty, Anglo-American girls lose self-confidence and courage, contributing to behavior that is hurtful to them.<sup>17</sup> Sexism and poverty were certainly part of Dunbar-Ortiz's and my life in Western Oklahoma.

Research that has looked at girls' courageous behavior and the experience of silence is a landmark study by Carol Gilligan and Annie Rogers at the Harvard Project on the Psychology of Women and the Development of Girls. These researchers suggest that Anglo American girls, as they become adolescents:

Lose some of the self-confidence, courage, and resistance to harmful norms of feminine behavior as well as a detailed and complex knowledge of the human social world . . . Up until the age of eleven or twelve . . . girls are quite clear and candid about what they think, feel and know.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> AAUW Educational Foundation & Harris Interactive, *Hostile Hallways Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School* (Washington DC: American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 2001), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Annie G. Rogers, "Voice, Play, and a Practice of Ordinary Courage in Girls' and Women's Lives" *Harvard Educational Review* 63: 3, 272.

<sup>18</sup> Annie Rogers and Carol Gilligan, "Translating Girls' Voices: Two Languages of Development." (Harvard University Graduate School of Education: Harvard Project on the

In addition to modeling the use of Aristotle's golden mean with the virtues of courage, loyalty, and self-assertion, Martin adds the three Cs of care, concern, and connection plus nurturing as virtues that I call **life-wisdom themes** to be learned when learning to live. Like courage, the virtue of self-assertion is situated on a **life-wisdom** continuum. The middle way of asserting self, which serves a woman well falls between the twin offenses of meek passivity and over-aggressiveness. The ability to assert self is essential. Martin<sup>19</sup> points out that although Aristotle does not discuss care, concern, and connection, attributes that our culture often assigns to women, his doctrine of the golden mean can be applied to the three Cs. The virtue caring lies in the middle of the continuum between coldness on the deficit side and indulgence on the excess side. Concern falls between disinterest and self-sacrifice. The virtue connection falls between the excesses of total separation and immersion of self. When my family and I moved to Collings the first of January 1961, I changed schools and my best friend Anna Lisa stayed behind. We had gotten matching wool skirts for Christmas; when I was lonely, I would wear my skirt. Why we did not write or continue to spend weekends together I do not know; twelve miles seemed like a long way to maintain our connection.

I began to make friends in Collings, the county seat of this western Oklahoma County that has a picturesque courthouse setting on the town

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Psychology of Women and the Development of Girl, 1988): 42-43 quoted in *How Schools Shortchange Girls, The AAUW Report*, (Washington DC: AAUW, 1995), 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-111.

square. As soon as we had a driver's license and access to a car, we would drag Main Street. This meant gathering your friends and driving the family car around the courthouse square, past the only streetlight in town, down the hill and up again, about a mile to Karla's, the drive-in where we would get a coke, hang out and see who was with whom. Dunbar-Ortiz recounts a similar small town with a class of only three girls. She and her best friend, Lorraine, would go for a ride on the back of two boys' motorbikes. They rode from Piedmont to Yukon, a larger town nearby. I did not leave Collings until I was a senior in high school and had a date. Dunbar-Ortiz also moved from the town of her childhood, leaving her best friend when, as a senior, she moved to live with her sister and attend Central High in Oklahoma City after her mother began to beat her in drunken rages. A challenged girl, Dunbar-Ortiz thrived at Central High because she was good in English and writing; she found friends in the journalism class that produced the newspaper and yearbook. We were both lonely and had to make new friends. Epicurius (341-270 BC), a Greek teacher, taught in his Garden School that friendship is desirable for itself and that it begins from personal need.<sup>20</sup>

Collings and Piedmont, the towns and schools, were racially segregated in the 1950s and 1960s, but are more racially integrated today. There were American Indians living in the town ten miles away as well as African Americans, who made significant contributions to the

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<sup>20</sup> Richard W. Hibler, "Epicureanism," in J. J. Chambliss (ed) *Philosophy of Education An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 186.

competing town's sports teams, but not in my town. There were no opportunities to form connections between races. There were no opportunities to form friendships between races, to observe the nurturing connections in African American or American Indian cultures only in European American families and culture.

Nurturing behavior can be found between the deficit of separation or neglect or in the excess of smothering in all races. Although the excesses are often culturally associated with females, they transcend gender categories. Both of my parents modeled the golden mean of care, concern, and connection. Women find a life well lived, a life of satisfaction in the middle way, neither neglectful nor smothering. With six children mother was not smothering; however, she did immerse herself in her relationships with her children, but we all made successful transitions to adulthood. The golden mean is not a precise point in the middle of the life-wisdom continuum, and an individual's ability to be courageous or caring will vary at different times. Table 1 follows illustrating Martin's heuristics.

**Tables 1**  
**Golden Mean Analysis Describing Adolescent Girls' Living Wisely**  
**and Well Regarding Virtues**

<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Martin's Virtues</b> <b>Golden Mean<sup>21</sup></b>	<b>Excess</b>
Cowardice	Courage	Foolhardiness
Betrayal	Loyalty	Blind allegiance
Passivity	Self-assertion	Aggressiveness
Total separation	Connection	Codependency
Coldness	Caring	Excess of indulgence
Disinterest	Concern	Self-sacrifice
Separation or neglect	Nurturing	Smothering

### **Tolman's Heuristics**

I began dating soon after moving to Collings, even though I had not dated except to go to a basketball game on a school bus with the pep club where I would sometimes sit with a boy. In Collings, seniors were asking me for dates. I finally said, "yes" to the blue-eyed football player. He was much more experienced than I was about dating; I had kissed a boy from church summer camp and played submarine in a car with the boys at church. We smoked cigarettes until it was so smoky, no one could see out of the car windows. I was very protected, but I learned to make-out and on a date in his lime green thunderbird, he raped me. I was much too

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

protected and inexperienced to handle this and felt I had no one or no place to turn, not even my mother. This experience became a challenge, which took a long time to address. I went home and much later in my life asked for help.

While thinking about my own past challenges individually and experiences as a teacher of sexually active and often obsessively dieting girls, I applied the “golden mean analysis” to Deborah Tolman’s model of Female Adolescent Health<sup>22</sup> and to body and food issues identified by Overeaters Anonymous (OA).<sup>23</sup> Tolman and OA are basically reiterating Martin’s analysis with Tolman’s sexual specificity and with OA specificity on body. These three points of view, Martin, Tolman and Overeaters Anonymous became the reflective background for my own educational questions about Oklahoma girls’ living wisely and well. Tolman’s model incorporates four aspects of adolescent health, which I regard as **life-wisdom themes**: the individual, dating/romantic relationships, social relationships, and the sociocultural/sociopolitical environment. Tolman’s developmental study of female adolescent sexuality goes beyond concerns about pregnancy with a comprehensive concept of sexual health that begins with the younger population of girls, age eleven.

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<sup>22</sup> Deborah L. Tolman, EdD, “Femininity as a Barrier to Positive Sexual Health for Adolescent Girls” *Journal of American Medical Women Association*, 54: 3, pg. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Overeaters Anonymous, Inc., *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*, (Rio Rancho, NM: Overeaters Anonymous, Inc, 1995).

When considering the middle ground in individual development, Tolman<sup>24</sup> advocates that girls and women feel their own sexual feelings and develop a sense of comfort with their own sexuality as opposed to unaware, asexual, repressed sexuality on the deficit side and being very uncomfortable with sexual feelings on the excess side. When I was growing up it was my job, as a girl, to keep my sexual feelings in control; there was no room for acknowledging sexual desire, or sexual pleasure. As an adolescent I fell at both the deficit and the excessive ends of the continuum. On the excessive side, I professed to feel what was expected of me or what I thought I was supposed to feel. The thought of fully experiencing sexual feelings and developing a sense of comfort with my own sexuality was not a reality for me growing up in Western Oklahoma in the 1960s.

My family's fundamentalist Christian religion played a large role in how I coped with what I later learned to call "acquaintance rape." Fundamentalist Christianity was a large part of my rural Oklahoma life story. The act of sexual intercourse before marriage was so reprehensible that I could only tell God; getting pregnant was an intolerable thought to me, the oldest girl of six children. I made a deal with God that if I would not get pregnant I would never let that happen again. In fact, I soon repressed the acquaintance rape until I retrieved it in therapy some twenty years later. At fifteen and a half, I immediately retreated to the protected

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<sup>24</sup> Tolman, *Ibid.*

environment of the church and my friends there. I had a group of girlfriends at church with whom I sang and went to school, but I could not tell them. At church, on a Wednesday night when the crowd was small, I confessed my sin without saying what it was and asked forgiveness. After that, I dated only boys who attended my church who I trusted would not rape me if we made-out on dates. I told no one but God the exact nature of my sin.

In relationships, the middle way, according to Tolman, is *to feel entitled to explore sexual identity*, have knowledge about sexual activity and reproductive health, to differentiate between sexual desire and sexual behavior and feel entitled to pleasure and sexual experiences without guilt, including self-pleasure. There was a total vacuum of human sexuality education in my life at school, and at church, and very little at home. The status of health and sexuality education in Oklahoma public schools and teacher education, while not a vacuum, it is not integrated into the health curriculum. The Oklahoma State Health Department and Planned Parenthoods are invited into some classes for this purpose. Tolman adds that the middle way in relationships includes *developing positive attitudes and a sense of responsibility* about protection from unwanted pregnancy and disease, as well as becoming aware of and having respect for one's own values about sexuality and relationships. In my own career, I have worked almost forty years to learn and to teach girls the middle way of feeling entitled to explore sexual identity and

develop positive attitudes about sexuality; but I have done it in a cultural context that regards such work with suspicion. The deficit position is unprotected sexual intercourse. One only has to read the statistics that follow to know that this is an issue among adolescents in Oklahoma. In my opinion, the excess is having no respect, or in some cases even knowledge of, one's own values.

Today, the numbers of teenage pregnancies are declining in Oklahoma<sup>25</sup> when compared with the 50s and 60s. The following numbers, however, still portray a vast need to rethink girls' education in Oklahoma. Births to teens ages 15-17, which were 38.1 per 1000 girls in 1994-1996, improved from 29.8% to 21.8 per 1000 girls in 2001-2003. Births to teens 15-19 were 63.6% (1994-1996) to 57.2% (2001-2003) or improved by 18%. The 2001 Kids Count Factbook reports that during the most recent three-year-period (1998-2000) an average of nearly eight thousand (7,981) babies were born to Oklahoma females under the age of twenty. Nearly three thousand (2,895) Oklahoma school-age girls (age 17 and under) had babies. School-age girls between ten and fourteen years of age who had babies numbered 135. The youngest girls' pregnancies are often a result of sexual abuse in the family. In 2000, on the average, Oklahoma children (age 17 or younger) became mothers at the rate of

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<sup>25</sup> Oklahoma Department of Libraries, official web site, [www.odl.state.ok.us/kids/factbook/kidscount2005/pressrelease.html](http://www.odl.state.ok.us/kids/factbook/kidscount2005/pressrelease.html), (accessed December 2005).

eight per day.<sup>26</sup> Even though we have made progress in reducing the rate of teen births, Oklahoma remains among the ten worst states in the nation during the most recent year compared.<sup>27</sup> Poor literacy skills, poor progress in school, and academic failure are good predictors of early childbearing. In addition to early childbearing, almost 24% of children in Oklahoma lived in poverty during the year 2002.<sup>28</sup>

In the most recent three-year period, eleven thousand young Oklahomans quit school without graduating (1996/97 – 1998/99). Although there is not a breakdown by gender, 36.2 percent of the state's 3,450,654 million people<sup>29</sup> are under age twenty and 50.9 percent of Oklahoma's population is female (561,060). Twenty-two percent of children lived in poverty in 2002 in Oklahoma County alone.<sup>30</sup> Although there is not a breakdown by gender, 36.2 percent of the state's 3,450,654 million people<sup>31</sup> are under age twenty and 50.9 percent of Oklahoma's population is female (561,060). Twenty-two percent of children lived in poverty in

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<sup>26</sup> Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, Inc., *Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook 2001* (Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001), 20-21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Community Council of Central Oklahoma. *Oklahoma County Vital Signs 2001* (Oklahoma City: A United Way Agency, 2001), 3-8.

<sup>29</sup> Oklahoma 2000 Census Data quoted in [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=04000US40&qr\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_5/18/2004](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US40&qr_name=DEC_2000_5/18/2004), (accessed December 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Community Council of Central Oklahoma, *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Oklahoma 2000 Census Data quoted in [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=04000US40&qr\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_5/18/2004](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US40&qr_name=DEC_2000_5/18/2004), (accessed December 2005).

2002 in Oklahoma County alone.<sup>32</sup> One out of every eight adult women in Oklahoma--nearly 174,000--has been the victim of forcible rape sometime in her lifetime.<sup>33</sup> That only counts the reported ones.

Dating and romantic relationships is the second ***life-wisdom theme*** in Tolman's<sup>34</sup> model of female adolescent health. The middle way for dating and romantic relationships is to recognize and employ a range of *appropriate ways to express love, affection, intimacy and sexual desire consistent with one's own values* as opposed to a deficit, which is a fear of intimacy or attachment disorder, to an excess position of no commitment to anyone, friend or lover. There are many points along this continuum; it is hard-won wisdom at twenty-one years of age. *Communication about sexuality in a dating romantic relationship* is another middle ground identified by Tolman with the deficit being unable to talk with a partner about sexual feelings and thoughts to an excess of a lack of boundaries, talking to everyone about intimate feelings and thoughts regarding sexuality. The third aspect of a healthy dating/romantic relationship is an *awareness of and feeling entitled to own needs and feelings in relationship balanced by sensitivity to and respect for needs and feelings of a partner*. Awareness and respect stands between the vice of deficiency, that is, total

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<sup>32</sup> Community Council of Central Oklahoma, *Ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> Dean G. Kilpatrick, Ph.D. and Kenneth J. Ruggiero, Ph.D., Rape In Oklahoma A Report to the State One in Eight (Charleston, SC: National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center, May 15, 2003), 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*.

unawareness of personal needs and the opposite vice of excessive focus on self, lacking any sensitivity regarding the partner.

A source of information on American girls growing up and feeling entitled to one's own needs and feelings is girls' diaries. Historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg describes diaries she researched that recorded how girls learned to live life. The diaries dated from 1830 into the 1990s.<sup>35</sup> The average age of the onset of puberty today is twelve but it can begin as early as eight or as late as 16.<sup>36</sup> Puberty today begins when today's girls are emotionally still children, much earlier than it was for girls in the late 1800s. At the same time, puberty is beginning, along come interpersonal sexual relationships entering earlier and earlier into girls' lives. Brumberg reports that one of the diary authors, Deborah was only fourteen-years old in 1982 when she and many of her friends at Stuyvesant High School in New York City began to talk about losing their virginity; she was two years younger than Laura Ramirez in the 1960s and five years younger than Yvonne Blue in the 1920s.<sup>37</sup>

Progress for women is often filled with ambiguities; for example, parental consent for birth control and secrecy often shrouded responses to sexual activity and unplanned pregnancies. As girls were discussing

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<sup>35</sup> Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), XXV, 31-38

<sup>36</sup> Health Library, <http://healthlibrary.epnet.com/GetContent.aspx?token=712c416e-2228-4a57-ae0e-b2be76d615d5&chunkid=46635>, (accessed June 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Brumberg, *Ibid.*, 182.

“losing their virginity earlier and earlier”<sup>38</sup> doctors and Planned Parenthood clinics were requiring parental consent, as the law required, for girls to access birth control, that is, birth control that required a physician’s prescription. Then, in the 1972 Supreme Court decision, *Eisenstadt v Baird*, the court put aside the model of “joint ownership” of girls’ bodies that had prevailed since the nineteenth century. In this historic case, the court upheld the rights of minors to seek and obtain contraceptives without parental approval.<sup>39</sup> Diary author, Deborah (1982) is the only one who would have had access to a method of birth control requiring a prescription. Moreover, that would have been available only if the medical community or the women’s advocacy community was aware of the Supreme Court decision. After that decision, gynecologist’s offices and Planned Parenthood clinics could openly write prescriptions for birth control without fear of prosecution. They became sources of education regarding prevention of unplanned pregnancies, a factor in living wisely and well.<sup>40</sup>

However, unplanned pregnancy has often been a secret held in a shaming environment, as described by Janet Ellerby, whose memoir, at age thirty, narrates her long-held secret regarding her pregnancy at age sixteen. After she became pregnant, she spent time with her aunt in another state and went to the Florence Crittendon Home for Unwed

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

Mothers during the last months of pregnancy before she gave birth to her first daughter who was immediately taken away and subsequently adopted. The aftermath of this pivotal time brought Janet a lifetime of painful consequences primarily because of its secrecy and shame.<sup>41</sup>

It is a challenge that most schools' sex education does not help students with what they need most, which is a sense of meaning regarding their sexuality, ways to make sense of all the messages, and guidelines on wise behavior in sexual relationships. Psychotherapist, Mary Pipher<sup>42</sup> describes the decision to have sex as a "North Star" decision, that is, one that should be made with one's "heart and head, a compass pointing true north."<sup>43</sup> It should be a decision in keeping with a sense of oneself, one's values, and long-term goals.

In Central Oklahoma in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I worked for Planned Parenthood. By 1978, we had a policy that "emancipated" girls could self-consent for birth control. "Emancipated" in Oklahoma meant that a girl, under eighteen, who supported herself and lived apart from her parent(s) could self-consent for a diaphragm or birth control pills. The policy also applied if she had been pregnant, currently was pregnant or

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<sup>41</sup> Janet Mason Ellerby, *Intimate Readings The Contemporary Women's Memoir* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 12-13.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Pipher, PhD., *Reviving Ophelia Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 246-247. Pipher is a therapist and a journalist who writes extensively about her practice.

<sup>43</sup> Jill Ker Conway, *True North A Memoir* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 132. Conway provides the inspiration to Pipher for this metaphor when Conway describes "moral integrity, courage, and devotion to humanistic learning as her compass point, the true north one needed to set directions on this continent."

had a sexually transmitted disease but not if she was preparing for protected sex. Janet had little awareness of, much less a feeling of entitlement to her own needs and feelings in the relationship with whom she had sex one time on a nubby, worn, avocado-green couch in her boyfriend's parent's living room.<sup>44</sup>

Regarding relationships, there were fifty-seven students in my graduating class and the high school students had cliques of friends but in choir, sextet, and trio I found girlfriends. When I told the girls at sextet practice that the center on the football team, a senior, had asked me for a date and that I had said, "no" they could not believe me, making a big fuss about it. So the next time he asked I said, "yes," even though I was afraid of him and had no experience dating. Today, I recognize that girls in Western Oklahoma culture could only have a voice if they had a man, a boyfriend. I was saying no to voice when I said no to him. I said "yes" at the next opportunity so I could tell the girls at choir practice. Self-awareness was not on my radar screen in 1961.

Concerning self-respect and awareness, current talk show host Oprah Winfrey openly talked about the "marginalization of women" to current singer, Pink, referring to Pink's hit song "Stupid Girls." Oprah says, "there is an epidemic of mindlessness among teenagers today and Americans' obsession with celebrity is to blame." In Pink's music video, she attacks modern-day role models like Paris Hilton, mocking what she believes is their obsession with beauty, shopping, and acting dumb. Pink

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<sup>44</sup> Ellerby, *Ibid.* 6.

said, "My definition of 'stupid' is wasting your opportunity to be yourself because I think everybody has uniqueness and everybody's good at something."<sup>45</sup> Pink says, "I don't think any of these [young Hollywood starlets like Paris Hilton] are actually stupid. I think it is an act. It makes you less challenging as a female to act really cute . . . my point is, sexy and smart are not oil and water --- and that you don't have to dumb yourself down to be cute."<sup>46</sup>

Finally, *feeling entitled and able to make active choices in consensual sexual and romantic contexts* is the golden mean between the deficit of being non-assertive or unaware of personal choices and excess position of accepting the partner's choices without respect for one's own needs or "dumbing yourself down."

The third characteristic of healthy female adolescence and a **life wisdom theme** is having *social relationships* with the middle way being to develop relationships with close friends, peers, older friends, teammates, siblings, parents, teachers, counselors, and church members, all of which offer emotional and social support. These friendships stand between the deficiency of no friends and no communication regarding sexuality with parents, siblings or friends and the opposite vice of excessive communication or no boundaries with indiscriminate disclosure to

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<sup>45</sup> Oprah Winfrey Show, official web site, referenced April 10, 2006 (accessed April 12, 2006).  
[http://www2.oprah.com/tows/slide/200604/20060410/slide\\_20060410\\_350\\_105.html](http://www2.oprah.com/tows/slide/200604/20060410/slide_20060410_350_105.html).

<sup>46</sup> Oprah Winfrey Show, official web site, April 10, 2006,  
[http://www2.oprah.com/tows/slide/200604/20060410/slide\\_20060410\\_350\\_106.html](http://www2.oprah.com/tows/slide/200604/20060410/slide_20060410_350_106.html)  
(accessed April 12, 2006).

everyone. Tolman offers the aspect of social relationships from the middle way of *making safe choices about sexuality and relationships* to identifying and leaving abusive relationships. Safe choices about sexuality and relationships were never a topic of discussion for me as I grew up; information about sexuality was communicated in smiles, laughs, raised eyebrows, and modeling without direct language about sexuality. Instead, *sharing information and getting advice about relationships* is the ideal and falls between the deficiency of no risk-taking, no sharing of information nor making safe choices and the opposite and excessive vice of disregard for consequences, staying in an abusive relationship, not sharing information nor getting advice about unhealthy relationships. After I experienced the acquaintance rape at age fifteen, I surrounded myself with church friends for protection, but I was unable to communicate about sexuality. I repressed this experience telling no one until I dug it out in therapy some twenty years later.

Tolman completes her model with sociocultural and sociopolitical issues over which the adolescent 11-19 year old girl has no power. A healthy society will offer access to educational, religious, community-based, elected, public service, and health-related organizations so that the girl *has access to information and materials to sustain sexual health (as in condoms, contraceptives, and knowledge.)* In this discussion Tolman adds the issue of *access to images of girls' sexuality as normal and acceptable for all girls, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, ableness or*

*sexual orientation*.<sup>47</sup> These two **life wisdom themes** must be provided by the community; elders are responsible for the girl's access. As each of these aspects were considered, it is helpful to note that Aristotle wrote that "the mean is hard to attain, and is grasped by perception, not by reasoning"<sup>48</sup> This is a key point in the construction my interpretative methods. He adds:

for in everything it is no easy task to find the middle, e.g. to find the middle of a circle is not for everyone but for him who knows; so, too, anyone can get angry--that is easy--or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor is it easy; wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble.<sup>49</sup>

Martin's Aristotelian analysis of virtues, often harmfully genderized, provided a framework for analysis of such virtues as girls' **life-wisdom themes** and for analysis of life-wisdom themes evident in Deborah Tolman's research on girls' sexual health as well. I am examining **life-wisdom themes** to make explicit the content of the curriculum that, in my study, the **challenged** girls have learned in order to live wisely and well.

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Aristotle, *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

The *protected* and *supported* girls have learned only some of these *life-wisdom themes*.

**Table 2**

**Golden Mean Analysis of Female Adolescent Health Issues**  
**Describing Adolescent Girls' Living Wisely and Well**

	Tolman's <sup>50</sup> Female Adolescent Health	
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Golden Mean Individual</b>	<b>Excess</b>
Represses sexuality or is asexual	Experience fully sexual feelings, develop a sense of comfort with own sexuality.	Profess to feel what is expected/supposed to feel
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Golden Mean Dating/Romantic Relationships</b>	<b>Excess</b>
Choose only family approved partner	Feels entitled and free to choose a partner, regardless of race, class, gender, ableness or sexual orientation	Engages in sex promiscuously; fears intimacy
Avoids talking to partner about sexual feelings and thoughts	Communicates with partner about sexuality	Has no personal boundaries
Lacks awareness of personal needs	Balances awareness of own needs and feelings with sensitivity and respect for	Lacks sensitivity regarding partner

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<sup>50</sup> Tolman, *Ibid.*

	needs and feelings of partner	
Lacks assertiveness or awareness regarding personal choices	Makes active choices in consensual sexual and romantic contexts	Accepts partner's choices without respect for own needs
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Golden Mean</b> <b>Social Relationships</b>	<b>Excess</b>
Makes or keeps no friends, avoids communication regarding sexuality with parents or siblings	Relates effectively with close friends, peers, older friends, teammates, siblings, parents, teachers, counselors & church members etc. who offer emotional and social support	Self discloses without boundaries
Tolerates abusive sexual & social relationships	Makes safe choices about sexuality and relationships	Exposes self to violent sexual & social relationships
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Golden Mean</b> <b>Sociocultural/Sociopolitical</b>	<b>Excess</b>
Lacks awareness of access to condoms, & contraceptives	Accesses information and materials to sustain sexual health (condoms, contraceptives, knowledge)	Denies need for protection to sustain sexual health
Lacks awareness of information	Accesses information about sexual expression besides sexual intercourse	Aware of only intercourse as sexual expression
Suffers neglect (passive)	Accesses violence-free, safe home & relationships	Suffers abuse (active)

## **Body and Food Heuristics**

Keeping the continuum of activities in mind and expanding on Martin's and Tolman's, as well as Brown's<sup>51</sup> and Pipher's<sup>52</sup> work, body and food issues are also important ***life-wisdom themes*** for girls, for which I think golden mean analysis can be helpful. The mean is a *sense of her body as beautiful, feelings about her body not influenced by society's concept of an ideal body; rather, significant others find the girl attractive and the young woman trusts her body to find the weight it needs to be, so she can move and feel confident*. This healthy view falls between the deficits of spending a lot of time looking at the body in the mirror comparing the body to others, feeling fat, being preoccupied with the body even accepting society's ideal body shape and size, which is currently thinner and more muscular. As a mature adult, I still cope with this deficiency, moving back and forth from the accepting body-self and deprecating body-self. The opposite vice would be to spend a lot of time exercising and dieting to change the body's shape and size, even considering or choosing surgery to "improve" the body in order to change the way the girl looks in the mirror. Another way to express healthy body image is equally based on social norms and the girls own self-concepts; *paying attention to her body and appearance because it is important but*

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<sup>51</sup> Lyn Mikel Brown. *Raising Their Voices The Politics of Girls' Anger*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 80-81.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Pipher. *Reviving Ophelia Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 199.

*only occupying a small part of the day. The girl nourishes her body so it has the strength and energy to achieve physical goals and she is able to assert herself and maintain a healthy body without losing self-esteem.*

This stands between the vice of deficiency that is feeling separated and distant from the body as if it belongs to someone else, hating the body and isolating from others, hating the way the body looks in the mirror. Two women I know intimately, in their earlier life were bulimic, bingeing and purging to maintain the weight they wanted to keep. Becky Thompson in her book *a hunger so wide and so deep a multiracial view of women's eating problems* Thompson explains that "on a concrete level eating problems are logical, creative responses to trauma."<sup>53</sup> Pipher says, "bulimic young women, like their anorexic sisters, are over-socialized to the feminine role."<sup>54</sup> My friends and I were certainly exposed to a sexist environment and oversocialized for a feminine role in our growing up. Twenty years later these two women no longer binge and purge, but they are always on a diet; progress on the health continuum.

The opposite vice is excessively comparing the body to images and the media, often hating the way the body looks in the mirror; which is a result of our media saturated culture. Korean-American, Vickie Nam in

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<sup>53</sup> Becky W. Thompson, *a hunger so wide and so deep a multiracial view of women's eating problems*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>54</sup> Pipher, *Ibid*.

*Yell-Oh Girls!*<sup>55</sup> describes herself as a teenager clipping pictures from magazines in order to discover ways to look so she fit in, the closest thing she kept to a diary.

The middle way is *healthy selves in bodies, weighing perhaps a little more than preferred but enjoying eating and balancing the enjoyment of food with a concern for a healthy body, being realistic and flexible in goals for healthy eating* following the Dietary Guidelines for healthy eating.

The middle way stands between the vice of deficiency that calls for thinking about food a lot, feeling ashamed of eating, afraid of gaining weight, wishing for a decreased appetite and that certain foods weren't so good to eat. The vice of excess would include diet pills, laxatives, vomiting or over exercising to lose or maintain weight; fasting or avoiding eating for long periods in order to lose or maintain weight shapes a desire for feeling strong and in control.

For Anglo American girls, eating disorders are a part of the landscape but unlike Becky Thompson's evidence, Rebecca Carroll states that African-American girls do not suffer from eating disorders. After analyzing fifty interviews with African-American girls ages eleven to twenty Carroll reports:

young black girls have neither the time nor the opportunity to concern themselves with the contemplation of self esteem. . . What makes eating disorders a white issue is, first, the ideal model of

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<sup>55</sup> Vickie Nam. *Yello-Oh Girls!*, (New York: Quill of Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), xxii-xxiii.

beauty is white, and it is the ideal model of beauty that instigates and perpetuates eating disorders. Second, pondering the concept and living the reality of low self-esteem is a luxury of self-involvement that black girls cannot afford. . . White girls have more options by way of their inherent and racially superior resources. In other words, young black girls have neither the time nor the opportunity to concern themselves with the contemplation of self-esteem.<sup>56</sup>

The Anglo ideal model of beauty also contributes to Asian-American girls “feeling invisible while trying to look normal” as described in *Yell-Oh Girls!* a book edited by Vickie Nam.<sup>57</sup>

**Table 3**

**Golden Mean Analysis Describing Adolescent Girls’ Living Wisely and Well Regarding Body and Food Issues**

Deficit	Golden Mean Body & Food Issues <sup>58</sup>	Excess
Deprecates body-self	Accepts body-self	Perfects body-self
Separates from body-self	Attends to body, listens to body	Compares self to images in the media and often finds self lacking

<sup>56</sup> Rebecca Carroll, *Sugar in the Raw Voices of Young Black Girls in America* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997), 141.

<sup>57</sup> Nam, *Ibid.*, xxvi.

<sup>58</sup> Overeaters Anonymous, *Ibid.*

Thinks, feels ashamed and afraid of eating, personal weight & appetite	Manages & attends to healthy body	Over-diets, vomits or over-exercises, fasts to feel strong, often feels out-of-control
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Tolman<sup>59</sup> and Overeaters Anonymous<sup>60</sup> make specific what Martin<sup>61</sup> has made general.

### **Girls Learning to Live**

I began this study by asking: how do diverse girls learn to live today in Oklahoma? How do they come to voice? From whom do they learn, by what means, and from which strategies do they learn? What do these girls need and from whom do they need it in order to learn to live wisely and well? Are their lessons the same as the lessons Dunbar-Ortiz and I learned growing up in the 50s and 60s in Western Oklahoma? These are my questions for this research.

I am motivated to study these issues and questions because of the following cultural indicators for my state. Oklahoma culture receives a grade of D by The Institute for Women's Policy Research on the following key indicators: political participation index, employment and earnings index, economic autonomy index, reproductive rights index, and health and well-being index. Oklahoma women rank 38<sup>th</sup> in the nation and would

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<sup>59</sup> Tolman, *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Overeaters Anonymous, *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Martin, 1992 *Ibid.*

benefit from stronger enforcement of equal opportunity laws; better political representation; adequate and affordable child care; and other policies that would help improve women's political, economic, and social status.<sup>62</sup>

It is important to recognize that fundamentalist Christian religion played a large role in both my and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's learning to live, as it does for girls throughout the state. Dunbar-Ortiz recounts attending the Baptist Church in Piedmont and becoming a member of the Rainbow Girls, an organization not open to the girls in my church. Many of us who grew up in these religions knew well the Bible verses from I Corinthians and I Timothy that tell women to keep silent. These verses were strung together to teach us how to live and guide women as they provided direction for girls as well as the women's lives. We know well the verses that told us how women and girls should act; we internalized the oppression, the otherness. We knew we were supposed to be nurturing, empathic, supportive, and never competitive.

Emphasis on nurturing, empathic and supportive characteristics provide fertile ground for early, unplanned pregnancy, but Wendy Luttrell has conceptualized unplanned pregnancy as a challenge that can be reframed as a learning strategy. Luttrell researched a school program for pregnant teens and found that we inappropriately judge and stigmatize young pregnant girls. She discovered creative ways to educate them

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<sup>62</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research [www.iwpt.org/states/pdf/ok.pdf](http://www.iwpt.org/states/pdf/ok.pdf) (accessed December 2005).

about life, who they are, and who they want to become. When asked to complete the stem sentence “What I know about myself is . . .” one student wrote “. . . having a baby is going to make me a better person.”<sup>63</sup> Another researcher Lyn Mikel Brown, found that anger, which is often times a challenge, can become a learning strategy. During a year of research with two middle schools in two small towns in Maine, she worked with girls in a working-class school and a middle-class school. She found the working-class girls were more comfortable expressing anger than the middle-class girls who bought into the perfect, white, thin, happy, good grades, popular Barbie girl image that leads to eating disorders, and over-pleasing others along with other unhealthy issues. She found that the working-class girls used anger as a learning strategy in a more successful way than the middle-class girls.<sup>64</sup>

I always felt that my family was middle class primarily because my parents both had college degrees and were leaders in their communities, but with six children, we had a working class income. However, as Brown describes middle class girls in her research, I was not comfortable with my feelings, nor was my mother no matter what our class. Like middle class families Brown interviewed, when we expressed angry feelings in my family, my mother often declared, “Oh, you don’t really feel that way.”

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<sup>63</sup> Wendy Luttrell. *Pregnant Bodies, Fertile Minds: Gender, Race, and the Schooling of Pregnant Teens*. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 30.

<sup>64</sup> Lyn Mikel Brown, *Raising the Voices: The Politics of Girls’ Anger* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 40-41.

Although my mother had been the first of her nine brothers and sisters to graduate with a four-year college degree and a life-teaching certificate, she married and kept a traditional household, staying at home to raise her six children until my youngest sister began kindergarten. Then she returned to teaching. Actually, prior to her marriage to my father, she bucked tradition by teaching home economics for three years in a western Oklahoma town some fifty miles away from her parents' home. She quit when he proposed. Following my mother's example, I studied home economics. My parents had given me a sewing machine as a high school graduation gift and during the summer before entering college, I took lessons from Mrs. McKenzie at the Singer Sewing Machine Store in a town ten miles away. I made a black and white, hound's-tooth, wool coat and a white wool dress and entered them in a contest, winning a trip for my mother and me to New York City. With black leather gloves and a black Jackie Kennedy pillbox hat, I was ready for an adventure. It was both my mother's and my first airplane ride and opened a new world for me as we sipped espresso in Greenwich Village and attended the 1964 New York World's Fair.

It has been a major realization during my research that my family, my childhood church, and even my bachelor's degree studies fostered essentialist notions of womanhood and Christianity. In college, I relied on my mother's lessons and extended my "feminine" skills and arts with sewing, nutrition and cooking, child development plus home management

lessons. My life was a reflection of essentialist Christian femininity with “a limit on the variations and possibilities of change.” “Essentialism entails the belief that those characteristics defined as [feminine Christian]. . . essence are shared in common by all [women Christians] . . . at all times”<sup>65</sup> Valerie Walkerdine and Lesley Johnson have argued that “there is nothing “essential” about girlhood; it is always produced and negotiated (by us all, but especially by the girls) in particular historical and political moments.”<sup>66</sup> In the Bible Belt we must recognize the impact of that essentialism has on girls and women, as well as historical and political events, in order to understand the reality of Oklahoma girls’ acculturation.

People engaged in essentialist Christianity interpret literally some of the verses that speak of gender. In his book *When Religion Becomes Evil*, Charles Kimball says, “corrupt religious truth claims always lack the liberating awareness that humans are limited as they search for an articulate religious truth.” Kimball further argues that:

Inquiry into the corruption of a religion must begin with the claims to truth it makes. Invariably, religious truth claims are based on the

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<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, Center for Cultural Studies Journal, 1999 Center for Cultural Studies, University of California Santa Cruz, [http://humwww.ucsc.edu/DivWeb/CultStudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol\\_5/ElizabethGrosz/10/18/2005](http://humwww.ucsc.edu/DivWeb/CultStudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_5/ElizabethGrosz/10/18/2005), (accessed June 2005).

<sup>66</sup> Valerie Walkerdine, “Girlhood Through the Looking Glass.” In M. de Ras and M. Lunenberg (eds.), *Girls, Girlhood and Girls’ Studies in Transition*. (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1993) and Valerie Walkerdine, *Daddy’s Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*. (London: McMillan, 1997) and Leslie Johnson, *The Modern Girl: Girlhood and Growing Up*. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993) in Christine Griffin, “Good Girls, Bad Girls: Anglocentrism and Diversity in the Constitution of Contemporary Girlhood” in Anita Harris (Ed) *All About the Girl, Culture, Power and Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 29-30.

authoritative teachings of ‘inspired’ or sage-like charismatic leaders or on interpretations of sacred texts, often connected to gifted leaders.<sup>67</sup>

In my family learning to live wisely and well meant going to church, and listening to the church leaders. Living wisely and well also meant doing well in school; being nice to my brothers and sisters; learning to sew, cooking and cleaning house; having friends; singing in the school chorus; or excelling at basketball. Managing the family income was a male job. I, along with other Collings girls, had summer jobs as soon as we could drive, in order to manage some money, often to buy clothes or save for college.

Dunbar-Ortiz describes a similar family and small-town culture in Piedmont in the 1950s. One teacher, who lasted only one year in Dunbar-Ortiz’s school system, encouraged her bright mind, imagination, courage, and risk-taking by giving her a sterling silver acorn pendant and writing: “Your mind is an acorn that will grow into a giant oak.”<sup>68</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz describes girls who got pregnant, got abortions, or chose to get married before completing high school. They all grew up expecting that a man would take care of them, making the major life decisions about where to live, work, worship, and play. Is the same true of Oklahoma girls today?

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<sup>67</sup> Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2002), 41.

<sup>68</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz, *Ibid.*, 152.

Latinas are often raised in the Catholic Church, which has its own agenda of essentialist Christian femininity. *Telling To Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*<sup>69</sup> includes a story written by Daisy Cocco De Filippis. She tells about her grandmother Mama Biela who introduced her to her Dominican culture, the people, and the literature. Armed with an umbrella, her wallet, and keys in her pockets, fifty-nine year old Mama Biela and eight-year-old Daisy would set out on most Friday and Saturday evenings to visit not only Mama Biela's friends, old friends of the family, and in particular the last remaining friends of Daisy's mother. As they walked, Mama used the street names to introduce anecdotes, historical events, or literary pieces of the independent Dominican nation. During her time with her grandmother, Daisy gained an understanding of who she was, building confidence, pride, and belief in self. Mama Biela showed her how to get the materials in her imagination and the tools from her resilience and intelligence, tools that would serve Daisy all her life. *Sí, Se Puede! Yes, We Can: Latinas in School* by Angela Ginorio and Michelle Huston<sup>70</sup> is a very different look at Hispanic girls. Daisy had an exceptional education from her grandmother and eventually completed a doctorate of philosophy.

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<sup>69</sup> The Latina Feminist Group, *Telling to Live Latina Feminist Testimonios* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, November 2001). 90-95.

<sup>70</sup> Angela Ginorio and Michelle Huston, *Sí, Se Puede! Yes, We Can* (Washington DC: American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 2001), 1.

Ginorio and Huston report that nearly one in three (30%) of the nation's Latina/o students between the ages of 16 and 24 left school without either a high school diploma or an alternative certificate such as a GED. Only about half of Latina/os overall between the ages of 16 and 24 have a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau: 1998). In Oklahoma, the Hispanic/Latino population is 5.2% of our 3,450,654 population or about 179,434 in 2000.<sup>71</sup> Latina/o students are at greater risk of not finishing school than any other ethno-racial group and tend to leave school at an earlier age than members of any other group. As a result, the graduation rate for Latinas is lower than for girls in any other racial or ethnic group.<sup>72</sup> Despite the prevalence of tracking practices in public schools, Latina/os may not have much knowledge or "cultural capital" with which to navigate and understand the tracking process in high school. According to the US Department of Education in 1998, relative to Asian eighth graders, Hispanics are more likely to respond that they do not know what kind of high school program they intend to enroll in (32 percent). Asian eighth graders are more likely to plan to enroll in a college preparatory program in high school than their Hispanic peers (36 percent to 22 percent). Two values that cut across many distinct Hispanic cultures are the centrality of the family and the importance of religious affiliation, most commonly Catholicism. Unsurprisingly, like Daisy whose Dominican

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<sup>71</sup> [http://www.dataplace.org/area\\_overview/?place=p26.124812](http://www.dataplace.org/area_overview/?place=p26.124812)

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

Grandmother taught her what it meant to be from the island of Dominica, parental and family involvement, especially for low-income Latina/os, boosts educational outcomes.<sup>73</sup>

In Pleasantville, the non-profit Latino Community Development Agency<sup>74</sup> is located in the area of town where the largest numbers of Latinos live. It offers family celebrations for graduating seniors as well as parenting education with child-care that addresses the prevention of child abuse. Understanding the value for family and religious affiliation, this agency offers a wealth of resources to the community including programs on stemming gang violence offered in Spanish.

There is a continuing history of cultural oppression of rural poor, American Indian, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans. I had a glimpse of a different culture when an Air Force base was located in the rural area where my mother's family had homesteaded some sixty years before. The rural culture was only Anglo-and European-American. The Air Force families were racially integrated; they had lived around the world; had a movie theater, swimming pool and golf course. Mrs. Kerry, my seventh grade civics teacher, who moved to our community with her Air Force husband, piled the rural kids, who had never been to the State Capitol, into her pink Cadillac and took us on an overnight field trip to Oklahoma City. A Japanese exchange student,

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Latino Community Development Agency, official web site, <http://www.latinoagencyokc.org/about/mainevents.php>, (accessed June 2005).

whom Mrs. Kerry had taught English while living in Japan, visited our class. Mrs. Kerry opened the world for me and my best friend Anna Lisa who, like Dunbar-Ortiz, did not have an indoor toilet in her family's house when we first met in the seventh grade. Today, indoor plumbing and exposure to the world through the Internet are more available to rural Oklahomans just as they are available for urban girls.

The rural patriarchal system that raised me marginalizes women's abilities, a form of oppression that illustrates the intersection of class and gender as a force. The "ideology of domesticity" and the "culture of romance,"<sup>75</sup> which were certainly a part of growing up in my community, refer to women's responsibility for unpaid work at home and the acquisition of status by way of relationships with men, a boyfriend or husband. Home and family, in this context, become a central concern for working-class females, and our interest in wage labor remain secondary. These are the cultural circumstances American girls face that must be recognized, as I discuss living wisely and well, and are often taken for the meaning of living wisely. If we expose this example of cultural liabilities or my generation's "cultural miseducation" per Martin's definition, perhaps we can prevent passing some of our cultural liabilities to the next generation of girls.

Martin speaks of the need for focus on the "golden mean of concern" avoiding coldness as a deficit or the opposite excess a glut of

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<sup>75</sup> Joe L. Kincheloe, Patrick Slattery and Shirley R. Steinberg. *Contextualizing Teaching* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc, 2000), 363.

over-indulgence that requires women to be keenly perceptive of when concern is too cold or excessively indulgent. In my girlhood culture, as in Dunbar-Ortiz's, if a girl learned to make decisions based on what her father and mother, her boyfriend or her husband thinks, she is making wise choices, indeed, the choices she has seen modeled another example of cultural miseducation. I never knew an independent woman until I was grown. Dunbar-Ortiz, however, had a "brazenly independent"<sup>76</sup> aunt who would visit her family during the summers that Dunbar-Ortiz was a teenager. Aunt Ella drove a VW van she had converted adding a half bed along with a Singer pedal sewing machine and a typewriter. She was a military widow traveling from place to place staying with relatives and in her favorite national parks.<sup>77</sup>

In Dunbar-Ortiz's and my generation, many of us grew up in extended families. Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic girls also grow up in culturally identified communities in Oklahoma, some more nurturing than others. One of my friends in junior high from the Air Force Base was an African American girl whose father was an officer; she was an excellent student. According to Joyce Ladner, race is a much more powerful variable in American society than social class.<sup>78</sup> Ladner states that there are two polarities of extended families found in two African American

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<sup>76</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz, *Ibid.*, 110-111

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Joyce Ladner, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: A Black Woman* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 55.

families described in her book *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman*.<sup>79</sup> In Beth's African American family, as in my own Anglo family, Beth's whole life was so protected and insulated that she was in the process of developing a reticence and naiveté about life that might prevent her from effectively coping with the harsh realities of her community, should it ever become necessary to do so. Ladner also tells the story of Kim,<sup>80</sup> a challenged girl who represents another experience. She was one of many children whose parents despaired and long since stopped trying to offer the protectiveness afforded other children because they knew they were fighting an uphill battle they would probably lose. Other families fall on a continuum at a golden mean between these two extremes, providing supporting families.

Within these realities, a challenge that girls face, which makes living wisely and well difficult, is the struggle to graduate from high school. There were no Latina girls from the Air Force Base at Billings Junior High or Collings High School, but Hispanic American girls are the least likely of all cultures' girls to graduate from high school, and Mexican American girls are the least likely of all Latinas. Low grades or falling behind a grade is a primary reason stated for dropping out.<sup>81</sup> Pregnancy is not the reason that most Hispanic girls drop out of school, as it is for African-American girls

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<sup>79</sup> Ladner, *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>81</sup> Angela Ginorio and Michelle Huston, *!Se, Se Puede! Yes, We Can Latinas in School* (Washington, DC: AAUW Educational Foundation, 2001), 2.

and Anglo-American girls. Hispanic girls drop out first, and then choose to get pregnant.

Poverty and exposure to violence are big challenges for girls of all races. Living in extended families, they are often educated by older children and adults as to the nature and possible consequences of aggressive activity, like fighting, drinking, rape, shooting, and running. According to Ladner's study of young Black women, "Nobody has time for childhood."<sup>82</sup> I do remember from Billings grade school that we had large, extended families who moved to our community when it was time to pick cotton. They were poor and lived in small houses the farmer supplied. Helen was my friend in elementary school who would move, with her family, to our community when it was time to harvest the cotton crops, and she would come to school. Helen's hair hung in two long, beautiful braids. Her older red-haired brother was married to a woman in her teens named Christine. I met all of Helen's extended family when I visited to pull cotton with her. Helen could pull 100 pounds of cotton a day, which I never could. I remember Christine telling us she would answer any questions we had. I was so protected I did not have any questions; Christine challenged me so that I understood I was missing something.

I did not experience Helen's family as a shaming environment. However, the challenges of learning to live wisely and well include shaming environments such as the one Dunbar-Ortiz had to survive<sup>83</sup> as

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<sup>82</sup> Ladner, *Ibid*, 55.

well as the rape I did not feel free to disclose to anyone but God.

Dunbar-Ortiz describes how her Baptist Sunday School teacher shamed her for knowing how to play “barroom shuffleboard.” Dunbar-Ortiz explains, “It took me several years to wonder how the Sunday school teacher knew that shuffleboard was played in bars.”<sup>84</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz was supported in learning how to live when her older brother took her to a Piedmont bar where he had a beer and she played shuffleboard. Her older brother was Roxanne’s hero, he helped her study, introduced vocabulary words and maps as well as discussed current events with her. She was at least ten years younger than he was.

One researcher and journalist who writes about American girlhood is Mary Pipher. She describes psychological challenges her clients faced that made living wisely and well difficult for them. In *Reviving Ophelia*,<sup>85</sup> a popular anecdotal account of girlhood, Pipher describes how girls are exposed to depression, eating disorders, addictions, and suicide attempts, how they exist in a look-obsessed, media-saturated culture. A contributor to depression is escalating levels of sexism and violence, from undervalued intelligence to sexual harassment. *Reviving Ophelia* was so popular that Sara Shandler, a high school girl, edited letters from other

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<sup>83</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz, *ibid.*, 174-175.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Pipher, *Ibid.* 169, 194, 242.

teenage girls to publish *Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write about Their Search for Self*<sup>86</sup>.

### **Learning Strategies Used by Girls**

The stories the girls tell point emphatically at courage, self-assertion and connection. According to Pipher<sup>87</sup> girls' learning strategies vary from having the courage to write and acknowledge all parts of one's self to developing a loving relationship or connection within family to learning self-assertion in order to speak in one's own voice, fighting efforts to limit personal value. Some strategies are less healthy, like using alcohol to deaden anxiety, overeating, getting depressed, or raging.

A learning strategy often used by girls to learn to live with courage and connection is journal writing. Pipher's client Gail needed an emergency plan for those times when she was tempted to burn her arms. Pipher advised her client to pull out a notebook and write, write, write, every painful, angry emotion she was feeling which might deal with any one of the various virtues, adolescent health or body/self issues. She needed to get those emotions out of her body and onto a piece of paper. When the craving to burn her skin did not pass with writing, she would ask one of her parents to hold and comfort her until she could sleep. "Burning

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<sup>86</sup> Sara Shandler, *Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write About Their Search for Self*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999).

<sup>87</sup> Pipher, *Ibid*, 193.

herself” happened less and less as she learned to connect, to talk and write about her problems.<sup>88</sup>

A loving connection with her parents was a key for a challenged girl named Gail. Facing her adversity Pipher helped her recognize that: “adversity built her character but what saved her was her deep awareness of her mother’s love.”<sup>89</sup> A lesson that all girls must learn, according to Pipher, is “they have only themselves to depend on for happiness.”<sup>90</sup> A loving relationship within the family is essential for girls who have been assaulted through rape or incest. They often block out the experience of being sexual, as I did, and then when they want to be emotionally present, they may find it impossible. Sexual touch may trigger a disassociative reaction, which fortunately therapy can change. Pipher states that these girls need someone they trust to confide in and ask for help. The girls need help and support in addressing their challenges such as I have identified as the ***life-wisdom themes***. The girls need help in reflecting on experiences or mistakes.

Development of personal strength is a learning goal according to several authors. Alice Miller would say that strength in adolescence requires an acknowledgment of all parts of the self, not just the socially acceptable ones. Simone de Beauvoir equates strength with remaining

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<sup>88</sup> Pipher, *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

the subject of one's life and resisting the cultural pressure to become the object of male experience. Betty Freidan would call it fighting against the "problem with no name." Toni McNaron calls it "radical subjectivism." Gloria Steinem calls it "healthy rebellion." Carol Gilligan refers to it as "speaking in one's own voice," Mary Pipher calls it a North Star decision, and bell hooks calls it "talking back." Resistance means vigilance in protecting one's own spirit from forces that would break it. Margaret Mead defines strength as valuing all those parts of the self, whether or not they are valued by culture. Pipher encourages the survival of the 10-year-old androgynous self that is competent and connected, emphasizing the importance of developing innate potentialities and fighting efforts to limit value.<sup>91</sup> To accept totally the cultural definitions of femininity and conform to the social pressures is to kill the self. Instead, girls who have opportunities to exhibit courage and to assert themselves, to experience their feelings and to communicate them to friends or parents, these girls will grow and thrive. Once girls understand the effects of the culture on their lives, they can fight back. Once they learn they have conscious choices to make and ultimate responsibility for those choices they can take responsibility for their happiness. "Intelligent resistance keeps the true self alive."<sup>92</sup> Collective political resistance, joining with parents, friends, peers, older friends, teammates, siblings, teachers, and counselors as well as church people who offer emotional and social

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<sup>91</sup> As quoted in Pipher, *Ibid.*, 319-320.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-36.

support can be a strengthening position in the fight with a look-obsessed, media -saturated culture.

Pipher's client Cassie used alcohol to deaden her anxiety so that she could have sex and kill her guilt feelings afterward. Pipher introduced her to a learning strategy: think and write about what kind of men she liked, the qualities, interests, how they would treat her. Cassie asked out one of the three guys who met her description and wrote a little speech to say “no” to sexual advances. She learned to check and recheck her feelings and thoughts, “Is this person meeting my criteria for a good date?”<sup>93</sup> She became more confident socially, but still had a habit of drinking to relax. She went to a support group, and as she grew more independent and took more responsibility for her life with her parents and peers, she became more prudent in her consumption of alcohol. This is a good example of a girl working with both individual feelings but also dating and romantic relationships that Tolman describes. The girl must feel, as Tolman explains, entitled and free to experience her own feelings and communicate them with partners. She must balance awareness of own needs and feelings with sensitivity and respect for the needs and feelings of a partner.

A goal for a compulsive overeater is to learn to respect rather than run from her feelings, she can use exercise as a learning strategy to fight

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

depression, manage stress, and feel better about her body.<sup>94</sup> Pipher taught a compulsive overeater to set limits with others, to work her way through problems and even ask for help. Overeaters Anonymous (OA) and twelve-step groups have a slogan HALT which means do not get too hungry, angry, lonely or tired.<sup>95</sup>

As a learning strategy to fight depression, Monica, another client of Pipher, joined the writing and political clubs at her school. She pushed herself to speak, to assert herself as Martin advises, in class and in the halls. Her courageous behavior was scary because sometimes she was rewarded, other times scorned. She learned to think of boys not as dates, but as friends, as connections. She learned to use humor to imagine and laugh, to diffuse some of her pain about being chubby. Monica was angry because her parents divorced; it changed her whole life. She even hit her mother in anger. She learned to jog to “outrun” her anger or to punch a pillow and write feelings onto paper and then throw the paper away. As her anger waned, she had more energy for her own life. She mourned her past, but then she set some goals for her future. Teachers, aunts, church youth leaders, girl scout leaders, and parents are a few sources that can provide support.

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

## **Sources of Girls' Learning**

Educational historian, Lawrence Cremin<sup>96</sup> has defined “public education” in terms of “configurations of education” that include schools, families, religion, and mass media. Martin has theorized in a similar vein “multiple educational agency.”<sup>97</sup> Here I provide evidence for Cremin and Martin’s theory illustrating how girls learn from many sources. Brumberg’s girls’ diaries describe how girls learned from their teachers, parents, doctors, marketers, conversations with peers, reading materials, and corporate sponsored films.<sup>98</sup> Teachers and counselors at summer camp are other sources, along with Planned Parenthood Clinics and doctors’ offices. Magazines, media, and advertising became a major source of information for girls, especially after World War II. Newspaper advice columnists became a source in the later part of the twentieth century.<sup>99</sup> African American families depend on the community, according to Diana Hayes “African peoples do not know how to exist without religion.”<sup>100</sup> The small tight-knit communities that helped families’ rear children are increasingly extinct. Instead, television is the baby-sitter in many homes.

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<sup>96</sup> Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), xiii-ix.

<sup>97</sup> Jane Roland Martin, *Cultural Miseducation In Search of a Democratic Solution*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 32-44.

<sup>98</sup> Jacobs Brumberg, *Ibid.*, XXV, 31-38.

<sup>99</sup> Jacobs Brumberg, *Ibid*, 166-182.

<sup>100</sup> *African Religious and Philosophy* (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday Anchor Books), 1970, 3 as quoted in Diana L. Hayes, *Hagar's Daughters* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 21.

Television, along with marketing and advertising, shapes girls' understanding of how to live.<sup>101</sup>

Often a negative configuration of education, advertising teaches that buying and consuming products can handle pain. We are told, "Don't worry, spend money" as well as "If you don't buy this, you're not good enough." Ideally, we would offer our children definitions of adulthood besides being old enough to get a job, consume harmful chemicals, have sex, and spend money. We would teach them new ways to relax, enjoy life, and cope with stress. According to Pipher,<sup>102</sup> the junk values of our mass culture socialize girls to expect happiness and regard pain as unusual.

A ***life-wisdom theme*** for me personally, I have treated pain as an anomaly, not an intrinsic, inescapable part of being human. Not acknowledging pain, often repressing the hurt, I have had to learn to deal with grief, honoring myself as I grieve the loss that divorce represented to me. Pipher wisely asks her readers to contrast this view with Buddha's statement: "Life is suffering." Or Thoreau's line: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."<sup>103</sup> Pain is a part of life; in fact, it often shapes character, much like challenges of the girls I interviewed.

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<sup>101</sup>Pipher, *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

Pipher states that our culture splits girls into true and false selves; we need to work toward a culture in which there is a place for every human gift, in which children are safe and protected and women are respected, where men and women can love each other as whole human beings.<sup>104</sup> It is good to lay out lists of “what influences people to be full-hearted, free-spirited and daring-minded.”<sup>105</sup> Otherwise, with puberty, girls face enormous cultural pressure to split into false selves.<sup>106</sup>

### **The Study Question**

Taking today’s writers and their claims about girlhood into consideration as well as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’s autobiography and my own life, my study asks, What does learning to live wisely and well mean to adolescent girls living in Oklahoma? I interviewed young women in their early twenties, asking them to reflect back to the period of time beginning at ages eleven or twelve continuing through their teen years. I wanted to know from whom, how, and what they learned? I was interested not only in girls’ perspectives on living wisely and well; I also wanted to know from which “multiple-educational-agents”<sup>107</sup> they have learned to live. I wanted to know from what curricula Oklahoma girls have learned. How has their knowledge of living wisely and well been transmitted to them? Although menarche and adolescence have

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>107</sup> Martin, 2002 *Ibid.*, 32-61.

imprecise definitions, for the purposes of this study I stipulate girls' adolescence as the phase of life from age twelve,<sup>108</sup> which is the average age of first menstruation in hot countries [the average age is fifteen in cold climates] to the end of the teen years.<sup>109</sup> What were their learning challenges, strategies, struggles, activities, and efforts to learn to live wisely and well?

By "diverse girls," I mean girls of differing race as reflected in Oklahoma. I selected my sample to reflect ethnicity found in Oklahoma. I will not generalize about these ethnic categories of Oklahoma women, only offer a slice of life that may enlarge our understanding, perhaps directing more research, a culturally-sensitive window, not a representative portrait. I have identified the origin of the one Latina and her family, because there is vast difference among Mexican American, Cuban American, Puerto Rican, and other Latin American traditions. Because most of the Latina girls in Oklahoma are of Mexican heritage, I included a young woman who is of Mexican American heritage. I intended to gather insights into Oklahoma girls' understanding of living wisely and well, and I wanted that understanding to reflect cultural sensitivity. By "girls" I meant not only the conventional gender construct, but I was also willing to listen to any transgendered young people identified as "girls" who chose to express "boy" identities or boys who chose to express "girl"

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<sup>108</sup> Jewish Encyclopedia, official web site, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=468&letter=M>, (accessed January 2006).

identities, or a biologically identified girl who wanted to conform to neither “boy” nor “girl” norms.<sup>110</sup> However, I had no access to such a young person in my research. I also sought to include at least one girl who was lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or sexually questioning but none of the volunteers checked this option on the demographics questionnaire, nor brought it up in conversation. One girl did comment about the item, “So many options.”

As the women serving in my sample prepare to be teachers, I have hoped that participating in this research might serve them well. A culturally-sensitive teacher must learn to recognize when a variable such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or disability is playing a significant role in a student’s learning experience.<sup>111</sup> Much of this study’s value may, I hope, reside in its utility and credibility for preparing teachers as well as for parents, aunts and godmothers raising daughters. Organizational leaders in the Girl Scouts and church youth leaders could also use this study to provoke rich discussion.

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<sup>110</sup> If the person is transgendered, an individual who cannot menstruate, then I will use ages 11 to 19.

<sup>111</sup> Steven E. Tozer, Paul C. Violas and Guy Senese, *School and Society Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998), 420.

## Chapter II

### Construction of the Narrative Inquiry

“A life employed in the pursuit of useful knowledge in honourable actions  
and the practice of virtue . . . yields an unspeakable comfort to the soul.”

- - -Cicero<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

This study is a work of feminist theory constructed from narrative inquiry using autobiography and in-depth interviews to explore meanings and consequence of life experience of Oklahoma girls. The work is based on the assumption that girls learn to live from their environment; they learn to live from their families and their friends, their religious institutions, their schools, and from activities beyond institutions. Each name in this work is a pseudonym, even the names of the cities and towns, as well as the people the girls talk about. This chapter describes how I gathered and interpreted narrative material for the inquiry. I focused this constructive process on my central questions: How do girls learn to live; from whom do they learn; by what means do they learn and from which strategies do they learn? What do these girls need and from whom do they need it in order to learn to live wisely and well? A naturalistic, emergent design,<sup>2</sup> the feminist research and theorizing enables the reader to see Oklahoma girls

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *On a Life Well Spent*, (Delray Beach, Florida: Levenger Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, (London: Sage Publications, 1985), 317.

as they develop between the ages of eleven to nineteen. It enables us to see what strategies and activities the girls choose and what consequences occur from their learning experiences.

Theorizing involves hypotheses and explanations based on the available knowledge and experience of the girls, and autobiography examines the researcher's experience with developing insight about their past and current experiences. Theorizing is dependent on a researcher's conjecture and insight into how to interpret and identify the significance of narrative material elicited from human subjects. Scholarly personal narrative, of which autobiography is one form, is designed to make an impact on both writer and reader, on both the individual and community. Its overall goal is "to admit the full range of human experience into formal scholarly writing,"<sup>3</sup> and to stimulate educators' critical self-examination.

### **Qualitative Design: Narrative Inquiry and Autobiography** **as Search for Meaning**

Narrative inquiry is a method of qualitative research that allows the researcher to chronicle experience and story, to experience the researcher through autobiography and the participant through in-depth interview. Clandinin and Connelly state that "narrative inquiry are closely associated with Dewey's theory of experience, specifically with his notions of situation, continuity, and interaction. . . the question to why narrative?

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<sup>3</sup> Deborah H. Holdstein and David Bleich, ed., *Personal Effects: The Social Character of Scholarly Writing*. (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2001) in Robert J. Nash, *Liberating Scholarly Writing The Power of Personal Narrative*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004), 29.

Is, Because experience.”<sup>4</sup> Dewey provides a frame for thinking of experience “beyond the black box,” that is, beyond the notion of experience being irreducible so that one cannot peer into it.”<sup>5</sup> The following terms describe this process:

Personal and social (interaction); past, present and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation): this set of terms creates a metaphorical three-dimensionally narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along a third.<sup>6</sup>

To understand an experience, that is, to do research into an experience, according to Clandinin and Connelly,<sup>7</sup> is to live the inquiry simultaneously in four directions: inward and outward, backward and forward. By inward, they mean toward the internal conditions such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, they mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, they refer to temporality or time, past, present, and future. Based on these aforementioned styles, I asked questions, collected field notes, derived interpretations, and wrote a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward,

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<sup>4</sup> D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 50

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

addressing temporal issues by looking not only to the event but also to its past and its future.

Doing narrative inquiry is a form of living. Living, in its most general sense, is unbounded. The structures, seen and unseen, that do constrain our lives when noticed can always be imagined to be otherwise, to be more open to have alternative possibilities. This very notion is embedded in the idea of retelling stories and reliving lives. [My] narrative intention is to capture as much as possible this openness of experience.<sup>8</sup>

I intended to avoid putting unnatural and constraining boundaries on the inquiry with the young women.

Narrative inquiry provides the framework that allows me to interact with the participants. It is a dynamic process of living and telling stories, and reliving and retelling stories, not only those of participants, but my story as well.<sup>9</sup> According to Clandinin and Connelly “life . . . is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities.”<sup>10</sup> I have included “autobiography because it provides a window on life in organizations and institutions that frame the lives of

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

educational researchers.”<sup>11</sup> Through the window of autobiography the researcher adds another dimension to the understanding of the narratives the participants tell/ Autobiography adds experience prior to their lives, experience of the researcher growing up in Oklahoma in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, author of *Red Dirt, Growing Up Okie*, who tells her story of growing up in Oklahoma during that same time. My goal was to achieve wakefulness<sup>12</sup> regarding time both present, past and, in some of the interviews, the future. In addition, I attempted to achieve wakefulness regarding inward and outward feelings, as well as place, as I interviewed the participants and examined Ortiz's and my own autobiography.

### **Ethics and Permission to Interview Human Subjects**

Research with human subjects demands informed consent as required by the Pleasantville University Institutional Review Board. Ethical guidelines ensure that participants enter the research study on a voluntary basis, understanding the nature of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved. (See Appendix I for the “Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Research Regarding Girls Learning to Live.”) As I invited women in the junior level education class to interview with me, I read from the “Invitation to Participate.” Fifteen girls volunteered to participate and each completed the “Invitation to Participate” document;

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<sup>11</sup> Anna Neumann and Penelope L. Peterson, *Learning from Our Lives Women, Research and Autobiography in Education*, (New York: Teachers college Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Clandinin and Connelly, *Ibid.*, xv.

one did not appear at the appointment and efforts to re-contact her were unsuccessful. As we began each interview the participant read and signed the Informed Consent Form and agreed to the audiotape before the taping began.

### **Gathering Narrative Material: Life Story Tellers**

Young women who had grown up in Oklahoma, who were preparing to be teachers and who were members of as many ethnicities as possible, were invited to participate in interviews. Fifteen women volunteered, one dropped out, and the remaining fourteen completed the interview process. The women were enrolled in a third year, junior level teacher education class; each had declared teaching as her major field of study. The races and ethnicities represented among the women were one African American, one Hispanic, two American Indian, and ten European American. They were all between the ages of nineteen and twenty-one and they all grew up in Oklahoma. Three of the girls grew up in an urban environment, five in a suburb, two in small Oklahoma towns; three girls grew up in mid-sized Oklahoma towns and one on a farm in southern, rural Oklahoma. I decided to use the age range of nineteen to twenty-one because of Pipher's experience with adolescent girls. She said:

... Much of what I know about junior-high-girls I learned from high school girls. Junior-high girls do not confide in me nearly as often or as articulately as do slightly older girls. I hear what happened in junior high a few years later, after "the statute of limitation has run

out.” In junior-high the thoughts, feelings and experiences are too jumbled to be clearly articulated. The trust level for adults is just too low. Girls are in the midst of a hurricane and there’s not much communication with the outside world.<sup>13</sup>

I have considered girls’ class, race, and sexual identities in order to give my understanding of them greater depth, to understand their lived experience more accurately, and to recognize that girlhood reflects power dynamics other than just gender.<sup>14</sup> From the girls’ experiences as participants in this study, perhaps they, as future teachers, will learn to recognize when a variable such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability are playing significant roles in their students’ learning experiences.

### **Gathering the Narrative Material: Deciding Upon the Approach**

In order to determine the best interview approach, I conducted a pilot study. When I piloted the Interview Schedule with six women, I oriented each woman back to the year she was eleven, in her memories of being eleven years old, identifying her friends, where she lived, with whom she lived, where she went to school, and what grade she was in. Pilot A continued with three women with the words “I want to hear your story.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Pipher, *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>14</sup> Julie Bettie, “Women Without Class: Girls, Race & Identity” (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) in Jessica K. Taft (Girl Power Politics: Pop Culture Barriers and Organizational Resistance,” *All About the Girl Culture, Power & Identity* edited by Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2004), 72-73.

<sup>15</sup> I.R., Karpiak, “Breaking through the Weir How Story Transforms Adult Education” *Journal of Philosophy and History of Education*, 55: 2005.

At this same point in the interview the women in Pilot B were asked to complete a pencil and paper exercise called clustering.<sup>16</sup> It began with the stem sentence, “as an adolescent I learned to live.” The young woman was to draw out from the stem sentence in the center of the paper and write as thoughts occurred to her continuing to write until she ran out of thoughts. I then asked her to talk about her writing. I conducted pilot B with Diane, Cathy and Stephanie; I invited each of them to write their thoughts, using the clustering method. None of the women chose to write, they all spoke their responses, which were taped and transcribed in their entirety. In pilot A, Holly, Terri, and Katie were asked to respond orally to the statement, “I want to hear your story.” Both methods worked. All girls orally told their stories in rich detail.

The most effective method became a combination of the two approaches without the pencil and paper, “I want to hear your story, the story of your adolescence and how you learned to live.” If the individual needed more prompting or guidance, I asked them to complete the sentence, “As an adolescent I learned to live . . .” which was the stem sentence for the clustering process. In the rest of the interviews, I used both methods with oral responses only. For example, in my interview with Hayden, I began with “I want to hear your story.” Hayden was very quiet,

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<sup>16</sup> I.E. Karpiak, “Clustering: A Hand Tool in Creative Writing; A Power Tool in Research,” Mid-Western Educational Research Conference, October 2-5, 1996, 1-6; I.E., Karpiak, *Social Workers at midlife: an interpretive study of their patterns of developmental change with implications for continuing professional education*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Minnesota, University Microfilms International, 1990) Doctoral Dissertation.

requiring support and additional probing questioning so I also asked her to complete the stem sentence, “As an adolescent I learned to live. . .”

When Hayden spoke, it was with clarity, which was most apparent when the interview had been transcribed.

### **Gathering the Narrative Material: Interviewing**

Individual appointments were arranged for two-hour interviews held in the campus building where the women attended classes. The narratives were gathered by audio taping my conversations with each woman. Each interview began with an overview of the research project and a brief description of Martin and Tolman’s grounding of my research questions. We read together the “Informed Consent Form for Research Conducted under the Auspices of the Pleasantville University Needles Campus” and the participant signed the form. (See Appendix VI.) During the narrative collection phase, following each interview, I captured field notes and kept a journal. (See Appendix III for the Interview Schedule.)

Morse and Richards describe ways of making narrative:

[c]haracteristics of an unstructured, interactive interview include relatively few prepared questions and may be only grand tour questions. . . [the] researcher listens to and learns from the participant. Unplanned, unanticipated questions may be used; also informal conversation [including questions] probing for clarification.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> J.M. Morse & L. Richards, *Readme first for a User’s Guide to Qualitative Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2002), 91.

After we completed the consent forms, I asked the participant to remember when she was eleven years old, what grade was that, what year was it? What school did you attend? Who was your teacher(s), your best friend(s)? Where did you live? Describe the city, town, or farm where you lived. With whom did you live? Did you have brothers or sisters? How did you get to school? Gradually, the atmosphere of the past time period became present to us and we felt the tone, quality, and circumstances of the time, and place and I said to her, "I want to hear your story, the story of your adolescence." I listened and responded to the participant with probes<sup>18</sup> and clarifying questions. If she needed more guidance, the following stem sentence was used, "As an adolescent I learned to live . . . "In order to identify who taught her to live I ask the participant to, "imagine a circle or a pie," fill it in with who taught you how to live, giving the largest portion to the most influential person or entity who taught you about life.

These techniques of eliciting the girls' narratives permitted them to explore and bring forth a range of their experiences in ways richer than direct questioning alone could do. I guided them to approach the teen years as a generalized whole in order to recapture the girls' private experience and inward awareness. We began by re-experiencing the events (outward awareness) of that time in their general aspect, gradually enabling our perceptions of the past to become more specific and definite.

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<sup>18</sup> Morse & Richards, *Ibid.*

The primary quality I used was listening to their stories, probing or repeating back and asking for more details or clarification. I asked each participant not to edit or interpret her memories, but simply to describe her experiences as she remembered them.

Some of the things that came up were stories about their families and feelings they had about themselves at that time. They described the kind of person they were. They told me about church and school, about friends, and extracurricular activities. If disclosure had become too intimate and the young woman had become aware of overwhelming feelings so much so she was disturbed, I would have used Goddard Health Services for intervention or support. We would have walked together from Collings Hall to Goddard, about three blocks, to request help from a counselor. This was not required.

### **Gathering the Narrative Material: Field Notes**

Following the interview, I captured my experience in field notes including mixtures of words of the participant and my words, notes on what the participant did, notes on what I did with the participant, notes on what was around us, place, feelings, current events, and notes on remembrances of my adolescence. Field notes captured a richer, more complex, and puzzling landscape than memory alone constructed. I captured contradictions and inconsistencies, notes on going-out-the-door disclosures, post-interview thoughts and insights. These notes were written immediately after the interviews including notes about what were

the girls wearing, what they looked like, what the weather was like. Was it during finals or the beginning of the semester? What time of day was it?

After one interview, the field journal reflected:

My heart goes out to this young woman. She is so bright eyed and vulnerable, yet strong, in her recovery from anorexia. Her mother's tears, because of Diane's illness, touched the girl as she lay in her hospital bed; it was then that Diane turned the corner toward recovery. I am very touched by her story; I am stunned.

After another interview, I wrote, "Kate put me at ease; she seemed so comfortable."

### **Gathering the Narrative Material: Journaling**

One of the starting points for narrative inquiry is the researcher's own narrative experience, -- for example, my own autobiography, as rendered in Chapter I. Rubin and Rubin acknowledge that because the "feminist . . . researcher is playing an active role in the interview, she needs to be aware of her own emotions."<sup>19</sup> During the summer prior to conducting the interviews, I recorded on paper memories of my own adolescence between ages eleven and nineteen following Ira Progoff's<sup>20</sup> journaling process. Journal notes recorded inner responses, what I was feeling, doubts, reactions, or remembered stories. They were

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<sup>19</sup> Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing the Art of Hearing Data* second edition. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Ira Progoff. *At a Journal Workshop Writing to Access the Power of the Unconscious and Evoke Creative Ability*, (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1992), 94-95.

observations of inner experiences that slipped back and forth between records of the experience under study and records of me as researcher experiencing the experience. I wrote my own story in an effort to put my story aside during the interviews.

During the actual process of gathering narrative material, but outside the interviews, my journaling continued. I compared the participants' narrative beginnings, capturing in the journal notes or stories of the past that framed present standpoints, moving back and forth from the personal to the social, and situating it all in place. I intended to avoid being a disembodied recorder of someone else's experience.

After Jane's interview, my journal reflects that I was particularly aware of the similarity of our adolescences growing up on a farm, our parents' conservative religion, our extended families and holiday gatherings. After Terri's interview and upon reflection, her resourcefulness was captivating in the face of her family's poverty. Her mother supported three children as a single parent, working as a waitress often with two jobs.

### **Procedures for Interpreting the Narratives**

Transcriptions began the same day as the interview. The audio-taped, informal conversations with fourteen young Oklahoma women enrolled in an education class captured a look back over their lives starting with ages 11 or 12 through the end of their teens, reflecting on the questions, "How have you learned to live?" and "What do you think it

means to live wisely and well?” Intending to capture a snapshot of Oklahoma girls, the demographics were identified, for example, whether their home was rural, urban, or suburban. (See Appendix II.)

The participant interviews were taped, transcribed, and then analyzed by identifying the themes in the fourteen interviews and coding the transcriptions. I took responsibility for transforming the research practice, as Patti Lather recommends, so that the empirical and pedagogical work was less toward positioning myself, the researcher, as a master of truth and justice and more toward creating a space where the young woman directly involved could act and speak on her own behalf.<sup>21</sup>

### **Narrative Inquiry: Exploring Lived Experiences of Girls’ Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

The form of conceptual analysis I have used is one of clarifying meanings through study of clear, contrary, and borderline cases of learning to live wisely and well. The interviews were transcribed and each of the fourteen girls was given a pseudonym: Jill, Cathy, Ellie, Diane, Holly, Terri, Kate, Donna, Stephanie, Jessie, Abby, Sarah, Hayden, and Jane.

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<sup>21</sup> Patti Lather, *Getting Smart Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 163-164.

## **Establishing Trustworthiness**<sup>22</sup>

I have not sought to generalize from this narrative material about all Oklahoma girls; instead it provides a snapshot or slice of reality among one group of people at one place in time. Three more criteria were used to establish trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry: credibility, dependability and confirmability.<sup>23</sup> Credibility was established by offering “assurances of the fit between respondents’ views of their life ways and the inquirer’s reconstruction and representation of the same.”<sup>24</sup> In order to accomplish this assurance, I invited all fourteen participants via an individual email message to meet with the researcher to review the transcripts of each individual’s interview. Half of the fourteen participants attended this review where the seven girls read their own double-spaced transcript and corrected or changed words. There was one instance of misspelling a proper name, a dog’s name. That was the only change in all seven transcriptions. Dependability and confirmability can be established by auditing.<sup>25</sup> Dependability focuses on the process of the inquiry and the inquirer’s responsibility for ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented. Confirmability is concerned with establishing the fact that the narrative and interpretations of an inquiry are not merely

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Schwandt, *A Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* Second Edition. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 258-259.

<sup>23</sup> Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1985), 301.

<sup>24</sup> Schwandt, *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

figments of the inquirer's imagination. A future audit of this inquiry is possible. The files were kept in my home study in a fireproof, locked box. Each participant's file consists of (1) the initial "Invitation to Participate" with the date the interview was scheduled and information required to contact the volunteer, (2) the signed consent form, (3) the audio-tape which will be erased five years after this research is completed and (4) the transcription of the audio-taped interview. Also kept in the locked box is the journal described above. All items are available for examination along with a book of field notes. I recommend that future replication of this study be conducted, in another region of the country, or another state, or in specifically identified Oklahoma cultures.

### **Intuitive identification of Cases: Girls' Learning and Not Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

I transcribed each interview and after each girl's pseudonym was determined, I read the transcription and intuitively identified girls who had learned to live wisely and well; as **clear** cases, they also particularly merited recognition as **challenged** girls. I developed my intuition as I read girls studies literature, lived and let what is inside me speak. It was very apparent to me some of the girls had successfully met significant challenges; they had struggled and resolved personal issues in their lives. The cases that indicated the girls had not learned to live wisely and well, I identified as **contrary** cases. They merited particular recognition as **protected** girls. They had not overcome significant challenges, in fact they

were not doing their own thinking, nor making their own decisions. The rest of the cases, **borderline** cases, merited acknowledgment as **supported** girls. They seemed to be in the process of learning to live wisely and well, but they hadn't been challenged as the **clear** cases, the **challenged** girls, had. I read the cases many times, coding and sorting the transcription by theme; analyzing, confirming, checking and making alterations, for example, I first identified Ellie, Jane, and Jessie as **contrary** cases but upon additional inspection changed them to **borderline**.

### **Understanding What Living Wisely and Well Meant to the Girls**

Martin's use of Aristotle's golden mean provided the framework from which to interpret and understand what "living wisely and well" meant within the girls' autobiographical narratives. The **golden mean** falls in the middle of a continuum with a deficit position and an excessive position located at either end. I stripped Martin's continuum of her conceptual content and filled in her form with the content of the girls' own narratives, thus identifying their own **life-wisdom themes**. I call this derivative technique of interpretation a **golden mean analysis**. Using the content of the girls' own narratives I identified their **life-wisdom themes** and the **golden mean** within each, and then also the excessive positions and deficit positions of that **life-wisdom theme**. I discerned that a clear case included the following eight themes in the girl's life: addresses challenges (e.g., dyslexia, poverty, absent mother); reflects on experiences or

mistakes; recognizes and is willing to take risks, risking from within; prioritizes and claims autonomy; imagines and laughs; pursues interests and passions; learns divergently, seeks new activities and adventures; and finally relates to family and friends. The girls' own narratives determined the ***life-wisdom themes***, through which I have interpreted what living wisely and well has meant to them. I then determined deficit and excessive positions for each theme. The reason I examined ***life-wisdom themes*** is to make explicit that this is the curriculum that the challenged girls have learned in order to live wisely and well. The protected and supported girls learned only some of these ***life-wisdom themes***.

**Table 4**

**Golden Mean Analysis of Eight Life-Wisdom Themes  
Describing Adolescent Girls' Learning to Live Wisely and Well ©**

<b>Deficit, Avoidance or Not enough</b>	<b>Golden Mean Life-Wisdom Themes</b>	<b>Excess, Preoccupation or Overcompensation</b>
Protects & disciplines self	Addresses challenges (e.g., dyslexia, poverty, absent mother)	Despairs and is cynical
Lack of reflection, avoids examination	Reflects on experiences or mistakes learns from experience	Preoccupation with perfection, immobilized, going over and over past "mistakes"
Avoids risk	Recognizes and is	Recklessness

	willing to take risks, risking from within	
Follows rules	Prioritizes, claims autonomy	Lacks organization, follows no rules
Hopeless	Imagines & laughs	Fantasizes
Lacks passion, is sluggish	Pursue interests & passions	Over-attempts and may overachieve
Learns only requirements	Learns divergently, seeks new activities & adventures	Driven by adventure and thrills
Avoids sustained relationships, both family and friendships	Relates to family and friends	Preoccupation with family and friends, cannot be alone

To formulate a concept of learning to live wisely and well, I sorted cases regarding their living based on the girls' narratives, their challenges, or lack of challenges, their multiple education agents, and their strategies to learn to live wisely and well. I didn't choose people with perfect life-wisdom as clear cases, but rather girls who were learning lessons that taught them wisdom.

### **Conceptualizing the Girls' Learning**

Examining the cases, I identified the girls' physical, emotional and intellectual challenges along with their reasons for learning and the occasions for their learning, their strategies, their attitudes, the actions and tasks. I interpreted how they derived wisdom; in addition, I identified from whom they learned, their sources of learning, who helped them learn,

what the girls studied, with whom they sought wisdom. I asked questions: “who volunteered to teach you?” and “how did they teach.”

I identified the clear and contrary cases intuitively, and then the ***life-wisdom themes*** that emerged from the interviews. As I read the transcriptions I highlighted the themes and copied each into a transcript identified as that life-wisdom theme. As I read subsequent interviews, I copied and pasted the themes into the labeled documents. I found that the intuitively identified contrary case’s stories exemplified the excessive or the deficit positions of the golden mean. The details of the contrary case were rarely, if ever, in the mean or middle position on the continuum. Sorting out these facts regarding the girls’ learning experiences, I continued to ask: How do diverse girls learn to live today in Oklahoma? How do they come into voice? “Voice includes analysis of all aspects of the text that provide information about who the narrator is --- who ‘speaks.’ The associations between voice, authority, and the representation of social (and natural) phenomena were a central concern.”<sup>26</sup> To interpret the narrative material, I used Martin’s, Tolman’s and Overeaters Anonymous’ theory applying Aristotle’s doctrine of the “golden mean” as I discussed in Chapter I. Discussion regarding how they learned to live plus implications for teacher education can be found in chapter five.

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<sup>26</sup> Schwandt, *Ibid.*, 277.

## **Thesis**

The girls in my study who gave evidence of having learned to live wisely and well as teenagers were **challenged** and had become independent thinkers. They had developed the habit of examining their own beliefs critically and rationally in light of their concern for their own and others' well being. They had each been befriended by adults in their life, but not by their families, the girls made intelligent, authentic, autonomous, imaginative choices. At age 19, 20, and 21 they respect themselves and have achieved some autonomy in the construction of their own lives and they have overcome significant obstacles. Those girls who avoided struggle and choice, **protected** girls, followed the rules and roles spelled out for them and sought the safety and approval of family and church; at the age of twenty-one, they remain at risk of postponing indefinitely this learning. A variety of adults befriended the **supported** girls in my study, adults who encouraged them to imagine, take risks, make decisions and confront mistakes as they learned to live. Their coming to live wisely and well is much slower than the **challenged** girls, but more certain than that of the **protected** girls. **Challenged** girls are addressed in chapter three, **protected** or contrary cases along with **supported** or borderline girls will be discussed in chapter four.

## **Limitations of the Study**

This cohort was drawn from girls who were enrolled in college preparing to be teachers and the choice of subjects limits the inferences

that can be made from this study. What about the girls who have not attended college but attended trade schools or vocational schools, or religious schools; Christian, Islamic or Jewish? What does learning to live wisely and well mean to them? How do they learn to live wisely and well? This study could be replicated with girls between the ages of 19 and 21 who have dropped out of high school, challenged girls who did not make it, who had no one to befriend them through their struggles. This study could be repeated by interviewing girls from secular homes attending secular schools in states whose cultures are more tolerant of secularism. I cannot generalize but offer only a snapshot of this specific group of fourteen girls in this particular place.

Are the **challenged** and **supported** or **protected** girls engaged in their community? This is a question for further research. How do they take care of their bodies? Do they exercise? Jill spoke of “running around Needles on pretty days.” However, I did not ask these questions and Jill is the only one that addressed exercise. Does place make a difference in a woman’s responses to my inquiry? Have they learned to reflect? Do they understand, as Adrienne Rich suggests, that instant answers often do not lead to wisdom?<sup>27</sup> Do they understand that we must look at all questions and issues from as many sides as we can think of. . . that they must question their assumptions, as well as their teacher’s assumptions,

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<sup>27</sup> Adrienne Rich, “Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet (1984),” *Blood, Bread, and Poetry Selected Prose 1979-1985*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 166-187.

sources, information; that that is a part of learning to learn? One must question one's own assumptions. Skepticism about oneself is essential to continued growth and a balanced perspective.<sup>28</sup> I will cover these issues when I repeat this study with a new population.

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<sup>28</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Toward a Woman-Centered University," *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 145. Quoting Deborah Rosenfelt, ed., *Female Studies*, vol. 7 (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1973) 10: 187.

## **Chapter III**

### **Challenged Girls**

The fact is, that men expect from education, what education cannot give.

A sagacious parent or tutor may strengthen the body and sharpen the instruments by which the child is to gather knowledge; but the honey must be the reward of the individual's own industry. It is almost as absurd to attempt to make a youth wise by the experience of another, as to expect the body to grow strong by the exercise, which is only talked of or seen.

-- Mary Wollstonecraft (1791)<sup>1</sup>

### **Seven Challenged Girls**

The next two chapters present the major findings of the study and specifically address three groups that emerged from the data: challenged, protected and supported girls. This chapter will focus on the challenged, or the clear, cases of learning to live wisely and well. Chapter 4 will focus on protected, the contrary cases, and supported girls, the borderline cases. The girls in my study who gave evidence of having learned to live wisely and well as teenagers had become independent thinkers; they had developed the habit of examining their own beliefs critically and rationally in light of their concern for their own and others' well-being, considering their own character development. When I saw wisdom, there was

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Carol H. Poston Ed. (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1988), 114.

intelligent, authentic, autonomous choice making. At age 19, 20, and 21 they have experienced challenges or struggles, they respect themselves and have achieved some autonomy in the construction of their own lives. The primary trait **challenged** girls had in common with one another was that they had successfully dealt with something with which they had to struggle. They are not merely “good girls” following the rules and roles spelled out for them by patriarchal family and church.

My study of these girls found that their learning to live wisely and well has required risk taking, confronting mistakes, struggling, and learning from mistakes. Such struggling required these girls to set their own priorities and to choose friends and mentors, as well as their learning activities, beyond school and family life. In the late eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote of the necessity of struggles:

It is not possible to give a young person a just view of life; he must have struggled with his own passions before he can estimate the force of the temptation, which betrayed his brother into vice. Those who are entering life, and those who are departing, see the world from such very different points of view, that they can seldom think alike, unless the unfledged reason of the former never attempted a solitary flight . . . we must mix in the throng, and feel as men feel before we can judge of their feelings. If we mean to live in the world to grow wiser and better, and not merely enjoy the good things of life, we must attain a knowledge of others at the same

time that we become acquainted with ourselves – knowledge acquired any other way only hardens the heart and perplexes the understanding . . . I very much doubt whether any knowledge can be attained without labour and sorrow; and those who wish to spare their children both, should not complain, if they are neither wise nor virtuous. They only aimed at making them prudent; and prudence, early in life, is but the cautious craft of ignorant self-love.<sup>2</sup>

### **Clear Cases of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

A brief picture follows of each of the seven **challenged** women who are **clear** cases of learning to live wisely and well beginning with the most **challenged** girl moving toward the **supported** center of the continuum. First biographical information about each girl is presented, followed by discussion of the cases by themes. The following chart represents the themes that emerged from analysis of all fourteen interviews.

**Table 5**

#### **Golden Mean Analysis of Eight Life-Wisdom Themes Describing Adolescent Girls' Learning to Live Wisely and Well ©**

<b>Deficit, Avoidance or Not enough</b>	<b>Golden Mean Life-Wisdom Themes</b>	<b>Excess, Preoccupation or Overcompensation</b>
Paralyzed	Addresses challenges (e.g., dyslexia, poverty, absent mother)	Obsesses, over- challenges, becomes self-destructive

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

Lack of reflection, avoids examination	Reflects on experiences or mistakes learns from experience	Preoccupation with perfection, immobilized, going over and over past “mistakes”
Avoids risk	Recognizes and is willing to take risks, risking from within	Recklessness
Follows rules	Prioritizes, claims autonomy	Lacks organization, follows no rules
Hopeless	Imagines & laughs	Fantasizes
Lacks passion, is sluggish	Pursue interests & passions	Over-attempts and may overachieve
Learns only requirements	Learns divergently, seeks new activities & adventures	Driven by adventure and thrills
Avoids sustained relationships, both family and friendships	Relates to family and friends	Preoccupation with family and friends, cannot be alone

### **Jill, a Clear Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Jill** is an African American, working-class, heterosexual girl whose single mother, a drug addict, died one week after **Jill** turned eighteen during **Jill's** senior year in high school, leaving her to live and struggle on her own. **Jill** became a member of the Baptist Church after her mother's death. Wearing her hair in dreadlocks, **Jill** says, “I’ve had a lot of resources in my life. . . I’ve had a harder family life but at each point in time, I’ve had somebody there that’s helped me tremendously that pushed me on to the

next person that helped me tremendously.” She acknowledges, “It’s just like its almost systematic how someone has helped me in one way or another. I’ve had friends who helped me out, teachers who helped me out, acquaintances, and people hiring me, just, I’ve had a lot of help. Not necessarily from family but from outside sources.” **Jill** accepted and addressed her challenges as well as recognized her needs. “I’m going to say . . . I’m going to have to say that one of the hardest times in my life was when my mom passed. I had a group of friends, we still communicate, we’re still good friends now. I was out of school, off of work.” She acknowledges her own pain, the support of others, and is grateful. “They were there around the clock. When one had to go home, another would be there to make sure I was okay, make sure I had something to eat, make sure I ate, make sure I showered and just you know telling me what’s going on in school and kind of what I was missing, just things of that sort. They really, they took me in.”<sup>3</sup> This is solid evidence of autonomous action by **Jill**; she admits her own dependence as a high school senior. That shows a certain amount of security and proof of both “labour and sorrow.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Diane, a Clear Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Diane** is a Latina, lower-middle-class, heterosexual girl who grew up in a two-parent, Catholic family with an older sister and younger brother

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<sup>3</sup> *Jill interview with Deborah Shinn, February 4, 2005.*

<sup>4</sup> *Wollstonecraft, Ibid.*

in a small suburban town in Oklahoma. She struggled with anorexia in ninth grade after her boyfriend, with whom she was having sex, broke up with her as he left for college. **Diane** describes that time, “ummm I.. just.. I think I fed off my friends and other people and so I had boyfriends all through middle school and then in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I don’t know how old that is, I had a serious boyfriend. It was the first time I’d gotten kissed. I just remember..like..thinking that was my entire life was this boy. And it lasted from the middle of my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year until the end of my freshman year.”

She was **challenged** when:

. . . We broke up it was very devastating. I felt like I didn’t have control of a lot of things. And I couldn’t, didn’t go to my family to talk about it and my sister had already left to college. . . she was studying in Arizona. And so ummm . . . the guy was a lot older than I was and so all of my friends were kind of his friends and they were older. So I kind of hadn’t set, hadn’t made really strong friendships within my own age.

As **Diane** looks back she recognizes her mistake, that of not developing friends her own age. She is aware of her “mistake” in trying to control things. She struggled to recover from anorexia and shared, “that’s when I just discovered my passion for who I was and to find satisfaction in God and not within things that are more human. I studied a lot about that [religion] and so I kind of found myself in that.”<sup>5</sup> **Diane’s** mother also played a big role in her recovery, “. . . I never saw my mom cry ... in front

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<sup>5</sup> *Diane, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 2, 2004.*

of me. So I think from that moment on when she showed me that she's a person and she not just a mom, she has feelings" **Diane** turned the corner toward recovery which took over a year until she was a junior in high school.

**Diane** provides another example of what Wollstonecraft described as learning from "labour and sorrow." **Diane**, in her early twenties already has an awareness of what she did wrong, her "mistakes" and how she survived and learned from her actions. This self-aware skill could give her strength as she enters teaching.

### **Terri, a Clear Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Terri**, a European American, working-class, heterosexual girl whose single mother often worked two jobs as a waitress "just to put food on the table" also learned in her adolescence the prerequisites for living wisely and well. Living in a large city, in a very poor family **Terri** set priorities early, "I knew as a little girl I was going to college." She will be the first of her family to graduate from college when she completes her degree prepared to teach Spanish. **Terri** currently works twenty-seven hours a week plus she takes a full course load at the university. She is married to a friend from high school, a man who "didn't finish eighth grade." When she graduates she plans to teach and support him while he gets a business degree.<sup>6</sup> **Terri** was very young when she made a life decision to go to college; she seems to have focused her life to achieve

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<sup>6</sup> *Terri, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 8, 2004.*

her goals without much help from others, particularly her family which is a very mature characteristic.

**Jill** and **Terri**, as high school seniors, from families with no college graduates imagined that they could go to college and that they could become teachers; both were inspired by teachers. **Jill's** high school AP history teacher and **Terri's** middle school science teacher modeled excellent teaching and encouraged them to take the risk of applying to college. **Jill's** high school teacher helped her write her application. When people ask **Terri** why she was planning to become a teacher, charging that she was so smart why didn't she make more money, **Terri** responded, "it's hard to be the first person to come to college from your family and decide what to do. . . I told several people, my Mom was a waitress; I'm going to be a teacher. Maybe my kids will be doctors or lawyers. You have to build the family up somehow." **Terri** used her imagination to see options and make decisions in her life just as, Maxine Greene explains, "Imagination . . . allows people to think of things as if they could be otherwise; it is the capacity that allows a looking through the windows of the actual towards alternative realities."<sup>7</sup>

### **Donna, a Clear Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

Donna, another **clear** case of living wisely and well, is an American Indian, a member of her father's tribe, Enrolled Wichita. Her mother is a member of the Cheyenne Arapaho tribe. Donna, a working-class,

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<sup>7</sup> Maxine Greene, "Teaching as Possibility: A Light in Dark Times" <http://www.lesley.edu/grounals/jppp/1/jp3ii1.html> , 1.

heterosexual girl, and her younger brother grew up in a rural Oklahoma town, “struggling with poverty and alcoholism” around them. Donna attended the Pentecostal Church for a year in her teenage years; however, she described Powwows as the site of spiritual guidance for her and her family. In the seventh grade, Donna scored high on the ACT and was selected to attend a summer program sponsored by an east coast university. It was a college preparatory program. She attended similar programs for five summers including the last three in an Upward Bound program designed for Native Americans at a university located in the mountains. She described experiencing the Rocky Mountains for the first time, “. . . they would take us up in the mountains, which for me I was like whoa! [laughter] well I grew up in Oklahoma. I thought that was very cool.”

While she acted out with her friends at home, school was always a priority. Donna “got good grades, participated in “Quiz Bowl,” an academic competition, “played softball. . . drank beer . . . and smoked weed.”<sup>8</sup> Learning to live wisely and well doesn’t always mean being the “good girl.” Donna risked as opposed to looking for perfection.

### **Holly, a Clear Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Holly**, a European American, working-class, heterosexual girl, grew up in a large suburb of the metropolitan area, attending the Baptist Church with her divorced mother and two brothers; one older, one younger than

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<sup>8</sup> Donna, interview with Deborah Shinn, February 24, 2005.

she. Her father lives in the same town. She excelled at school, learning divergent lessons outside the classroom through pom squad and publishing the yearbook. **Holly** set a priority of becoming a math teacher after she was inspired by her eighth grade math teacher, who taught songs so students could “memorize math formulas.” Demonstrating risk taking and learning lessons from cheerleading, she quit when she became “afraid of being dropped.” When she was on the pyramid she would “get scared.”<sup>9</sup> **Holly** was strong enough to recognize and honor her fears, fears that are not at the same intensity level as perhaps **Jill**’s situation losing her mother but **Holly** learned courage and decision-making, as well as priority setting through cheerleading and participating in extracurricular activities. As I compare these girls’ lives **Holly** certainly experienced fear just as **Jill** did when she lost her mother, but her fear isn’t valued socially as much as the fear and anxiety of losing a mother.

### **Stephanie, a Clear Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Stephanie** is a European American, working-class, heterosexual girl who grew up in the metropolitan area in a two parent, Methodist family. Though she is an only child, **Stephanie** is in touch with a large extended family. In elementary school, she struggled with dyslexia. “[my] fifth grade teacher wrote on my report that I would never be anything but a C student but I graduated with a four-point in high school.”<sup>10</sup> She learned to take

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<sup>9</sup> *Holly, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 9, 2004.*

<sup>10</sup> *Stephanie, interview with Deborah Shinn, March 11, 2005.*

risks. “My great grandmother said ‘can’t never did anything’ to try and get me to realize that I can do whatever I want.” As a six-year-old, **Stephanie** heard a cello played in a library music program. She knew immediately that she wanted to play a cello. “I had been labeled and put in a special class but music was something that kind of came with the ‘understand’ label. Music was the one thing that made everything click. Music helped me understand how my mind worked so I could make sense of everything else.”<sup>11</sup> **Stephanie** had studied piano, choir, and dance but the cello changed and focused her life. **Stephanie** was only six when she heard the cello performance, a seminal experience. **Stephanie**, like **Terri**, made what became life directing decisions very early in her life.

Her parents got “a tutor at the church, a lady who tutored kids that had learning differences . . . that helped me out a lot.” **Stephanie** struggled with her “difference” but “by middle school I was to the point that I could do most of it [schoolwork] on my own . . . it was still on my report that I was a [learning] lab student but I never went after 5<sup>th</sup> grade. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade it was there for me if I wanted help but I never went.”<sup>12</sup> **Stephanie** was raised in a protected, disciplined environment; her parents gave her lots of help. For example, her mother was the parent band sponsor, going on many of the trips. **Stephanie** made friends playing the cello in school. Using music as a tool to deal with her dyslexia, **Stephanie** took risks

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

auditioning for the Harrison Academy Orchestra and for the Summer Arts Institute Programs where she met two other cello players. All three musicians attend the Pleasantville University, taking lessons from a university cello teacher and remaining friends.

**Stephanie** has never dated; she says, “Music is my life.”<sup>13</sup> She is learning to live wisely and well, developing skills for autonomous choice-making in friends, careers, studies, each risk-taking experience in large part through music. **Stephanie’s** parents provided resources, but they allowed her to struggle with dyslexia and with music they didn’t do her “labour” for her. She auditioned for chairs in several orchestra programs as my epigraph by Wollstonecraft recognizes. So it was with all the **clear** or **challenged** cases I interviewed.

### **Kate, a Clear Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Kate**, a lower middle class, European-American girl from a suburb of a metropolitan area, is my sixth **clear** case of learning to live wisely and well. As a sophomore in high school, **Kate** was **challenged**, experiencing a trial when her mother left the family abruptly, divorcing **Kate’s** father and moving out of state. **Kate** did not know where her mother was for ten months; abandoned, she is the youngest of four children. **Kate’s** father did not provide much guidance after her mother left; however, because of sports and music, she felt like she had “ten mothers instead of just one.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Kate interview with Deborah Shinn, December 7, 2004.*

She continued to take risks and learn divergently, playing catcher and third base in softball; she also played the clarinet and competed for first chair in band. She made a four-point grade average and served as president of a club. She was a member of an organization whose members were all presidents of the various clubs in her high school.

**Kate** “accepted Christ and Christianity”<sup>15</sup> in her senior year in high school and plans to be a missionary after graduation. She set priorities in her competitions, playing sports and experiencing autonomy in her travels; she traveled with softball teammates’ families by car, visiting Kansas, Florida, Georgia, Texas, New Mexico, Arkansas, and Missouri. **Kate** spent a summer in Bolivia and Vancouver, British Columbia, playing softball, as well as half of one summer in Colorado and the other half in France serving as a missionary. Her focus during high school was on friends, softball, band, and her studies. When her family changed so much, she had friends’ families who looked out for her after school “until nine or so in the evening.”<sup>16</sup> She definitely was not protected and disciplined by her father. She says, “Looking back on it . . . I took it like he didn’t care to know where I was and thankfully I had very good influences with my friends.”<sup>17</sup> I do not know if **Kate** has questioned her beliefs as a Christian in order to accept them as her own, but she was drawn to her

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

church not because of her father and mother but by friends. It seems that **Kate** found a new family after she joined a church; “I spent this last summer in Bolivia [a Christian School] teaching music and sports. It was an incredible, it was incredible like everything that I’m good at I was able to use there.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Analysis using Martin’s Heuristics**

After I identified the *life-wisdom themes* and the seven **clear** cases of learning to live wisely and well, I analyzed them using the heuristics from Martin and Tolman. I will discuss the **clear** cases beginning with courage, then self assertion, loyalty, care, concern, and connection plus nurturance. Next, I will describe how each of the seven girls gives evidence of Tolman’s healthy adolescent development and finally I compare them to Overeater’s Anonymous’ guides to healthy body and self.

### **Clear Cases of Learning Courage**

As a freshman cheerleader **Holly** was a ‘mount,’ the one who went to the top of the pyramid. She had cheered for a long time but as competition increased, her frustration level caused so much personal tension that she took a courageous step and quit cheering. She tried out for pom squad but she did not make it, “which was horrible.”<sup>19</sup> **Holly** would not accept defeat. She went out for the basketball team but broke her

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Holly, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 9, 2004.*

wrist over the Christmas holiday, which sidelined her for the rest of the season. Struggling, asking what to do next, **Holly** and a friend, who also had not made the Pom Squad at the first of the year, signed up for the yearbook staff. There, she was successful using old and newfound skills to sell “Senior Salutes”<sup>20</sup> for the yearbook. She and her partner contacted parents of the seniors to sell space in the yearbook to publish a picture, a poem, or a letter honoring their graduating senior. “I loved doing it,”<sup>21</sup> **Holly** said. It took a process of courageously risking, accepting defeat, continuing to look for options, and reasserting to find an extracurricular activity that fit. The yearbook staff traveled to Los Angeles her junior year and San Francisco her senior year to attend conferences designed to improve their publishing skills. **Holly** used her imagination, recognized a wide variety of interests, identified her priorities and opportunities, and exercised courage to learn divergently.

A **clear** case of learning courage, **Jill** lived on her own and supported herself after her mother died. She and one of her three sisters are the only ones of the four attending college; **Jill** is studying to become a teacher, her sister a nurse. **Terri** is courageous in a similar way; she is the only person in her family to go to college. She said, “My mother had no clue how to help me apply for college or financial aid.” **Terri** did all the research. She has worked to support herself and will be graduating in only three-and-a-half years. Additionally, she married a high school friend

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

and bought a house within the last three years, exemplifying in several instances a willingness to take risks, identify priorities, and imagine possibilities in addition to being courageous.

**Donna**, also the first in her family to graduate from college, plans to teach American History at a residential Indian School in an Oklahoma town where many of her father's family live. **Stephanie's** courage is exemplified in her tenacity at overcoming dyslexia. Through music, she said:

Reading fell into place. . . although I was still signed up for learning lab I never went after fifth grade. . . you have to do it and you can't always worry about what everybody else thinks and you can't make everybody happy. You're always going to disappoint at least one person.<sup>22</sup>

**Kate** was courageous when her mother left the family. She continued with school, sports, music, clubs, and friends, making good grades and traveling extensively with families of the softball team's players, meeting her needs through alternative families. In college, **Kate** made a significant decision; recognizing a priority, she chose music over sports to focus her career.

### **Clear Cases of Learning Self-Assertion**

Martin writes that self-assertion is a necessary trait for today's girls who are learning to live wisely and well. Jill supported herself from the

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<sup>22</sup> *Stephanie, interview with Deborah Shinn, March 11, 2005.*

time she was sixteen. She bought her own car, paid the insurance, and did her homework in order to graduate from high school. She says:

I worked at Babies R Us for a while, almost 2 years . . . and then my senior year, after I turned 18; I quit Babies R Us and worked at Victoria's Secret. I would have to say [grew up] independently and that has so many implications for me. I'm not just speaking financially or economically independent. Independent for myself, I learned to live. I'm not saying I'm 80 and on my death bed, I'm still revising. I still have a lot to learn and I'm still trying to find my way but I've learned to be myself [to assert herself] and that's so cliché but there is so much power behind those words."<sup>23</sup>

**Jill** exemplifies the golden mean of each of the *life-wisdom themes*. She addresses challenges, reflects on experiences, she takes risks, she set priorities, used her imagination and laughs, she pursues passions, learns divergently, and relates to family and friends. She says:

A lot of time and unfortunately with young girls you find yourself, you're always compromising who you are because you're wanting to make, to please somebody, please family, please friends, a crush, or you're just not really able to be yourself and that's a shame. . . "<sup>24</sup>

She goes on to say:

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<sup>23</sup> *Jill interview with Deborah Shinn, February 4, 2005.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

We have too many people conforming and I realize conformity is necessary but at what cost? You don't want to hide who you are to please someone. And that's a lot easier said than done but it's important, it's very important. A prime example is my locks. They're a part of me. At times, it can be hard because of where we're located."<sup>25</sup>

**Jill** asserted herself repeatedly; she used imagination, identified her interests and priorities, and in that she learned to live; her advanced understandings will serve her well as she looks to future teaching.

In contrast **Kate** described herself as an eleven-year-old girl:

who thought learning to live would be trying to adjust, trying to please the people around her, and trying to please her peers and even more than that, her teachers. . . just trying to please the people around her, like not anything more than that."<sup>26</sup>

Both **Jill** and **Kate** "accepted Christianity" in their senior year in high school and testified that Christianity is a joyful support for them in their current life. **Jill** and **Kate**, as well as **Holly** and **Diane** have strong religious beliefs that they described as serving them well.

**Holly**, as a junior living away at college, drives sixty miles each Sunday to go home to attend church and have lunch with her mother and grandmother. Eleven of the fourteen women described attending church,

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Kate, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 7, 2004.*

Christianity and religion as important to their understanding of living wisely and well. **Kate** said:

. . . once I became a Christian and once I did believe in Christ then everything--all that--was just underneath. It gave me personal satisfaction, real success, purpose, drive, everything. So the final satisfaction that I was looking for in all my extra hard work [was found in Christianity].<sup>27</sup>

Her extra hard work was as a musician playing the clarinet, as a catcher and 3<sup>rd</sup> base player in softball, and academically as a four-point student and president of a club. Describing her interest and intention with Christianity, **Kate** says, “. . . I’m planning on being a missionary after I graduate.” I wonder if **Kate** is at risk of blind allegiance to the church; she seems to quiet the questions in her life with the declaration that she will become a missionary. As I turn to the next topic, loyalty, **Kate** shows some evidence that she falls on the deficit side of loyalty; that of blind allegiance, instead of falling clearly in the golden mean of loyalty to herself. The **clear, supported, protected** continuum is just that, a continuum. **Kate** falls further along the **clear** sections of the continuum nearer the **supported** girls because of the question of loyalty to herself. Further illustrating the continuum, it is also true that **Ellie** and **Jessie**, two of the **supported** girls, would fall in the **protected** category expect for one major autonomous decision that they each made.

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<sup>27</sup> *Kate, Ibid.*

### **Clear Cases of Learning Loyalty**

Loyalty is another characteristic Martin promotes for a person who is learning to live. **Jill** explains, “My mother is my heart,” she told of lessons she learned from her mother . . . “things that my mother did both good and bad.” **Jill** is loyal to the memory of her mother; she is loyal to her church and to herself.

. . . I wouldn't say I've been Christian all my life. I've quote unquote grown up Christian but I wasn't baptized until I was 18. I went to church on and off from when I was 11 but never regularly. Of course, that doesn't define a Christian but I was never, I was never real in the faith. It was something I did. I got serious about it after my mom passed. My church home has been the major factor in that. . . just a lot more role models there. . . It strengthened me in a positive way, in a very positive light. I'm still young in the faith. I'm not seasoned, but I'm learning and I'm growing. It's a major part of my life. . . definitely joyful.<sup>28</sup>

**Jill** does not seem to be at risk of losing herself in the church nor losing herself as she experiences her mother's death; she has many relationships; she built social capital. In fact, she describes five friends, boys and girls, who were with her “around the clock” when her mother died and with whom she “still keeps in touch” three years later “even

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

though some of us have moved away.”<sup>29</sup> **Jill’s** character is an example of the middle state; she chose loyalty, not blind allegiance nor betrayal.

### **Clear Cases of Learning Care**

Martin advises that “care, concern and connection”<sup>30</sup> are three Cs necessary for teachers. Her advice is applicable to both boys and girls; care can be demonstrated in teaching relationships with family or friends or in sexual relationships. Girls are more likely to learn care as an excess, as indulgence requiring a reminder to care for herself as much as she cares for others.

**Terri** describes a time in her life when she both cared and was cared for. She moved from her home in an urban area to a suburb nearby. She hated having to move. She said that after she moved:

When I was 14 I started hanging out..ummm..<sup>31</sup> with the bad kids of Miner. They didn’t go to school. My husband didn’t go to school past 8<sup>th</sup> grade and none of his siblings graduated. But they were real accepting and real loving. My family wasn’t real loving. So I clung to their family. And they were into drugs and alcohol. . . [My mother] took really good care of us; she just didn’t provide a whole lot of warmth. So I always went to other people for that, other

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Jane Roland Martin, *The Schoolhome Rethinking Schools for Changing Families* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1992), 107.

<sup>31</sup> .. before and after the word.. indicates hesitation.

people's parents. And my mom hated that, hated it so much. But it's what I needed. . .<sup>32</sup>

The mom **Terri** adopted was very loving, holding her when **Terri** would cry because she had made a B or C on daily school work. **Terri** said her own mom would just laugh at her distress but her adopted mom would sympathize. **Terri's** friendship with her adopted family in Miner continued throughout high school and when **Terri** went off to college, but her relationship with her best friend "just turned into a romance."<sup>33</sup> She said we:

. . . sat around and listened to music. We didn't go out hardly at all. We drank a lot and smoked a lot of weed. But most of the time we just . . . he and I would sit up for hours and just talk about stupid things. He wrote stupid poems and read them. But . . . it was just somewhere to go besides my house.<sup>34</sup>

**Terri** also describes a teacher who was caring and for whom she cared. She went back to study with him in a college field experience because: ". . . I had learned so much from him in his class. He was my eighth grade science teacher; he always talked to me like I was an adult and like I was an actual person instead of just some person passing through."<sup>35</sup> This teacher

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<sup>32</sup> *Terri, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 8, 2004.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

talked to her about life and he expected great things from her. She intends to model after him. "I want to instill values of learning and let them [my students] . . . know that I care."<sup>36</sup>

### **Clear Cases of Learning Concern**

Concern is the ability to empathize without taking on the problem versus looking the other way or simply expressing sympathy. **Donna**, when she was in the Upward Bound Program, took:

. . . a Sign Language Class as our foreign language and that was really cool . . . because being a Native American you consider your culture different from White American Culture and this is like a whole different culture in itself, too. For some people it was kind of a stretch like I'd see them making fun of the teacher and the TA because they were both deaf. But I didn't really like that but I never really said anything. But I always made sure not to, because I didn't think it was funny. . . They're deaf, they're just different. . . I though it was very interesting that they kind of, like, have their own culture. They don't consider being deaf like a disability they just consider it a different culture and I thought it was really cool.<sup>37</sup>

**Donna** recognized and was willing to take a risk, disagreeing with the other students about how they treated the teacher and teaching

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Donna, interview with Deborah Shinn, February 24, 2005.*

assistant; she empathized with them in their difference although she did not verbalize it at that time.

### **Clear Cases of Learning Connection**

**Stephanie** illustrates finding connection when she describes her music friends from middle and high school. She says:

I remember in high school one of my New Year's resolutions was to learn something from every stand partner I had. Every stand partner, so it's whoever you are sitting next to [in orchestra] then every section leader who's in charge of bowings and everything, kind of keeping us all in line, and every conductor that I had that year. Senior High Orchestra, All State and Oklahoma Youth Orchestra at the Harrison Academy. . . so I did all of these and Quartz Mountain. At Quartz Mountain you had two different conductors and four different stand partners so that was really, I think, kind of a really important decision that year that I was going to learn something from everybody. And there was a lot, I was happier, I felt more engaged. They were kind of all my role models.<sup>38</sup>

**Stephanie** describes learning connection from every musician she came in contact with and three of them are currently here at Pleasantville University studying with the same university teacher. Many of her high school music friends were in honors classes with her and had been friends

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<sup>38</sup> *Stephanie, interview with Deborah Shinn, March 11, 2005.*

throughout her school career. **Donna** also describes connections with people in the Upward Bound program:

You know we had a lot of fun just crazy, sneaking off and smoking cigarettes. One time me and my roommate, I think it was our second summer there. Whenever we first showed up we heard that there was this concert that was going to be on the campus and we were like, 'we're going to do it.' And then they told us we couldn't go but we'd already gotten tickets. . . so we went anyway. We like snuck off for one weekend and we were out there in the sun for like five hours and we came back for dinner trying to act like, I don't know what we were thinking, like we were going to play it off or something. But right after dinner they called us up to the office and 'we told you not to go' and all this stuff. And I thought they were going to send me home or call my parents but the guy that was the head of it, Larry, said since you two are such good students we're just not going to do anything. I was like 'Oh, My God.' Because I really thought I was going home, but yeah, Larry was the director of it. Larry Wallace. Actually he works here at Pleasantville now.<sup>39</sup>

**Donna** formed a connection not only with her roommate but also with the director of the program:

Having him [Larry Wallace] around [at Pleasantville University] I guess I have to be more accountable. He always asks me, 'are you

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<sup>39</sup> Donna, interview with Deborah Shinn, February 24, 2005.

doing okay, are you having any trouble. If you ever have trouble just let me know and I can find someone to help you . . .<sup>40</sup>

**Diane**, another **clear** case of learning to live wisely and well, describes a connection she has with her mom and with her youth minister at the Catholic church:

. . . his name was George Cain, I remember my junior year he was new on staff and he just had this vision of finding your identity in Christ. Not necessarily like teaching just teaching the Catholic religion but to find the religion to serve your faith not your faith you know, the other way around. And so he helped me a lot. I remember having a lot of different conversations not necessarily again, I wasn't really very open with people like I am now. I just say it how it is and then I was more just like introverted like I would say 'if someone was struggling with this' . . . even though I'm sure he knew.<sup>41</sup>

**Diane** describes how he guided her and how she would mention things to her mom who was usually very quiet. But sometimes her mom would respond; **Diane** thought she was very wise. As **Diane** remembered being in the hospital with anorexia she said:

I just remember right now one of the conversations we had [with her mom] and it was pretty heated. I was really sick then and I was

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Diane, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 2, 2004.*

in and out of..just..going to a psychologist and in and out of the hospital. I just remember that I was lying in bed and she wanted me to drink some juice or something. I don't know I was.. just.. remember that she never even then, I mean if I was a mother I would want to grab my daughter and just show more emotion, she never did. So she never really broke from that. And then I remember at that time like that was the first time she ever cried in front of me, ever in my whole life. And I mean she, her parents passed away and she had a brother that died and I never saw my mom cry . . . in front of me. So I think from that moment on she showed me that she's a person, and she's not just a mom, she has feelings too.<sup>42</sup>

**Diane** reflected on her choice not to eat, which she saw as a mistake, to try to control everything in her life after her boyfriend broke up with her and left for college. It took medical help and an intimate relationship with her mom and her youth minister to break the anorexia.

**Holly** describes her connections with her family and with her friends from middle school who are still friends here at Pleasantville University:

I still have pretty much the same friends. . . We've been friends since middle school. Well, my middle school broke up and went to all three high schools. So that was kind of hard. We became really

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

close that 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. So those that went to other high schools it was harder to stay in touch with them, but people from my high school we've, I've grown up with pretty much the same friends ever since elementary school. I have those few good friends that I've grown up with my whole life. They are even here at college.<sup>43</sup>

**Holly** talks specifically about her connection with her family:

I love my family. My mom is a very good role model, I've always looked up to her; she's a great person and my brothers, I love both my brothers. My older one is three years older and the other is three years younger. And we're pretty close. My older one is very smart. And I look up to him. And my younger one. . . he calls me his second mom. Yeah, I always look out for him. . . This is his first year here. So I love having him here. Yeah, we hang out a lot; we'll go to lunch occasionally.<sup>44</sup>

**Holly** uses imagination, humor and laughter when she described her family. "He's [her brother] really athletic; I'll always see him over at the University gym. We'll play basketball together sometimes but I usually get kicked out when he wants to play games with the boys. [laughter] Time for me to go."<sup>45</sup> She is loyal too, "but we hang out. I help him on his

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<sup>43</sup> *Holly, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 9, 2004.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

homework sometimes. I take him to classes . . . when he doesn't want to walk. . .so it's fun. I love her [mom], too. My family is great.<sup>46</sup>

### **Clear Cases of Learning Nurturance**

Finally Martin recognizes nurturance as a trait necessary for learning to live. I have placed nurturance in the middle ground with separation or neglect as a deficit and smothering as excess. All seven **clear** cases experienced nurturing, but in different ways and amounts. Three of the **clear** cases, **Holly**, **Donna** and **Terri** are the persons providing the nurturance in at least one of their current relationships. **Holly** nurturers her brother; she drives him to class and shows him where he can play basketball on campus; he is a freshman, she is a senior. **Donna** has a nurturing relationship with her brother; they are currently sharing an apartment and expenses following an unsuccessful freshman year at a Kansas university. Finally, **Terri** nurturers her husband and expects to support him after she finishes her teaching degree while he returns to school for a college degree.

**Kate** experienced nurturance from her friends, band, and softball teammates' parents, but she experienced neglect from her mother and father, the deficit end of the continuum. This is a good example of how each girl did not always fall into the median of the criteria, how life lived wisely and well is not perfect. **Kate's** mother divorced her father when **Kate** was a sophomore in high school, and her mother left. **Kate**, the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

youngest of four children, did not know where her mother was for ten months. **Kate** relates that her parents' divorce:

was a very, very great influence on me . . . from the outside you couldn't really tell that anything had happened. Just like anyone else, because she [mom] was always at the sports functions and all the music stuff . . . but all of a sudden she just wasn't there any more. . . I guess all the parents knew about it even though I didn't know they knew. Of course, stuff like that spreads. But the way I dealt with it was by ignoring it."<sup>47</sup>

**Kate** didn't get the nurturing she needed at home but she turned to her friends and their families. "[I] worked even harder at everything I did; I stayed after practicing, I stayed after music rehearsing, and . . . I guess again [laughter] . . . it was positive in some aspects because I had a good resume when I got out of high school."<sup>48</sup>

**Kate's** dad was not nurturing:

At home, the thing that changed the most was when my mom left. I didn't really have any parental influences, I guess. I never had a curfew or eating style. My dad didn't cook very much. [laughter] That's okay; I don't [cook] either, still. But it wasn't as healthy after she left."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Kate, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 7, 2004.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

She overcame it on her own by turning to her friends, “and I wasn’t at home as much; I spent more time at my friend’s house than I did at my house.”<sup>50</sup>

**Kate** called herself “a bad kid.”<sup>51</sup> Her dad came home at 5 o’clock every day but he didn’t provide any boundaries, a curfew, or food for dinner, so she didn’t come home until later. She said:

I think he responded with being actually permissive in my life style, by not giving me any kind of boundaries. Like he never knew where I was or anything. At the time, I liked it of course because I was a teenager, and I had freedom. But looking back on it, I took it bad.”<sup>52</sup>

She didn’t think he cared. When her family fell apart **Kate** turned to her friends and one specific boy’s family, which were very good influences. She said, “I never really got into anything that would hurt my future. But I took it not as him trusting me but as him not really caring as much.”<sup>53</sup>

**Jill** had nurturance from her teachers, not in excess but enough to guide her in her advanced placement (AP) classes and to guide the writing of a successful college application essay. When her mother died, she moved in with “an older woman who had a family and I just kind of slept on

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

her couch until I graduated and then I came here in the fall.” **Jill** describes the nurturance:

I’ve had a lot of help from. . . a particular teacher in high school. I had her all three (sic) years, from my freshman to my senior year. I guess she saw something in me. I guess I was quiet when I shouldn’t have been so quiet or wore the same pair of jeans two days in a row. She saw something, something struck her and I, and she kind of took me under her wing. At first maybe it was just me coming into her class to eat lunch. Asking me how my day was and it grew eventually to her having me over to her house, babysitting her children. She was paying me more than what she owed me. She knew I needed money. . . tutoring me. I mean I had her for several AP classes, AP European History, AP US History, for after school, making sure I knew what was going on. She helped me fill out my application for here, proofread essays and just so many things like that, and I was pretty successful over those four years and the things that she did for me grew.<sup>54</sup>

I don’t think it is an accident that **Jill** is now preparing to be a history teacher. Susan Laird describes **Jill’s** teacher’s behavior as befriending, to encourage “girls’ and young women’s growing capacities and responsibility for learning to love themselves and others, including the

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<sup>54</sup> *Jill, interview with Deborah Shinn, February 4, 2005.*

non-human natural world, to survive and thrive despite their troubles.”<sup>55</sup>

Befriending is a way of exercising concern for girls’ safety without overprotecting them.

### **Analysis using Tolman’s Heuristics**

Tolman’s model of female adolescent health identifies four aspects of female adolescent health: individual, dating and romantic relationships, social relationships and sociocultural/sociopolitical influences. Here I will discuss the **clear** cases of learning to live wisely and well using Deborah Tolman’s model of a healthy adolescent girl.

### **Learning to be Comfortable with Sexual Self**

While Tolman discusses many aspects of an adolescent girl’s healthy development, her focus is on healthy sexuality. The key, according to Tolman, is to feel one’s own sexual feelings and develop a sense of comfort with one’s own sexuality. Examples of the seven **clear** cases experiencing sexuality issues follow.

Both **Kate** and **Stephanie** have focused their lives on their music to the exclusion of sexual relationships with a person of the opposite sex or same sex, although they seem comfortable with their sexuality and have friends of both sexes. **Jill**, **Donna** and **Terri**, with the limited information I have, seem to be comfortable with their heterosexual selves. **Jill** lives with her boyfriend; **Donna** lived with her boyfriend until she kicked him out when he wanted to sell marijuana out of their apartment. Having a sexual

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<sup>55</sup> Susan Laird, “Toward Gender-Sensitive Education: Befriending Girls and Young Women” Oxford Round Table Women’s Rights and Gender Equity Lincoln College, Oxford University (U.K.) March 28 – April 2, 2004, 20.

relationship doesn't seem to trump other goals in her life, a sign **Donna** has healthy boundaries. **Terri** married a high school friend and plans to put him through college after she graduates and gets a teaching job.

**Diane** related the most dramatic sexual life experiences of the fourteen girls regarding comfort with her sexual self. She began dating a boy who was a junior in high school when she was in eighth grade. **Diane** felt entitled and free to choose a partner regardless of race, class, gender, ableness or sexual orientation, as Tolman describes, but she describes her boyfriend and her experience with the model her parents provided: "My parents always respected each other. I've never seen them disrespect each other. So they were good with their own, they were a good married couple."<sup>56</sup>

Upon reflection, **Diane** says:

. . . I think, like, they sometimes, they were too afraid or maybe didn't know how to initiate anything or ask. You know, probe into a child's life when you need to. So, I just, I think I fed off my friends and other people and so I had boyfriends all through middle school and then in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I don't know how old that is, I had a serious boyfriend."<sup>57</sup>

**Diane** describes her boyfriend who was three years older than she:

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<sup>56</sup> *Diane, Interview with Deborah Shinn, December 2, 2004.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

It was the first time I'd gotten kissed. I just remember, like, thinking that was my entire life was this boy. And it lasted from the middle of my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year until the end of my freshman year. And so when we broke up it was very devastating."<sup>58</sup>

She didn't have friends her age but had been friends with his friends; when he left his friends went off to college, too. Reflecting back, **Diane** says,

I felt like I didn't have control of a lot of things. And I couldn't, didn't go to my family to talk about it and my sister had already left to college. So . . . hadn't made really strong friendships within my own age. . . So I never experimented with drugs, but it was always a more control issue with me so I controlled my eating habits and school.<sup>59</sup>

A good student, **Diane** made:

straight A's. . . I (had) shared so much with that person I felt like he knew me so well, more than anybody else and then, like, he didn't, he didn't love me for who I was. And it wasn't enough for him. So. . . I think that was the catalyst through my high school. I just felt really inadequate in all areas of my life. I felt like I could never be good enough.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

**Diane** describes her parents who were “good at praising, but not necessarily talking about issues” She remembered:

if I didn't feel like eating dinner my mom wouldn't make me. . . I never dated really seriously after that [her boyfriend broke up with her and left for college]. Until I was a senior in high school. And through that time, I dated around. Like physically, I never kissed anybody after that. I just never . . . never opened up to anybody. And my friends either. I kind of just closed, I was just more like put on a face everyday. . . my eating habits had gotten really really bad my junior year.<sup>61</sup>

**Diane** was in and out of the hospital for anorexia during her sophomore year:

From the middle of my sophomore year towards the end was the process of getting better. And that getting better took a lot longer than what I actually was . . . I think that I just with my boyfriend, I had shown him so much of myself, like, inside and physically I felt, you know, for the longest time I felt it was more of just how I viewed myself, like the image that I had of . . . 'cause when I looked in the mirror I didn't see what other people saw. I, you know, I felt it was almost, like, you just look in the mirror and you just know you're not good enough. So, it doesn't even matter; before you get to the mirror you know what you are going to see. So . . . I had sex not

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

even six months after we had dated. And I had never even kissed anybody or anything before then, but then it was . . . it took us, like, I don't know, like, four months or so to even kiss at all to initiate the first kiss. He was a lot older than I was. . . <sup>62</sup>

I asked her how she avoided pregnancy:

I actually went by myself to a health clinic and he waited outside in the car. I just can't believe I don't know, like, just the person I am now, I don't know if I would have the guts to do that. Like, I did care about consequences, evidently I did, because I didn't want to get pregnant. But I don't even know . . . and we never not, I mean we always used condoms and . . . <sup>63</sup>

**Diane** meets the golden mean of learning to access information and contraceptives but she had very little help from her family, her friends, or her school in coping with the sexual relationship she had with her boyfriend. In addition, she did not have a group of friends her own age to talk to, leaving her bereft when she broke up with her boyfriend and he, along with his friends, left for college.

Her body image was negative, falling in the deficit column. **Diane** describes the mirror and not seeing how thin she was. One can see from her statements above that anorexia is a very complex issue involving much more than self-image. It involved lack of support from her family

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

and not having developed friendships her own age. **Diane** talks about her struggle and self awareness:

The main thing that I think I've learned through the whole time is that you have to be consistent with yourself and content with yourself and able to serve other people. So in order, like, you just have to hold a strong identity of who you are all the time and always be challenging yourself to know who you are all the time because, definitely, thinking back, this is the first time I've ever thought about it since then.

Through reflection upon her experience, or "mistake," **Diane** reveals how much she learned because of her struggle:

. . . thinking back to the kind of girl I was then and the girl that I am now and then the woman that I'll be later, like, I know that I will always be continually changing and it's always a process. So, I think it's just good to not be stagnant and I hate it when people just stay in their point of view all the time. Like, I may view that exact same situation differently, you know, twenty years from now.

This provides evidence that Diane has become an independent thinker that she can imagine various situations, and analyze them intelligently.

She said:

Then I don't think I even knew what I was doing. Even when people, even when my doctors would ask me questions I would just answer to answer because I wanted to get out. . .and it definitely

was something no one else can change and make you feel a certain way. You have to find that within yourself. So once, I found that it was so easy to start just eating. It was, like, one day I just started eating. . . you have to go from liquids to solids because physically your body is, like, deteriorating. . . But I don't know if anyone could have prevented that or aided. I mean there is so many. You could always say, well maybe, if you hadn't dated at that age and not gone through that experience, maybe you wouldn't have gone through that..ummmm..such rapid feeling of being alone, feeling inadequate.

**Diane** is aware that her challenge was serious and that she has overcome the obstacle. She has achieved some autonomy in the construction of her own life.

. . . I think at some point in my life I was going to feel inadequate. Somewhere. . . And I would never take it back by any means, I mean I'm so much stronger now and I know so much more.<sup>64</sup>

**Diane's** words speak volumes. Even though the experience, the challenge, was painful and dangerous, she is stronger now for having coped with anorexia. **Diane** was able to communicate with her partner about sexuality, although she often had trouble talking to her boyfriend about sexual feelings and thoughts, a deficit on the golden mean of a girls' individual adolescent health. **Diane** falls in the deficit column of the

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

golden mean analysis regarding awareness of feeling entitled to her own needs, and feelings in a relationship balanced by sensitivity to and respect for needs and feelings of partner with the exception that she went to the clinic (while her boyfriend waited in the car) to get contraception. In this instance she was aware of her personal needs, and assertive and aware of personal choices. Her experience would have been far less traumatic if she had had close friendships with peers, older friends, parents, siblings, teachers, counselors, or church members who could have offered emotional and social support.

Tolman describes the golden mean of accessing information and material to sustain sexual health, which **Diane** had when she said “. . . he always had condoms and I don’t know. We never, I don’t know.” It’s still hard for **Diane** to talk about contraception, illustrating how sensitive and difficult this communication can be.

### **Learning to Feel Entitled and Free to Choose Dating/Romantic Relationships**

Tolman discusses dating and romantic relationships, a girl should be free to choose. All of the **clear** cases of learning to live wisely and well communicated freedom and comfort to choose dating and romantic partners. However, **Kate** and **Stephanie’s** lives were filled with music with no sexual relationships. **Kate** said, “You can count all of my dates on one hand.” And **Stephanie**, said, “I’ve never had a boyfriend.” **Jill**, **Diane**, **Terri**, and **Donna** had chosen sexual relationships. **Jill** was in

relationship with a sexual partner; **Diane** did not mention a current relationship. **Terri** married her high school friend: “We got together my freshman year in college. We had been best friends forever and then we just. . . it just turned into a romance.” About a year before the interview **Donna** broke up with her partner she had been with for almost five years; she felt entitled and able to make an active choice with her romantic and sexual partner, another “golden mean” in Tolman’s model.

### **Learning to Develop Social Relationships**

Relationships with close friends, peers, older friends, teammates, siblings, parents, teachers, counselors, and church members who offer emotional and social support was evidenced by all fourteen girls. I have described **Jill’s** experience with close friends when her mother died and with the teacher who befriended her. **Diane** expressed a lack of close friends her own age when she was in high school that left her with nowhere to turn when her boyfriend broke up with her and left for college. **Terri** described:

[when I] was 11 I had a best friend whose mom was amazing and my brother’s dad was a jerk. He used to lock us out of the house so he could smoke weed with his friends. So, I’d walk to her house, it was a mile away. I’d walk there and hang out and they were going to let me move in. Because my step dad decided he wanted to come back. But he never did. But they were just, even when the kids weren’t there, when the kids were in California, they would let

me come and just hang out . . . adults like that have always talked to me like I was an adult. And so I guess I've always understood better than other kids my age. Always. I always understood the world a little bit better and had an adult mind. They used to tell me I was way too mature for my age.<sup>65</sup>

**Donna** describes 6<sup>th</sup> grade in her small western Oklahoma town as:

When I really started making friends with other people basically all through grade school, I was a really shy kid, and I never really had a lot of friends, maybe one or two close friends and that was it. But in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I started making more friends, started getting more involved in . . . sports and things like that.. different extra curricular activities. Basically one girl, Sarah, she was very outgoing so that's kind of, and I, kind of, came out of my shell, I guess.<sup>66</sup>

**Donna** also describes making friends at college after she broke up with her boyfriend.

At first I drank a lot, and then I just got used to it and school started and I got more involved with AISA (American Indian Student Association). . . Yes, just totally a different group of friends than what I had. You know people who are actually going to school.

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<sup>65</sup> Terri, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 8, 2004.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

Yeah, 'cause when he was around I didn't have that many friends, I don't really know why.<sup>67</sup>

**Stephanie** describes her friends and then her Mom as her best friend, someone with whom she:

. . . always talked about things we'd see at school. We talked about it that every choice has consequences, what you do with those consequences. And I always wanted to make my Mom proud and happy. I didn't want to make her mad or upset. When I would do something wrong when I was little, I was more upset that she was upset than that I had actually done something wrong. So, I have a hard time relating to kids that don't think that way or they don't, you know, realize that we should do well for authority figures, that's not so much about punishment. . . almost all my friends were in music.

Again, **Stephanie** said "my life is music." She describes:

the orchestra bunch is a really close bunch, we stick together. It was fun 'cause we always went to the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute all three years. . . Three of us were cellists; two of us have known each other since middle school. We did honors workshops together, and we were at All State together and Quartz Mountain every summer, and then we came here. . . The unique thing about orchestra is that a lot of the orchestra people are generally the honors students and they took all honors classes and that was . . .

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<sup>67</sup> Donna, interview with Deborah Shinn, February 24, 2005.

Yeah, there was a group of us that took every class together for two years. We were in all the honors classes together and we were in orchestra together and so we got to spend all day every day together. . . we all had the same background too.

**Stephanie** describes their backgrounds:

we were from church backgrounds, parents that were still married. There weren't any separate homes. We all kind of the same socioeconomic background, you know, Caucasian, upper class. I always was friends with those that were older. Like when I was a freshman I had really good friends that were seniors and juniors; so they would graduate. It was hard, you know, your friends, and they get to go on.<sup>68</sup>

**Kate**, who sometimes uses 3<sup>rd</sup> person to describe herself, talked about making friends at age 11:

[she was]. . . very much a tomboy, she still is now. I think that (**Kate** at 11) was a girl would have thought learning to live would be trying to adjust, trying to please the people around her, and trying to please her peers and even more than that her teachers. [She was] just trying to please the people around her, like, not anything more than that. Music wasn't that important to me until I decided it to be my major. Actually in junior high it was, like, the social clique that I fit into best. Sports was the thing that I liked

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*

doing the most, I just liked the people in band more. There was one specific guy that there is no relationship there or anything, but I would go over to his house and just hang out there until 8 or 9 in the evening. I just really got along with his family really well.<sup>69</sup>

The interviews did not cover the sociocultural/sociopolitical issues that Tolman includes in her model of female adolescent health with two exceptions. **Diane** discussed access to contraceptives and knowledge as described above. **Donna** described having access to contraceptives and knowledge when she was 17 and dating a person who was four years older than she was. As **Donna** tells it, her mother said:

‘Are you having sex with him?’ And I said, ‘yes,’ and she was, like, ‘Well, do you want to get on birth control?’ And I said, ‘well, yeah, probably,’ and she said ‘well, okay. I’ll take you to the clinic.’ Which I thought was, at the time, I thought hey, that’s cool. But you know, now I think about it and say, Thanks, Thanks mom. But she had had my sister when she was, she had gotten pregnant with my sister when she was 17 so, I think she was kind of, she’s going to do it anyway, so you know better be safe than be sorry.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Kate, interview with Deborah Shinn, December 7, 2004.

<sup>70</sup> Donna, *Ibid.*

### **Access to a Violence Free, Safe Home**

The last aspect of Tolman's model is access to a violence-free, safe home and relationships. **Donna** talked about violence between her parents in her home. Her mom worked 45 minutes away from their home in a town where many of her mom's relatives lived. Her Dad worked the night shift at the local carpet factory in their hometown so he was the parent who was home and free, most often. **Donna** describes her dad "helping us get to school on time."<sup>71</sup> She describes her mom:

I always thought my mom was kind of mean. 'Cause she, I don't know she was kind of mean. I don't know how to explain that, but her and my dad a lot of times wouldn't get along. Maybe it was from stress, but a lot of times there would be alcohol involved. . . there was only a couple of times when they actually physically got into a fight. That was always scary. I was always mad at my mom because it seemed to me that she was the one starting the fight. . . a lot of times 'cause she had family that lived in the town where she worked she would just stay overnight there or stay, like, on a Friday night where you knew she was just out partying. And my Dad would be home and he would be angry because he felt like, I guess maybe kind of abandoned. But you know he would stay at the house and he would drink, too, but he'd just sit around and talk to us. . . They still fight . . . I mean when they were good together they

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

are being nice to each other and everything's fine but they do fight a lot, still. So, it's kind of, yeah, I'll go home and visit them and they'll fight and I'll be, like, I just want to go home.<sup>72</sup>

**Donna** uses the word “home” to explain two different locations.

Perhaps she is describing “home” as a safe place where people don't fight.

### **Analysis Using Overeater's Anonymous Issues**

The golden mean for body image is the belief that for any given “I,” body is beautiful; feelings about body are not influenced by society's concept of an ideal body. She knows that the significant others in her life will always find her attractive; she will find the weight she needs to be so she can move and feel confident of and in her body. The excess position is someone who spends a lot of time exercising and dieting to change body shape and size. Perhaps the person experiencing excess has considered changing or has changed body shape and size through surgery to “improve” her body. The person in the excess position wishes she could change the way she looks in the mirror. The deficit end of the continuum spends a lot of time looking and comparing her body to others, knowing in her heart that she would be more attractive if she were thinner or more muscular, yet not bothering to exercise or take care of herself.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, (Rio Rancho, NM: Overeaters Anonymous, Inc, 1995).*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Learning About Body Image Based on Social Norms and Self-Concept**

The golden mean for a body image that is equally based on social norms and one's own self-concept is described, for any given "I" as:

She pays attention to her body and her appearance because it is important to her, but it only occupies a small part of her day. She nourishes her body so it has the strength and energy to achieve her physical goals, she is able to assert herself and maintain a healthy body without losing her self esteem. A deficit position is when she feels separated and distanced from her body as if it belongs to someone else. Girls in the deficit position would say, "I hate my body and I often isolate myself from others; I don't see anything positive or even neutral about my body shape and size. I don't believe others when they tell me I look okay; I hate the way I look in the mirror." An excessive position is comparing self to images found in the media and finding it lacking plus hating the way she looks in the mirror.<sup>74</sup>

Most of **challenged** girls fell into the golden mean for food and body image issues; **Diane** was the only exception. However, that will not be true for the **supported** girls.

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<sup>74</sup> Overeater's Anonymous, *Ibid.*

## Chapter IV

### ***Protected Girls and Supported Girls***

. . . seek out criticism, recognize that the most affirming thing anyone can do for you is demand that you push yourself further, show you the range of what you can do. -- Adrienne Rich<sup>1</sup>

### ***Protected and Supported Cases of Learning to Live Wisely and Well***

The previous chapter identified the challenged group or clear cases of learning to live wisely and well. In this chapter, I will address the protected or contrary cases and the supported or borderline cases. My study found girls on the borderline of living wisely and well, who were very individual; however, generally, they had not been ***challenged*** nor had they taken risks as the ***clear*** cases had to take in order to survive and thrive. The ***supported*** girls grew up in more sheltered, disciplined environments not engaging in struggles like the clear cases caused by the death of a mother, a mother absent because of divorce, poverty, or the suffering caused by anorexia. The ***clear – supported – protected*** cases are on a continuum with some of the ***supported*** cases closer to the end of the continuum labeled ***clear*** and others closer to the end of the continuum labeled ***protected***. I will present them in the order nearest the ***clear*** cases moving toward the ***protected*** end of the continuum.

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<sup>1</sup>Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, "Claiming an Education," New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979.,239.

There was only one **protected** case. I came to understand that those girls who avoided risk, struggle, and choice by seeking the safety and protection of family and church and obsessively seeking perfection were, at the age of twenty-one, at risk of postponing indefinitely this learning. The girl in my study who gave the least evidence of having learned to live wisely and well was a classic “good girl” who had not felt the urgency to question church and family defined rules and roles, to take risks, to confront mistakes and to struggle in pursuit of practical wisdom. She was instead still dependent on given rules and roles, school, church and parents. I am not saying that a girl who follows the rules never learns to live wisely and well; however, a girl who avoids the challenges of life may not ever learn to live wisely and well.

A generic analysis<sup>2</sup> in education was my guide to define clear or **challenged**, contrary or **protected**, and borderline or **supported** cases of young women stories they told about learning to live wisely and well. The fourteen women interviewed at Pleasantville University are preparing to be teachers. A **clear** case of learning to live wisely and well, as I have defined it, is based on a review of literature and my own intuition. A **clear** case demonstrated risk taking, confronting mistakes, struggling, and learning from mistakes. Such struggling mandated that these girls set

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<sup>2</sup> Conversation with Susan Laird, Ph.D., April 2006 and Jonas F. Soltis, An Introduction to the Analysis of Educational Concepts, (Reading Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1968).

their own priorities and choose friends and mentors as well as their learning activities beyond school and family life.

I defined a contrary or **protected** case of living wisely and well as the opposite of the **challenged** cases: the girl avoids risk, seeks perfection, has few priorities or lets her parents and friends set her priorities so that she has little autonomy. The contrary cases of living wisely and well focus only on their family; she dates or marries the family-approved man and is **protected** from struggles or danger. They are “good girls,” learning all the lessons of church and school, but never venturing out on their own, seeking lessons. **Cathy** told me the story of her girlhood that reflects the contrary case of learning to live wisely and well. I will discuss **Cathy’s** case here. See Golden Mean Analysis Eight Life-Wisdom Themes Describing Adolescent Girls’ Learning to Live Wisely and Well, Appendix V.

### **Cathy, a Contrary Case of Learning to Live to Live Wisely and Well**

**Cathy** is a white, heterosexual girl who grew up in an Oklahoma town with a population of approximately 47,000. She has a two-parent family and an older brother who are members of the Baptist Church.

**Cathy** was the “good girl” who decided to:

Live opposite of my brother because I watched him get in trouble, so I wouldn’t do the same things. I always knew if he was going to do it, I shouldn’t do it. I learned from him a lot. . . he called me the ‘golden child, it’s like she never gets in trouble’. . .[I] learned to live

dependent on my family, which I think is another thing that draws from learning to please my parents.<sup>3</sup>

**Cathy** followed her parents as role models and learned to live with good morals. She lacked imagination beyond what her parent's wanted.

That was something that I obviously learned from my parents and going to church. . . I learned to perform well in school and I also put being involved in high school because that was something my parents wanted.<sup>4</sup>

**Cathy** was active in softball; her father was the coach, and her mother had a job that allowed her to attend all the games. Her parents and her youth minister at church were her primary teachers regarding learning to live. She said:

I was always involved at the church, going, doing church camps in the summer, as a camper, and now I go back to them and work as a counselor every summer. I always did the honor society thing, making good grades, student council, that kind of thing.<sup>5</sup>

I call this case contrary because **Cathy** turned only to her family and church for guidance, not to friends, nor teachers. In my analysis, **Cathy** has not developed autonomy. She also has second thoughts about “rebellious” or thinking for herself.

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<sup>3</sup> Cathy, *interview by the author*, December 2, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

She said that one of her biggest challenges:

[was] a lot of my friends, almost all of my friends except a few, of course, the ones from youth group, but the ones from the youth group went to smaller schools around my town. I went to a 6A high school; it's really big. The girls that I hung out with from my high school, like, I would stay home almost every weekend 'cause I didn't want to go out and drink and I didn't like the party scene at all. This was one of my biggest struggles; I think was not being involved in the school in that sense because that was a big part of high school in my town. I would stay home on weekends. I think that's one of the reasons I got so close to my parents was because I just didn't go out and I would just stay home and be bored, but now that I look back, I'm glad I chose to do it that way. I had boyfriends but not good ones, they lasted two months at a time but we'd go watch movies or whatever, nothing serious.<sup>6</sup>

**Cathy** looks back, at age 21, and wonders, "if it would make me think differently about stuff if I'd rebelled more. . . what kind of kid would I be now. You know, like, I'm trying to, like I don't think I would have liked it. 'Cause I'm really good friends with my parents, and I think that would have kind of drawn me away from them."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

**Cathy** spoke of being assertive when she played softball; she was kicked out of the game once for yelling at the umpire. “If it’s something I had a passion for and somebody is like disrespecting what I really love and I’m going to be like ‘no’ that’s when I get real vocal about stuff.”<sup>8</sup> She is also assertive with her current boyfriend, “I grew up in a really. . . I’m still spoiled. My boyfriend is, like, ‘you want me to buy you this, to buy you this, you’re spoiled.’ I’m, like, well, my parents did that. Anything I ever needed, I could just go to them. . .”<sup>9</sup> She expects to be engaged in the next six months. **Cathy** avoids risk, seeks perfection, and all of her priorities ally with her parent’s priorities. She has been *protected* and never questioned or ventured far from family and church to learn or consider learning other lessons. **Cathy** is a “good girl” much as I was growing up in the ‘60s in Western Oklahoma in a fundamentalist Christian church.

I have questions regarding **Cathy**. Is she mentally alert and watchful? Does she doubt what she knows in order to learn something new? There is, as I will discuss in Chapter Five, a rational approach to improving one’s soul, character, virtue and morality. Does **Cathy** test her moral beliefs or does she just accept her parents’ and her church’s beliefs? Is justice important to **Cathy**? Is compassion a value she holds? Does **Cathy** take responsibility for herself? Is she purchasing economic

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

security in her relationship with her boyfriend or is she avoiding asking herself difficult questions? The issue for **Cathy** is not that she is a member of a fundamentalist religion but that she is not developing autonomy, learning to do her own thinking, making her own decisions.

### **Challenged and Protected Girls, a Comparison**

Let us compare the **challenged** and the **protected** girls. Why should a girl not be a “good girl”? Fourteen young women who had grown up in Oklahoma told me stories of their adolescent years. **Jill** and **Diane** told their stories of thriving and finding guidance and comfort in fundamentalist (essentialist) Christianity. However, they do discriminate among the teachings to find their own faith without swallowing completely all the teachings of the church leaders. **Jill** and **Diane** struggled as they learned to live in the face of unpredicted troubles. They developed a habit of examining their own beliefs critically and rationally in light of their concern for their own and others’ well-being.

**Diane**, a Catholic, Latina girl grew up in a suburb of the metro and in her sophomore year she was diagnosed with anorexia. She said, “. . . I remember [my youth minister] my junior year he was new on staff and he had this vision of finding your identity in Christ, not necessarily just teaching the Catholic religion but to find the religion to serve your faith not your faith to serve the religion. He helped me a lot.”<sup>10</sup>

**Jill** also found comfort and guidance in a fundamentalist church and its teachings. **Jill** is an African American woman who grew up in an

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<sup>10</sup> Diane, *Ibid.*

urban area. Her mother, her only parent who had been a drug addict for a long time, died of cancer one week after she turned eighteen. She had three older sisters but she lived with friends until she graduated from high school. **Jill** describes herself as “Christian.” She says:

Unfortunately in our society and where we live that’s the thing that you are. You’re black, you’re white, and you are Christian. It’s the thing to be. And a lot of times not a lot of stock goes into it. Oh, everybody’s a Christian, that’s where my mom is, that’s where my father is, that’s what I am. . . I wasn’t baptized until I was eighteen. . . I went to church on and off from when I was eleven but never regularly. . . I was never real in the faith. It was something I did. I got serious about it after my mom passed. My church home has been the major factor in that, just a lot more role models there. It’s a major part of my life . . . definitely joyful . . . but at the same time it’s a job.<sup>11</sup>

When compared to **challenged** cases **Jill** and **Diane**, I found **Cathy** to be a **protected** case. She is a European American woman who grew up in a two-parent family with a brother three years older; they were members of a Baptist Church in a mid-sized Oklahoma town, population 47,000. Essentialist Christian churches teach a patriarchal theism, values, and essentialist understandings of gender through a literal interpretation of the Bible. **Cathy** accepted all she was taught without question; she remains dependent on her parents today.

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<sup>11</sup> Jill, *Ibid.*

**Cathy** never rebelled, she never acted out; she watched her brother get in trouble, and she never took risks. She seems to expect to go from being dependent on her parents to being dependent on her boyfriend. Does she expect, as Adrienne Rich described, to “receive” anything she needs? **Cathy’s** parents led her to essentialist Christian femininity, essentialist Christianity. My sense is she does not question she follows blindly. **Cathy** seems intelligent, but my sense is she does not doubt what she knows in order to learn something new. I do not think **Cathy** has thought about justice. Perhaps she has considered compassion; her faith would stress it. Perhaps she is purchasing economic security in her relationships. Perhaps she expects a career of meaningful work but I do not think she has an understanding of supporting herself instead she expects to be married soon and that her boyfriend will “buy her things.”

Two of the **challenged (clear)** cases, **Jill** and **Diane** sought guidance for decisions as they faced major issues in their lives. They made autonomous decisions, they became independent thinkers, and they developed a habit of examining their own beliefs critically and rationally in light of their concern for their own and others’ well-being. They faced the essentialist lesson to follow all the church’s advice, yet they did their own searching, their own questioning. **Jill** told me about learning lessons from her mother, lessons in which she learned to discriminate:

I learned from things that my mother did both good and bad. Right now, I’m thinking bad. I’m thankful for, because I didn’t have to

necessarily do it. Because me seeing that was enough for me not to do that. So, that has caused me to live a lot wiser while trying to live well. Just the whole drug thing, it's horrible, it's..you don't want to have to live through that. And me seeing that and living it in the sense of second hand, I won't do that. I won't put anybody else that I love through that because I've learned. You know dope stuff. It's a killer. It's a killer and it's a problem. And it's a serious problem. Nothing good comes of it.<sup>12</sup>

We had the following conversation.

Deborah. It's been a big lesson.

**Jill.** A very big lesson. I know. Whether it's good or bad.

Obviously I don't do dope, I don't smoke weed, I don't smoke but moreover because of that I don't smoke cigarettes and I don't drink. I'm 21 and I don't drink. I don't and I'm not saying people who smoke it's bad or who do drink but for me it's not, I can't do it.

D. It's not something you're going to choose?

J. It's not something I'm going to choose and it's not the way I'm going to go. It's not helpful to me and you know it's not. A lot of people, a lot of young people especially on campuses..you have to experiment because you haven't had it. Maybe not so much with heroine or crack cocaine or PCP but more so with alcohol. You have to experience it and you have to say Oh, God! I couldn't drive home or I had a wreck, I've learned. I'm going to drink in

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<sup>12</sup> Jill, *Ibid.*

moderation. Or you know or if I'm going to party I need to party smart or I'm going to do this or I need to do that. And from that lesson I have no need to experiment. It doesn't interest me, doesn't do anything for me, should I say.<sup>13</sup>

Upon the death of her mother, **Jill** describes a church that helped her, a church where she sought role models, models that stood in where **Jill's** mother might have been. **Jill** took the consequences of her mother's lifestyle to heart and autonomously chose another way to live her life.

**Cathy**, however, followed the rules and roles spelled out by patriarchal family, capitalist culture, and church. **Cathy** learned to be dependent on her parents and now her boyfriend. She is a "good girl" accepting, without questioning, her parents' faith, and her youth minister's church. Living in a protective family, she does not take risks; she does not examine her beliefs critically and rationally. Her only struggle is wondering what it would be like if she had gone to parties with high school friends, wondering what she would be like today if she had rebelled, if she had disagreed with her parents during high school. **Cathy**, **Jill**, and **Diane** were exposed to essentialist gender lessons, essentialist Christian femininity that they took for granted. Two of them questioned; two of them sorted through the lessons to decide which they would keep for themselves. **Cathy**, on the other hand, swallowed it whole. What determined this difference?

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

**Diane** asked if her “religion serves her faith,”<sup>14</sup> not simply accepting the faith taught by the youth minister at the Catholic Church. **Jill**, left without a parent, looked to the church that helped her with her mother’s death and found role models there. **Jill** does not seem to blindly accept the role models. If we ignore the church’s education that took femininity for granted and the education and decisions that **Jill** and **Diane** made with their understanding of Christianity in mind simply because they are essentialist, we would miss a large part of who **Jill** and **Diane** are and how they learned to live. Moreover, without analysis we will not see **Cathy** as a young woman without autonomy. **Cathy** is preparing to teach school; however, I question if her life lessons have adequately prepared her.

Should educators establish a litmus test about how scholars engage essentialism? Would that not be establishing a new essentialism, a new political correctness? Do we want to judge people on whether or not they are rejecting biblical teaching, not considering **how** they accept or reject teaching? Lorraine Code points out, “essential femaleness . . . is a specific cultural-social construct, not a manifestation of natural essence. . . . The problem is to devise alternatives that neither presuppose an ‘essential’ femaleness nor appeal to ‘feminine’ values that are just as unrealistically pure and unequivocal as ideal objectivity and masculinity.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Diane, *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 53-54.

Should Educational Studies scholars decline to recognize essential femaleness or study it further?

### **Six Supported Girls**

#### **Borderline Cases of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

The title word ***supported*** describes a girl who sometimes met the ***clear*** case golden mean descriptions but in other instances fell into the deficit or excess categories. One of the principle differences between the ***supported*** cases and the ***challenged*** cases was the ***supported*** girls had not met the level of difficulties, the life challenges, which the clear cases had met in their young lives. However, the ***supported*** girls fell at various locations on the continuum. I will describe first the ***supported*** girl who fell closest to the ***challenged*** end of the continuum continuing toward the protected end with the last two, **Ellie** and **Jessie** who except for a decision or two would have been a ***protected*** case. In fact, I had at first categorized them as ***protected*** but with further reflection moved them to ***supported***. Sometimes the cases were too blurry to successfully categorize but the categories help to understand the subtleties of their upbringing and character that needs to be worked on. See Appendix V, Golden Mean Analysis Eight ***Life-Wisdom Themes*** Describing Adolescent Girls' Learning to Live Wisely and Well.

Of the fourteen women I interviewed I found six young women, **Hayden, Abby, Sarah, Jane, Jessie, and Ellie** to be ***supported*** or borderline cases of learning to live wisely and well. I have ordered them

so that they move from the more **challenged** to the more **protected**.

Some of the women took risks and learned from mistakes, but some did not. Not one of these six women spoke of struggling with issues; they had not encountered significant dangers. Most of them focused on friends as well as family, and most of them set priorities. Autonomy was a part of daily decision making, but the decisions had fewer consequences than for the **clear** cases. Jessie and Ellie, except for a decision or two would have been categorized as **protected**.

These stories remind me of my own life story. I lived my young adult life as a **protected** case of learning to live wisely and well. I did not establish independent thinking and decision making in my twenties, living instead in a codependent relationship with my husband. It is true I went to college; I took calculated risks, majoring in home economics like my mother. I chose to marry my high school sweetheart without ever establishing my independence, paying my own rent, buying my own car or paying for the gas and insurance. I went from dependence on my father and mother to dependence on my husband. Within seven years we had two children and I had taught high school in two different school systems. Things that other people see as risky choices did not seem to me, at the time, to be risks; I was following my mother's model. It is only in looking back that I understand going to college and getting married at age twenty as risk-taking behaviors. Recently, my biggest challenge has been divorce after twenty-five years of marriage; I grieved and was clinically

depressed. Recovering today, fifteen years after the divorce was final, I continue to establish my independence, making efforts toward intelligent, authentic, autonomous decisions, learning from mistakes, imagining, learning to reduce stress and anxiety. My participation in educational studies, women's studies, and adult education at the doctoral level has been transforming in this regard, helping me to develop new knowledge and coping skills, to increase my rational decision-making and self-esteem. I have had significant support through therapy as well. Belenky et al. speak of the "importance of intellectual development if emotional difficulties are to be prevented or overcome. Gaining a voice and developing an awareness of their own minds are the tasks that these [women with emotional difficulties] women must accomplish if they cease being either a perpetrator or a victim."<sup>16</sup>

### **Hayden, a Borderline Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Hayden**, a young woman who lives at home with her two parents in a suburb of the metro area, population 45,000, says:

[I] learned to live through daily experiences, through life experiences like my Dad with cancer and through learning to deal with people with diverse issues. When I turned 18, well before that, I had started watching a girl with special needs and it turned into a job with a company; I just watch her after school. It has

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<sup>16</sup> Belenky et al. *Ibid.*, 163.

taught me a lot about people and how people with different needs respond.<sup>17</sup>

Today, **Hayden** is a special needs education major. **Hayden** has become acquainted with Casey, a special needs girl, during the past three years, which helped to determine **Hayden's** life's work. American educational philosopher, John Dewey<sup>18</sup> and Mary Wollstonecraft<sup>19</sup> agree with **Hayden**; one learns to live through experiences. **Hayden's** father battled cancer for a year during **Hayden's** junior year in high school. He was in and out of the hospital and off work. **Hayden** describes this as a difficult, struggling year.

**Hayden** learns divergently; she played catcher for the city softball team; and she plays the piano, keyboard, and drums. She autonomously told her mother, a university librarian, that she would only be in band if she could play the drums, and her mother agreed. **Hayden** describes herself as the only girl in the drum line in the high school band. She was also active in the Baptist church, playing in a praise band, teaching children's classes, and going to summer camp each summer where she played leadership roles like deciding upon a theme and decorating the cabin that housed 100 campers. She has worked and bought a new car; she pays for the insurance and gas, showing initiative.

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<sup>17</sup> Hayden, interview *by the author*, March 3, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education: The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (West Lafayette, Indiana, Kappa Delta Pi, 1998), 23-52.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Carol H. Poston Ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 12.

**Hayden's** best friend goes to church with her; they went to the same high school, both took advanced placement classes but her friend currently attends another university. They made autonomous decisions regarding the university they would attend. **Hayden** spoke of no mistakes, and as an honor student sought perfection with perfection defined by her parents and church. She spoke of boys who were friends at church, they would sit beside her and she would think, "oh, he must like me, he sat beside me. Today, it would be, like, he didn't have another place to sit."<sup>20</sup> She went on dates to the prom, to banquets and "stuff like that. . .In high school, the group was more mixed between girls and guys obviously. It was just like I had a lot of good guy friendships instead of boyfriends."<sup>21</sup> Again, the **challenged**, **supported** and **protected** cases are on a continuum. **Hayden** is a **supported** case but she falls very close to the **challenged** or clear case end of the spectrum. She takes risks, she has made autonomous decisions, and she independently bought a car, pays the insurance and the gas.

#### **Abby, a Borderline Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Abby**, the valedictorian of her large high school class was a competitive swimmer from second grade until she graduated from high school. She grew up in a suburb, population 77,000, of the metro area in a family made up of her mother, father, and older brother. **Abby's**

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

maternal grandmother came from a family of eleven brothers and sisters and the extended family often vacationed together, fishing at Bennett Springs in Missouri. **Abby** says, “I know some of my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> cousins.” She, her parents, and brother often traveled in the summer, camping and visiting many of the national parks in the United States as well as Washington DC and historic sites such as Gettysburg. **Abby** learned divergently through swimming and traveling, she set priorities, and managed her time. She described the tight schedule she would keep with swimming practice every day after school followed by dinner, homework and bed. In addition, she sometimes participated in three strenuous swimming competitions over a weekend at statewide meets. As a competitive swimmer **Abby** had to commit to the rigorous schedule, she committed to the races, risking winning or losing. **Abby** has made autonomous decisions; for example, she started college in accounting, but by second semester sophomore, she knew:

I cannot sit behind a desk and do this the rest of my life. [I]switched to elementary education and have been the happiest person in the world ever since cause I was so frustrated with it and was just not liking school because I didn’t like what I was doing. . . I guess I have to learn from my mistakes.<sup>22</sup>

**Abby** has had a close friend, Monica, since kindergarten. She is very close to her own family, especially her mother, so she has focused on

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<sup>22</sup> Abby, interview *by the author*, February 25, 2005.

both family and friends. She has coached swimming and done extremely well in school; she even has a dream of teaching two years, getting her master's degree in teaching reading during that time, and going to Europe to teach. **Abby** is on the borderline of living wisely and well simply because she seems to have excelled at everything, she has not met struggles other than swim competition, and communicates nothing about her sexual self. She seems to have a confident body image. Like other borderline cases, she may, with the support of her friends and family, be able to meet any future struggles that cross her path.

### **Sarah, a Borderline Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Sarah** is the third *supported* case that I will describe. She grew up in an Oklahoma college town just under 100,000. Her middle-class parents went to the university and stayed in the town after they married, as did many of their college friends. **Sarah** grew up with an extended family of her parent's long-term college friends and their children. This group has a Christmas party every year, continuing even after the children left home for colleges. **Sarah** also describes her grandparents, particularly one grandmother who passed down a ring of rubies and diamonds to **Sarah**. The ring had been in her mother's family four generations. She is European-American and lived with both parents and a younger sister. She described herself several times as, "I didn't like to get in trouble."<sup>23</sup> Yet early in high school, she went one way and a group

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<sup>23</sup> Sarah, interview by the author, February 22, 2005.

of her middle school friends “went another way.”<sup>24</sup> **Sarah** made an autonomous decision when:

I was on the Pom Squad and I really liked that and they [friends] were kind of negative towards that. My friends started being more towards my Pom Squad, and theirs weren’t . . . all of a sudden I was just cut off. But I think that was a big moment in high school, really defining a decision I wanted to make for myself.<sup>25</sup>

While **Sarah** does not like to get in trouble, she was able to make autonomous decisions in the face of friends who disagreed with her:

You always make bad decisions when it comes to friendships and, you know, boyfriends and things like that. You say stuff you shouldn’t, you get yourself in trouble sometimes and I think you kind of have to do that in order to grow up a little bit . . . make mistakes. . . I wouldn’t say learning by all mistakes is the way you learn to live, but I think you need some. I don’t think you can be perfect. That doesn’t make you normal. You need to have some personality. You can say you did stupid things and learned from it and didn’t do it again.<sup>26</sup>

**Sarah’s** understanding of mistake making is the key to her **supported** status. After fifth grade, her family became active in a Baptist church.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

She went to church summer camp and she was a huddle leader in Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) during her junior and senior years in high school. It was something she “really liked. . . FCA had a lot of older leadership, sophomores, juniors and seniors and they really set an example . . . that was instrumental in me choosing the way that I wanted to live.”<sup>27</sup>

**Sarah** was hesitant to take risks. During her junior year she took AP English where they would do “free writing,”<sup>28</sup> something she really enjoyed. Her teacher advised her to take AP English the next year:

I remember him asking me ‘why aren’t you taking AP English? You need to take this, you need to take this class.’ I was, ‘I just don’t want to, I don’t want to take it.’ And I didn’t take it, and I wish I had because my senior year, my English class was awful. . . no one wanted to be there, they hated it. . . It was awful. But you know you learn. Take AP English if your teacher tells you to. I should have known. That’s a mistake that I learned from.”<sup>29</sup>

She describes learning from example, “I think that’s the best and easiest way to learn how to live. . . watching people older than me and seeing things. . . I just followed the rules and I didn’t do what [the person she was watching] did to get in trouble.”<sup>30</sup> **Sarah** has perfectionist

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*

tendencies; courage and risk-taking were not her strengths. We did not discuss sexuality and she seemed to have a healthy body image; however, she didn't take risks talking to me about sexuality nor her family or personal relationships. She seems to protect herself in this, she is **supported** but falls near the **protected** end of the continuum.

### **Jane, a Borderline Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Jane** reminds me of my own life. She grew up in a very **protected** environment living on a small farm with cows, horses, dogs, and chickens; riding the school bus to a nearby town, population approximately 4,700. **Jane** is Chickasaw, Choctaw, and European American and lived with her mother, father, and younger sister. On Sundays, **Jane** and her family attended a Pentecostal church located in a smaller town near her family farm where she sometimes played the piano. **Jane's** mother taught her two daughters to play but was too shy to play in public herself, so she made sure the girls got experience playing in front of the church congregation. After church on Sunday, the four of them spent the afternoon having lunch with her maternal grandparents with a following afternoon visit to her paternal grandparent's home in the town where **Jane** went to school. Her maternal grandmother, who lived just down the road from her family farm, disapproved of girls wearing pants or short skirts so **Jane** and her sister always respected her wishes, wearing longer skirts on Sundays. This grandmother often prepared holiday meals from her garden for the many relatives in their extended family who came to visit

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after Sunday church. **Jane** described joyous holiday gatherings at her maternal grandparents' home with her three aunts, her uncles and cousins.

**Jane's** mother works at the school cafeteria. It was important to her mother to have the same hours and vacations as her daughters. "Education was very important."<sup>31</sup> Her best friend "during middle school and most of high school was Maggie"<sup>32</sup> whose parents also worked at the school and went to a church that shared many activities with **Jane's** church. **Jane** dated a boy whose father was a minister and "everyone thought that we'd go get married because we were together for so long and my family was church oriented and his dad was a preacher, then just all of a sudden things just didn't work out, and we wanted a break. You know when you just wanted something new."<sup>33</sup> Then **Jane** met, through a mutual friend at church, a new boy who had "moved from California to Marshall, he went to school in Marshall"<sup>34</sup> the small town where **Jane's** family went to church. They met during her junior year:

I went to his senior prom with him. It [the prom] was small, really small. We broke up, but both of us 'knew.' . . . One day I went over and said, 'Okay, I'm done talking how about you?' So basically we both got back together. But it was too late; he had already signed

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<sup>31</sup> Jane, interview *by the author*, February 28, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

papers [joined the Air Force] and was leaving for Utah. . . my parents are very moral, very strict, you don't go visit someone out of state that's not your husband. . . he would come visit me and finally we got married in December and we've been married a year and a couple of months. . . being married . . . kept me from just going wild. You know, coming from a home that you don't drink, . . a lot of kids would just go wild. . . I realized I have somebody who's already important to me. I don't need to go out and do the partying, would rather go ahead, do school, make good grades and graduate. That way I can make something for me and my husband.<sup>35</sup>

I've identified **Jane's** case as borderline; she has not established her independence; like me, she went from dependence on her father and mother to dependence on her husband. However, she showed autonomy in going to college instead of following her husband to Utah. In the future if she divorces, it will be very difficult for her, as it was for me, to live alone and make independent, autonomous decisions. If she leaves the fundamentalist church of her family, it will be difficult. However, I predict that her close-knit family will stand behind her, as mine did, and she will be able to ask for help in order to make the transformations required to set priorities, take risks, learn from her mistakes and make intelligent, authentic, autonomous choices. My parents stood behind me even when I

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

chose to leave their church, although we never discussed my decision. Evidence of autonomous decisions is reflected in **Jane's** choice to change her major from ultra-sound to teaching:

I went to East Central and worked in the ER and I really liked it, I mean I really loved . . . science and seeing everything but . . . but the hours were really, really tough 3-11, 11-3, very inconsistent. And you wouldn't have summers off and, like I said, my Mom had a great influence on me, being there during the summer and I want to be there for my kids, you know, when I have them . . . And I love kids. I taught . . . 2 and 7 year olds, a nursery class at my church. . . I looked back and asked which do I like more, teaching the kids or being in a hospital. And I really wanted to be with the kids.<sup>36</sup>

**Jane** and her new husband are interdependent with her family; she wants to live on a farm, and her dad "was actually telling me the other day 'well, whenever you buy you some land, you tell your husband that I'll come help him build a house.'"<sup>37</sup>

**Jane** demonstrated independent thinking when she responded to my question about challenges she had faced. "Some of the challenges I had were probably associated with people that weren't [appropriate]. . . be in activities with them, have fun with them, run track with them but that

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

doesn't mean that you have to follow every single thing that they do."<sup>38</sup>

She also demonstrates autonomy by working as a waitress part-time while she attends college. **Jane** quotes her husband when he said "that [waiting tables] can't be too hard, no big deal, I'll do that until I find a better job." And **Jane** said, "okay! You go ahead and you try it, you will see how it is,' because he always made fun of me because I was complaining. Well it's harder than you think and he realized pretty quick that it's harder than you think. He hated it."<sup>39</sup>

When I compare my background to **Jane's**, I have changed jobs six times during my career, but my education as a teacher has served me well. It is impossible to predict where life will take **Jane**, where the bumps in the road will be, but if she is willing to ask for and accept help, I predict a life lived wisely and well.

### **Jessie, a Borderline Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

**Jessie** describes herself as a "home person, a Mom's girl."<sup>40</sup> She grew up in an Oklahoma town, population approximately 22,000, where she lived with her mother, father, and younger sister, the same family constellation as **Jane's**. **Jessie** is also preparing to marry a family-approved boy she met as a junior in high school. **Jessie** struggled with body image and weight. She describes a time when she compared her

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Jessie, interview *by the author*, March 2, 2005.

body to others, feeling fat and preoccupied with her body on the deficit side of the golden mean of body and food issues. She said:

I remember it was hard because during that time [middle school] you wanted to be the popular person in that school. And I know that I was not, I had glasses, and I was chubby, so it was hard, and I was in band, which was a major; you were a geek if you were in band. So, it was kind of difficult. And then whenever I moved to the high school level, because of that, I got contacts, I lost 45 pounds. . . It was intense, like, I worked out every day but then I gained lots of my weight back because everybody thought I had an eating disorder. But I really didn't I just lost lots of my baby fat. . . I went to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade a thinner and prettier person than what I was. And I noticed the difference in the reactions that I got when I went into high school. I mean people who had never talked to me before talked to me then. And I was still in band but it was okay because I looked okay. I didn't have glasses anymore.<sup>41</sup>

**Jessie** describes her best friend Stephanie who also played in the band. They came to Pleasantville along with a:

. . . guy I had grown up with and I'm still with him now, four years later and we're going to get married. So we're high school sweethearts. Yes, he is a very big part of my life. I don't know how I would live without him, the way, like the way he is now. He has a

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

twin brother and his twin brother also has a girlfriend, they are high school sweethearts as well. They are going to get married, she's one year older than us. And then his parents are high school sweethearts and they have been married for 24 years. So, it's kind of weird how that all worked out. He knows all my secrets and we share our lives together. And definitely he has influenced my life, totally has. He's at PU, and I was trying to decide where I should go to college, and I chose Pleasantville University definitely because of him. So definitely, lots of my future plans have been geared towards our lives together.<sup>42</sup>

**Jessie** describes meeting Tim, and how he helped her as she learned to live with her body. She said:

I guess it started not mattering [being skinny] whenever I was in high school and I started dating Tim. I found someone who loved me for who I am. And so I didn't have to struggle with my weight anymore. . . Now, I know that people will like me for who I am, and if they don't like me, you don't need to put up a false image of yourself.<sup>43</sup>

**Jessie** described the maturing process she went through, but like me she has gone from dependence on her parents to dependence on her boyfriend and best friend. She hasn't established independence.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

On the topic of a faith community, **Jessie** describes the challenge of growing up Catholic in a protestant town and always having to explain what it means to be Catholic. Her best friend, Stephanie, is also Catholic. Stephanie moved to **Jessie's** hometown when they were in second grade. They bonded around their Catholic Church membership. However, Tim is a member of the Presbyterian Church and **Jessie** has become a:

Pres-Cath so I'm like half and half now. Ummm, but we don't know, most likely I'll never be able to be confirmed because I was baptized Catholic and I'll always be Catholic and when we get married we'll probably raise our children in a Presbyterian home. But I'll never lose my Catholic upbringing. I will still practice some of the Catholic rituals, some of the stuff that we do. Which is a lot different. The only thing during Lent we don't eat meat on Fridays. . . I don't believe that you have to tell a priest before you can be forgiven of your sins I believe that if you ask God for forgiveness of your sins, that you can, in essence, you can go directly to God to ask forgiveness of your sins. You don't have to go through a high order priest to get forgiveness of your sins.<sup>44</sup>

**Jessie** falls closer to the *protected* end of the spectrum than the other *supported* girls. She was *challenged* with her "weight, wearing glasses and being in the band." She lost the weight and got contact lenses but her image of herself is based, at least in part, on her boyfriend's opinion. It's difficult to predict, but **Jessie** will probably be

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

able to rise to the challenges ahead of her in life, if she is willing to ask for help. She has a career ahead as a science teacher; she will always have her family and friends.

### **Ellie, a Borderline Case of Learning to Live Wisely and Well**

A ***supported*** case, **Ellie**, grew up in a small town, population 4,000, not far from the metro area. Her case is very close to the ***protected*** case but upon careful examination I find that she is not ***protected*** but ***supported***. Her mother drove into the city to work at a big hospital as a nurse on the heart team. Her father worked in real estate and then as postal worker. The family was exposed to the challenge of her father's open-heart surgery. Like Cathy, **Ellie** has an older brother.

**Ellie's** family of four lived less than a block from the school grounds, where the elementary, middle, and high school were located. "I have my best friend Judy; we've just always known each other. . . [We] went to the same church. Judy and I had another friend Angela; she was fun. . . we did everything together."<sup>45</sup> In 4<sup>th</sup> grade **Ellie** was moved to a new class because they had so many students. The "new class was taught by Mr. P, the first guy teacher in our elementary and he just threw parties every week because he didn't know what he was doing. . . and that was good."<sup>46</sup> In 5<sup>th</sup> grade, **Ellie** and Judy "played soccer or on field day

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<sup>45</sup> Ellie, interview *by the author*, February 22, 2005.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

they would just walk around; play(ing) bean bag toss in the gym.”<sup>47</sup> On Saturday night **Ellie** and Judy would “go roller skating or do something, and then we’d always plan our outfit for the next day. We were always in the same Sunday School Class.”<sup>48</sup> With the limited information that I have about **Ellie**, I cannot say that she questioned her Southern Baptist religious upbringing, although there is no evidence that she did not question.

It is apparent that **Ellie’s** family was very *protective*; however, when her father had open-heart surgery, **Ellie’s** experience was *challenging*. Her mother, a nurse, was comfortable in the hospital setting and took **Ellie** and her older brother to be near their dad when he had the surgery. This was a very scary time for them; they decided not to tell family or church friends about the surgery until it was over and everything turned out fine. **Ellie** reported of her parents, “They changed their eating habits; they now go to the gym and eat broccoli.”<sup>49</sup>

In eighth grade, **Ellie** began to date a boy two years older, in the tenth grade. They dated until it was time for him to go to college. Then he broke up with **Ellie**, which was very traumatic but she said, “The trauma only lasted a couple of days.” Her house was located within a block of the school; it immediately became a gathering place for everyone on Friday

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

night. “There would be twenty cars there . . . I was single for the first time in two and a half years. But after six months, I started talking to Russ, who I am with right now.”<sup>50</sup> **Ellie** has attended Pleasantville University while Judy, her best friend, and Russ, her boyfriend, go to other schools, which provided some evidence of at least limited personal autonomy. But for this autonomous decision, **Ellie** would have been in the protected category.

**Ellie** has watched her parents’ marriage and believes that:

You can be your own person and still be in love with somebody and want to take care of somebody. . . I don’t think you should depend on a man, but at the same time, I think everybody needs somebody to love. [In addition,] everybody needs to feel wanted. . . I see it so much more now looking back . . . and me and Judy seems like we’ve gone through everything. . . like dating and actually growing up and going to proms and deciding to go to school somewhere and . . .”<sup>51</sup>

If **Ellie** had a sister, she would advise her to imagine and pursue her interests and passions. “Find yourself, like, especially before you graduate from high school. Decide what your goals in life are, and if you’re not sure, that’s something you need to figure out in the next couple

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

of years.” **Ellie** is not expecting to “receive” a career, she has prioritized and claims autonomy.

**Ellie’s** story reminds me of my career; I graduated from college in four years. My dad advised me to “get a teaching degree so I could get a job anywhere your husband takes you.” I got a home economics teaching degree, and my husband and I moved to Lubbock, Texas, for his job. Texas Tech University in Lubbock graduated dozens of home economics education students each year and that year there were three home economics openings in the Lubbock and surrounding area schools. I worked as a home service advisor for the local gas company, which turned out to be a fun job, but I could not have predicted it when I was in college preparing to be a teacher. **Ellie** may or may not have the opportunity to work as a teacher throughout her career, although the openings for early childhood and elementary school teaching are much more abundant now than home economics teaching jobs were for me.

**Ellie** claimed autonomy when choosing new friends in college. She describes an early **protective** environment, but she emerged with at least one autonomous decisions:

In high school and through your grade school days, you kind of get your friends chosen for you; who you go to church with, who your parents are friends with. When you are in college, you are all on your own. And if you don’t like yourself, you might not like those friends that you find or you might not have any. I need friends; I

like having friends. I think diversity is always better than singling yourself out. And I think the more friends you have, you can, like, find your morals. Find your values without having someone just tell you what they are which I think is something that happens in college . . . it's your time to decide.<sup>52</sup>

The six girls who are **supported** cases tended to be very good students, following the rules, aiming toward perfection. They lived in more **protected** environments than the **challenged** girls. Perhaps it takes longer for a person who grows up somewhat **protected** to experience a life struggle that forces or allows them to act on their own behalf.

### **Learning to Teach**

What are the implications for students learning to be teachers? A teacher must have personal autonomy so she can tell her non-judgmental truth to her students as she helps them understand their alternatives or options in decision making. For example, whether advising **Sarah** to take AP English, or befriending **Jill** by helping her write her application for college, these teachers know who they are as individuals, and can exhibit courage to focus with the student on the student's issues to determine if they can help the student or refer her to other(s) or agency(ies). A teacher cannot be nor expect to be perfect; however, s/he must be able to ask questions, question authority, think critically and allow students to respond to challenging lessons. S/he must sense when the student is

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

overwhelmed and know if s/he can help or refer her to the counselor, the principal, other professionals or friends. How do we prepare students studying to be teachers to handle, with grace and understanding, relationships with students I have described? Perhaps one only needs the equanimity to walk with the student to the counselor or the principal's office. In 2006, it continues to be possible that a teacher will have a girl who is pregnant ask her teacher, as was my experience, to help the student tell her father. Female students may also ask for help to obtain contraception or a student may ask for help when h/she is very unsure of his/her sexuality and wants and needs to know how to make friends. How does a teacher respond when a student comes to him/her wondering if she is pregnant? Or perhaps you see a girl like **Diane** losing a lot of weight which is obviously not healthy. Students do have these types of situations. What would you do, as a teacher, if your student has the courage to tell you that she is very upset? How does a teacher foster courage in her students and befriend the student with difficult situations in life?

What if your female student, whose mother has divorced and left the family, comes to you distraught; she just "can't take it anymore."<sup>53</sup> I propose that it takes a teacher who has had life experience, who knows him/herself and can have a listening conversation with his/her student or call the student's aunt to come in for a chat to support the girl.

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<sup>53</sup> Kate, *Ibid.*

Educational philosophers often use a “sentence analysis”<sup>54</sup> to propose a formula for teachers who are conceptualizing the triangle of teaching (S), curriculum (W and Y) and learning (P). For example, S (teacher) teaches P (student) W (lesson or curriculum) so that Y (aim). For example, the teacher (S) teaches girls (P) risk taking (W), so they experience courage (Y). Or, S teaches P honesty by being honest with the student (W), so that they build trust (Y). Or (S) teaches girls (P) to listen to other students talk without interrupting them in order to connect (W) so that they build friendship skills (Y). The reason I am examining life wisdom themes is to make explicit this is curriculum that the challenged girls had to learn in order to live wisely and well. The protected and supported girls have learned only some of these ***life-wisdom themes***. In order to teach these ***life-wisdom themes***, I propose that a teacher must be comfortable with her/his autobiography in order to listen, hear, and befriend the student as she responds to concerns beyond the daily classroom lesson. By including these aims—e.g., honesty and trust, listening and relating or connection--in the curricula, teachers can contribute to girls LWW.

I must point out that in my own life I have lived in all three stages, they weren't static. I was ***protected*** until I was a teen and ***challenged*** as a fifteen year old girl. At fifteen the acquaintance rape ***challenge*** was

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<sup>54</sup> Conversation with Susan Laird, Ph.D., May 2006 and modeled in Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991). 1-24.

such an extreme one for me in my cultural context that I repressed the experience and retreated to a **supported** existence which was very close on the continuum to **protected** as I grew into adulthood. As an older adult I have had to deal with the **challenged** understandings of sexuality that I mislearned during my adolescence as well as the **challenge** of divorce. As an adult I chose a therapist and friendships that **supported** me as I reexamined my life and misunderstandings. Perhaps this learning is evolutionary; however, given the seven **clear** cases or girls who were **challenged** early in life, I do not think it should take a lifetime to gain voice. I do not think it should take a lifetime to establish autonomy, to address challenges, to imagine and laugh, to pursue interests and passions, to seek adventures and new activities in order to learn divergently or to relate to both friends and family. Teachers cannot do the work for the girls; as Wollstonecraft declared in the late eighteenth century, “the honey must be the reward of the individual’s own industry.”<sup>55</sup> However, teachers can provide an environment with aims using the philosophical tool of sentence analysis described above and an environment of befriending where the teacher encourages friendships between girls and boys or relationships with adults to encourage learning to live wisely and well.

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<sup>55</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Ibid.*, 114.

## Chapter V

### Girls Learning to Live

. . . have patience with everything unresolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is question of experiencing everything. At the present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.

-- Rainer Maria Rilke in *Letters to a Young Poet*<sup>1</sup>

### How Did They Learn?

This was a study into the lives of fourteen young women who have grown up in Oklahoma from different locations in the state, different ethnicities, different family structures, different schools, different churches although ten of the fourteen listed Christian churches as part of their life. This chapter discusses how they learned, and from whom they learned. It discusses implications for teacher education and future research opportunities along with conclusions.

The girls in my study who gave most evidence of having learned to live wisely and well as teenagers were “challenged” and have become independent thinkers. They made intelligent, authentic, autonomous, imaginative choices. At age 19, 20, and 21 they respect themselves and

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<sup>1</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet/The Possibility of Being*. Translated by Joan M. Burnham, (New York: MJF Books, 2000), 35.

have achieved some autonomy in the construction of their own lives. Those “protected” girls who avoided risk, struggle, and choice by following the rules and roles spelled out for them and by seeking the safety and approval of family and church are, at 21, at risk of postponing indefinitely this learning or meeting challenges later in life such as I experienced. The “supported” girls in my study had adults who encouraged them to imagine, to take risks, make decisions and confront mistakes as they learned to live. Their coming to live wisely and well is much slower than the “challenged” girls but more likely than the “protected.” It must be noted that the protected girl and her parents, within their cultural context or faith group, may disagree with me and define what I have call **protected** as actually living wisely and well.

I have asked here how girls learned to live, from whom did they learn, and what did they learn, with the girls’ answers are described in chapters three and four. As noted earlier, Martin writes that multiple education agency plays a large part in this learning and my research has substantiated that. The girls learn from their churches, their families, their friends and the friends’ families, their extracurricular activities such as band and softball, as well as their teachers in schools.

This chapter focuses on multiple education agents because the girls learn from many and a teacher can find support in these. Families, churches, friends, experiences in organizations and extracurricular activities are keys to students’ learning to live wisely and well. The

teachers need not shoulder all the responsibility regarding their students' education, but instead become aware of "partnerships" that increase their students' resources.

### **Family as Education Agent**

The young women listed parents, most often their mothers but also fathers, brothers and sisters, grandmothers, and a great grandmother who said, "Can't never did anything," as persons from whom they learned to live. Grandparents who lived nearby modeled life for Jane, running a farm and gardening. Jane's grandparents brought aunts, uncles, and cousins together many Sundays for a lunch often prepared with food from her maternal grandmother's garden. Eleven of the fourteen women said they learned the most from their mothers even when, as **Jill** said, her drug addicted mother "taught me what not to do. I'm twenty-one years old and I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't use drugs. . . but she's my heart."<sup>2</sup> Jessie, who grew up in a town in southern Oklahoma said, "I'm a mama's girl" and at 21, she is preparing to marry her high school sweetheart without evidence that she has established independence and autonomy.

Susan Laird describes maternal teaching and befriending as "the educational achievement of encouraging children's growing capacity and responsibility for learning to love and survive, despite conflicts, pains, losses, and other difficulties, most especially their mothers' absence."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Jill Interview by the author, February 4, 2005.*

<sup>3</sup> *Susan Laird, "Toward Gender-Sensitive Education: Befriending Girls and Young Women." United Kingdom: Lincoln College, University of Oxford, April 2, 2004.*

**Challenged** girls **Jill, Diane, Holly** and **Stephanie**, as well as protected girl **Cathy** and **supported** girls **Ellie, Jessie, Abby, Sarah,** and **Jane**, all acknowledged their mothers as the primary teachers from whom they learned to live. **Challenged** girl **Donna** and **supported** girl **Hayden** described their fathers as the person from whom they most learned life lessons. **Challenged** girls **Terri**, whose mother was a single mom, and **Kate**, whose dad was a single father, described significant learning from friends' families.

**Challenged** girl **Donna**, a member of the Enrolled Wichita Tribe, told of learning to live from her father who always got them up in the morning, made sure they had breakfast of some sort and got them to school. He was invested in getting her to Quiz Bowl, an academic competition, and he supported her going to summer academic camps. He would sit on the couch on Friday nights talking with **Donna** and her brother while her mother stayed in town after work when "we knew she was playing."<sup>4</sup> However, **Donna's** mother also supported her by asking when **Donna** was seventeen and had a boyfriend, "Are you having sex?" To which **Donna** replied, "Yes."<sup>5</sup> Her mother asked her if she wanted to get birth control to which **Donna** said, "yes."<sup>6</sup> **Donna's** mother had been seventeen when she had her first child, a daughter who was subsequently

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<sup>4</sup> *Donna, Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

raised by the child's grandmother. Donna described her relationship with her half-sister, "We didn't really hang out a lot."

**Hayden**, an Anglo American girl, also learned from her dad. During her junior year in high school, he had a year-long illness with cancer. She said she thought that she learned to live from "experiences" like her father's illness but she also learned about life from the experience of babysitting a special-needs girl whose family she knew from the Baptist church. While babysitting with Carrie, **Hayden** noticed how a small modulation in the sound and tone of her voice would affect her young charge's response to a situation. A loud voice would "set her off."<sup>7</sup> **Terri** and **Kate** spoke about learning from a friend's family when their single parent didn't provide what they needed. Families of all shapes and sizes, single parents as well as parenting couples, are the crucible from which the girls meet life, growing and changing. Parents, usually the mother but sometimes the father, can be seen and accepted by teachers as a very important partner in their female students' education.

### **Friends as Education Agents**

Friends were listed as most important after family; the young women also learned to live from their friends. Supported girl **Sarah** describes how friendships changed, and she made an autonomous decision as she entered her sophomore year in high school. She said, "My friends started being more towards my pom squad and their's wasn't

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<sup>7</sup> *Hayden, Ibid.*

so . . . they went this way and I went that.” **Sarah** declared, “I think this was a big moment in high school, a defining decision I wanted to make for myself.” **Sarah’s** decision wasn’t as life altering as challenged girl **Jill’s** decisions after **Jill’s** mother’s death, but hopefully, most girls are provided smaller steps than a mother’s death as experiences that provide “defining decisions.”<sup>8</sup>

Friends often organized around activities, school, and church. Supported girls, **Jane**, **Jessie**, and **Ellie** describe such friendships. **Jane** met her boyfriend and future husband through a friend at church who introduced them, telling the guy, “You’ve just gotta meet this girl.” A boyfriend she met at school helped **Jessie** with her body image. **Jessie** relaxed about her weight, worrying less after she started dating **Tim**, who accepted her a little overweight, showing Jessie how she could accept herself, and her weight, which was an external source of confirmation but still a source that contributed to **Jessie’s** self-image. **Ellie** described her best friend, Jennifer, “We went to the same church.”<sup>9</sup> **Ellie** continued:

On Saturday night we’d go roller-skating and plan our outfits for the next day. At Sunday school our main person would say, ‘okay who can do the Bible verse and you get a dollar.’ Me and Jennifer never got dollars because we didn’t worry about that kind of stuff, too much. We were like yeah, we don’t want to learn it. But it was fun.

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah. *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Ellie, *Ibid.*

. . so Mom and Dad then school and church [influenced me], I was definitely small town, here's my world.

Friends were not as important as, in most cases, mothers, or in two cases, fathers, but they were very important in shaping the girls' lives

### **Church as Education Agent**

Only **Terri** of the seven **challenged** girls did not describe belonging to a church. The other six spoke of church, youth ministers, Powwows or friendships at church as significant experiences during their adolescence. **Donna**, an American Indian, told me "we went to Powwows. . . I used to dance when I was younger."<sup>10</sup> **Jill**, **Hayden** and **Holly** described being members of Baptist churches. **Stephanie** participated in a Methodist confirmation program.<sup>11</sup> **Diane**, who is Catholic,<sup>12</sup> described a youth minister who "helped her find a church to fit my faith"<sup>13</sup> and meet her personal life needs at the time. Only three, **Jill**<sup>14</sup>, **Diane**<sup>15</sup> and **Kate**,<sup>16</sup> joined their churches as adults, making what I am calling discriminating decisions. **Jill**, a Baptist and **Kate**, a "Christian," joined a church as seniors in high school because they attended church with friends who

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<sup>10</sup> *Donna, Interview by the author, February 24, 2005.*

<sup>11</sup> *Stephanie, Interview by the author, March 11, 2005.*

<sup>12</sup> *Jessie, Interview by the author, March 2, 2005.*

<sup>13</sup> *Diane, Interview by the author, December 2, 2004.*

<sup>14</sup> *Jill, Interview by the author, February 4, 2005.*

<sup>15</sup> *Diane, Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Kate, Interview by the author, December 7, 2004.*

were Christians, but not because their families had always taken them to church.

**Jill** and **Kate's** decisions seem to be discriminating choices made as young adults. **Jill** told me that she found "role models"<sup>17</sup> there and **Kate** described becoming a Christian as a:

. . . complete turn around, like, like I just remember the whole time that I was searching for satisfaction in my success and satisfaction in getting the highest grades and whatever highest chair whatever. Like it just hit me my senior year that it didn't really matter all those things that I did. That wasn't enough and like once I became a Christian and once I did believe in Christ then everything all that was just underneath that. So. . . it gave me personal satisfaction, real success, purpose, drive, everything. So [Christianity was] the final satisfaction that I was looking for in all my extra hard work. . . and I'm going to be a missionary when I finish college.<sup>18</sup>

It is impossible to tell from the young women's stories if the others made conscious, autonomous choices as adults to become members of their churches or if they adopted the churches because their families had always attended.

It is difficult to determine if **protected Cathy** is a discriminating member of the Baptist church or if she goes only because she has always

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<sup>17</sup> *Jill, Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Kate, Ibid.*

gone with her parents and by doing so she is “not making the mistakes that my brother did.” Each of the churches the girls named has only male leadership as ministers, music directors, and members of the governing boards, although women in the Methodist and Pentecostal Churches are allowed to serve in the leadership.

**Jane**, a **supported** girl, told me that her parents and grandparents are life-long members of a Pentecostal Church where **Jane** sometimes played the piano and met the boy to whom she is now married.<sup>19</sup> **Jane** and **Hayden**, another **supported** girl participated in the services through performing music. I know from my growing up as an adolescent in Oklahoma fundamentalist Christian churches and from having friends in the Catholic , Baptist and Pentecostal churches that the leadership of the Catholic churches is male, relegating women to the pews, and the elementary classrooms. Women could not lead the songs or play an instrument in my church; this type of participation is possible in the Baptist, Pentecostal, and Catholic churches.

At the age of twenty, I would have called myself a “supported” young woman; I married a young man who was a member of my church. I remember the Sunday morning that my husband and I left The Church. We had been married for several years, had two boys, and lived 900 miles away from our hometown, far enough to begin to ask our own questions. I was working on a master’s degree in Family Relations and had enrolled our four-year-old son in a Montessori day school. A psychologist was

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<sup>19</sup> *Jane, Interviewed by the author, February 28, 2005.*

teaching a *Parent Effectiveness Training* course in partnership with the day school where I learned new ways of thinking about feelings, about communication, about power in relationships. My husband and I were also participating in a gestalt consciousness-raising group at the time, seeking to expand our awareness of self and world. That Sunday morning the minister was teaching the young adult Sunday school class we attended. A young woman sitting behind me said, "Paul didn't like women, we can tell who wrote some of the chapters in the Bible by their writing style and Paul wrote that women should be silent in the church speaking only through their husbands among other things." The minister ignored her; he treated her as if her opinion was not important. I was furious and at the end of the Sunday school class, before the services, I said to my husband, "I'm going to get the children, let's go home." I remember that I had on a navy and white polka dotted swiss summer suit with a white pique blouse, navy stockings and shoes, certainly the perfect, "unadorned" Christian, Sunday dress. We got in the car and drove home never to return. We did not raise our children in a Protestant church. Looking back, that was the first independent action I took as an adult without my parents, my brothers and sisters, or even my husband's input. Even the choice to marry my husband or have children was a decision I made knowing I had my parent's approval.

When visiting, we continued to honor our parents' beliefs and friends and accompanied them to church. Sunday mornings at our house;

however, became time for family breakfasts, music, nature, and peaceful times in the back yard. I no longer believed the dogma of the church, and I did not want my children's self-images shaped as mine had been.

Adrienne Rich said in September 1977, "We want for ourselves and our students to claim an education . . . to take as the rightful owner; to assert in the face of possible contradiction." Rich points out that the difference between claiming and receiving an education "is the difference between acting and being acted-upon, and for women it can literally mean the difference between life and death."<sup>20</sup> The fundamental, literal interpretation of the Bible in the Church of Christ and in Baptist churches makes a woman's ability to claim an education difficult. She is to be submissive, speaking only through the men in her family, dressing so she will not be noticed; rather she should be "adorned with good deeds." In the Bible Belt, ignoring essentialist gender talk simply because it is essentialist means ignoring substantive aspects of the lives of many of the girls I interviewed during my research; indeed, it means ignoring my own educational journey. However, I have recently been introduced to an organization Christians for Biblical Equality<sup>21</sup> with the mission of seeking gender equity in Christianity, so some progress is being made in this reeducation.

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<sup>20</sup> Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, "Claiming an Education," (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 231 – 235.

<sup>21</sup> [Http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/index.shtml](http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/index.shtml)

Jane Roland Martin describes “the charge of essentialism as mean-spirited, closing off important discussion and needed research, deploring the offense of essentialism.”<sup>22</sup> She asks, “Even when essentialism exists might there be signs of resistance worthy of study?”<sup>23</sup> We will here uncover what it takes for a girl who has always been submissive to resist the essentialist lessons regarding her gender to break the code of silence and learn to speak truth to power.

Essentialism is a term that is rarely defined or explained explicitly in feminist contexts and refers to, according to Elizabeth Grosz in the *Center for Cultural Studies Journal* from the University of California Santa Cruz, the attribution of a fixed essence to women. She says. . .

Women’s essence is assumed to be given and universal and is usually, though not necessarily, identified with women’s biology and ‘natural’ characteristics. Essentialism usually entails biologism and naturalism, but there are cases in which women’s essence is seen to reside not in nature or biology but in certain given psychological characteristics – nurturance, empathy, supportiveness, noncompetitiveness, and so on. Or women’s essence may be attributed to certain activities and procedures (which may or may not be dictated by biology) observable in social

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<sup>22</sup> Jane Roland Martin, “Methodological Essentialism, False Difference, and Other Dangerous Traps.” *Signs*, Vol 19. No. 3 (Spring, 1994), 630-657.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

practices, intuitiveness, emotional responses, concern and commitment to helping others, etc. Essentialism entails the belief that those characteristics defined as women's essence are shared in common by all women at all time: it implies a limit on the variations and possibilities of change – It is not possible for a subject to act in a manner contrary to her nature. Essentialism thus refers to the existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical functions that limits the possibilities of change and thus of social reorganization.<sup>24</sup>

In order to understand the culture that gives Oklahoma a grade of D regarding women's health, it is important to know that fundamentalist Christian religion and essentialist approaches to educating girls played a large role in both my life and Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz's life as well as in the lives of the fourteen girls I interviewed. Ortiz recounts attending the Baptist Church in Piedmont and becoming a member of the Rainbow Girls, an organization that was not open to the girls in my church. Many of us who grew up in fundamentalist Christianity know well the following verses:

. . . The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate,

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<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Center for Cultural Studies Journal*, 1999 *Center for Cultural Studies*, University of California Santa Cruz, [http://humwww.ucsc.edu/DivWeb/CultStudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol\\_5/ElizabethGrosz/10/18/2005](http://humwww.ucsc.edu/DivWeb/CultStudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_5/ElizabethGrosz/10/18/2005)

as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.<sup>25</sup> I Corinthians 14: 34-35.

Other pertinent verses are: I Timothy 2: 9-12,<sup>26</sup> I Corinthians 11: 3<sup>27</sup> and Titus 2: 3-5.<sup>28</sup> These verses were strung together to teach me how to live, to guide women as they provided leadership for girls, and to give direction to the adult women's lives. Those of us who grew up in fundamentalist churches know well the verses above that told us how women and girls should act; we internalized the oppression. We know that we are to be nurturing, empathic, supportive, and never competitive.

People engaged in essentialist Christianity interpret literally the verses above that speak of gender. Charles Kimball calls this "corrupt religion."<sup>29</sup> Kimball says that "Inquiry into the corruption of a religion must begin with the claims to truth it makes and invariably, religious truth claims are based on the authoritative teachings of inspired or sage like charismatic leaders

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<sup>25</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha Revised Standard Version*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 1394.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 1441.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 1390.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1451.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2002) 41.

or on interpretations of sacred texts, often connected to gifted leaders. . . are treated as rigid doctrines. . .”<sup>30</sup>

Kimball’s words are important to me because Paul’s teachings were central in the church of my childhood. Paul was a sage-like, charismatic leader. Well-meaning people used the phrases “women should keep silence in the churches. . . for they are not permitted to speak. . .” to maintain patriarchy, to maintain power. Looking back, it was my experience that my church leaders presumed to know God; they abused sacred texts and disseminated their versions of absolute truth. This kept women both in submission and with personal views of themselves as submissive. These leaders were “limited,”<sup>31</sup> which Kimball recognizes as a trait of all human leaders.

Most of the leaders of the church in which I grew up did not have college degrees, or if they did, they had attended church sponsored colleges. In my family’s house, a college education was of primary importance; it was assumed that just like the boys the girls would go to state colleges, like those our parents had attended. The career choices for girls were gendered, however: teaching, nursing, or working at the bank as a secretary, not vice president. I always believed my mother was very resourceful because of her college education. Dunbar-Ortiz, who at times was supported and at times challenged, had a mother who modeled resourcefulness by organizing a Boy Scout Troop that included girls.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Roxanne's mother stood up to the professional Boy Scout who came to visit them; she would continue to have girls along with boys in her club and did not need the Boy Scouts. She had enjoyed using the books and stories the Boy Scout books provided, and she was upset when the staff person took them away. Dunbar-Ortiz's mother got a job reporting for the local newspaper, but it was always clear who was in charge: the father, the husband. Her mother had to sneak around to do what she wanted; Ortiz's mother never smoked in front of her husband and never flaunted her reporting job.<sup>32</sup> Surprisingly, I never thought of my mother as sneaking around; she and my dad were very forthright with each other. In fact, Church of Christ was the religion of my mother's family. Our dad had been raised in the Methodist church. Mother determined our family's religion.

Recently I discovered *The Woman's Bible*<sup>33</sup> written in the late nineteenth century by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leader in the then current suffragist movement. Stanton and a "Revising Committee" wrote comments regarding Numbers XX. "Woman is here taught that she is irresponsible. The father or the husband is all. They are wisdom, power, and responsibility. But woman is a nonentity if still in her father's house, or if she has a husband."

The suffragists:

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<sup>32</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz, *Ibid.*, 81

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible, Part I Comments on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy*, (New York: European Publishing Company, 1898), 116-118.

. . . Object[ed] to this teaching. It is unjust to man that he should have the added responsibility of his daughter's or wife's word, and it is cruel to woman because the irresponsibility is enslaving in its influence. It is contrary to true Gospel teaching, for only in freedom to do right can a soul dwell in that love which is the fulfilling of the law. . . The whole import of this chapter is that a woman's word is worthless, unless she is a widow or divorced. While an unmarried daughter, her father is her surety; when married, the husband allows or disallows what she promises, and the promise is kept or broken according to his will.<sup>34</sup>

Today, the Bible contributes to a secondary status of women in many organized religions, although not all religions, in Oklahoma. I am currently a member of a liberal church in Oklahoma, which welcomes Christians and non-Christians, atheists and agnostics, we welcome heterosexual and homosexual women and men, to the leadership and the pulpit. Teaching girls today in some Oklahoma churches offers an opportunity to expand their understanding of God to a God that cherishes them as women. The twenty-first century is a time when women have many opportunities to learn and to participate, to lead and to choose whom they follow. These opportunities have not been open to women for much of our civilization stretching back before Christianity to Greek teachers.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Historic Education Agents**

Prior to Christianity and the Bible, Greek authors wrote about the quality of life and living, including the idea of practical wisdom,<sup>35</sup> which seems to be a combination of reason and virtue gained through experience. Even though Aristotle, the author of the idea of practical wisdom, classed women with slaves, the idea of practical wisdom has much to teach girls and women today. To understand practical wisdom it is important to note that Greek culture was divided by gender into two systems: the Hestian System and the Hermean System.<sup>36</sup> The Hestian concerned household and family, hearth, home, and the private domain. The Hermean System was concerned with the Greek State, government, and the public domain.<sup>37</sup> Women were not privy to education outside the home. My own undergraduate study of home economics reflects the Hestian domain of pre-feminist America.

In Greece, the most prominent social category was that of citizen, but all women and the majority of Athenian men were excluded from citizenship and governing. Slaves, children, and metics were excluded from the citizen-voting block. Metics were craftsman, farmers, and hired

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<sup>35</sup> Randall R. Curren, "Practical Wisdom," in J. J. Chambliss, *Philosophy of Education an Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1996), 496-498.

<sup>36</sup> Patricia Thompson, *Home Economics and Feminism*, (University of Prince Edward Island: Home Economics Publishing Collective, 1988), 13.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

workers.<sup>38</sup> Only Plato (427-347 BC) spoke on behalf of women's education in the public domain and then only for the women born to the guardian or citizen class. Today feminists are providing works that interpret Aristotle, fully acknowledging that he did not speak on behalf of women and in fact was misogynist.<sup>39</sup> Educational philosophers specifically Jane Roland Martin<sup>40</sup> has acknowledged the golden mean as useful in teaching moderation, specifically with regard to courage, loyalty, self-assertion, care, concern, connection and nurturance. As I have followed Martin's thought and leadership regarding the golden mean I apply some of the lessons of Athenian's thought regarding practical wisdom to the education of today's Oklahoma girls and women preparing to be teachers.

The Greek concept of practical wisdom presupposes that living wisely and well requires "living in accordance with the dictates of reason rightly employed, and also that among the dictates of reason are the requirements of justice and virtue generally."<sup>41</sup> The convergence implied by these grounding assumptions between living in accordance with right reason, living well, living happily, and living virtuously, is implicit in the Greek concept of "sound judgment." Greeks aimed in teaching to promote

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<sup>38</sup> Steven E. Tozer, Paul C. Violas and Guy Senese, *School and Society Historical and contemporary Perspectives, Third Edition*, (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998), 8-11.

<sup>39</sup> Cynthia A. Freeland (ed), *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 2-15.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, 1992, *Ibid.* 108.

<sup>41</sup> Randall R. Curren, "Practical Wisdom," in J. J. Chambliss, *Philosophy of Education an Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 496-498.

sound practical judgment in both politics and private life.<sup>42</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft in eighteenth century England was among the first to publicly advocate this for women when she said, “Let her only determine, without being too anxious about present happiness, to acquire the qualities that ennoble a rational being . . .”<sup>43</sup> Today critical thinking or “constructive thinking”<sup>44</sup> includes reason as one of the tools but also discusses imagination, emotion, and intuition as essential for women and teachers preparing lessons within the social context of their teaching situation. According to Thayer-Bacon we use our not just minds, but ‘bodyminds’. From the constructive thinking perspective, we use our bodies as well as our minds to think constructively and this knowledge is always partial and open to revision and renegotiation.<sup>45</sup> Constructive thinking is essential for women and teachers preparing lessons within the social context they find in the school where they teach. These lessons are often taught in teacher preparation educational studies or foundations classes.<sup>46</sup> Today it is important that teachers know about fundamentalists and pay attention to the religions in which students and the students’ families participate; these religions will often be a part of the context within

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Ibid.*, 1988, 32.

<sup>44</sup> Barbara J. Thayer-Bacon, *Transforming Critical Thinking: Thinking Constructively*, reviewed by Susanne Gibson, <http://www.practical-philosophy.org.uk/Volume4Reviews/Transforming.htm>

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Tozer, *Ibid.*

which the teachers live and teach. In the spirit of separation of church and state the teacher who is a fundamentalist or any other religion must not impose his/her beliefs on the students only recognize the belief systems of the students and take those beliefs into consideration as context in which student's learn.

### **Teachers as Education Agents**

In addition to family and church, teachers like **Terri's** science teacher, Mr. Powers, spoke with her "adult to adult. . . He'd make fun of the way gringos spoke Spanish and he'd talk Spanish to the other kids . . . while introducing **Terri** to Spanish "slang and stuff."<sup>47</sup> Today, **Terri** is the first in her family to go to college and is planning to teach Spanish. Mr. Powers introduced and modeled respect for his students while urging them to do their best work, **Terri** described him as strict but caring, and she wants to be just like him. Other participants described teachers who taught them life-lessons, for example, **Jill's**<sup>48</sup> AP History teacher who befriended her. This teacher watched out for **Jill**, sharing lunch, hiring her to clean her house or to watch her children so that **Jill** could earn money. Sometimes she would buy **Jill** a fast food meal. **Jill** also described how a group of teachers would help them prepare for the academic tests the students took at the end of the year at the nearby community college. On the day the test was scheduled, the teachers prepared individualized

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<sup>47</sup> Terri, *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Jill, *Ibid.*

brown bags for each of the students with things like tissue, sharpened pencils, chocolate for energy, and a note for the nervous student assuring him/her s/he would be just fine. Consider, also, **Kate's** teacher who allowed **Kate** to "just unload (when it) got too much to take"<sup>49</sup> after her mother left. The teacher called **Kate's** aunt and arranged for time for the aunt and niece to talk. **Sarah** also described a favorite English teacher who began each class period with a 5-10 minute free write where **Sarah** learned to love to write. **Sarah** is now preparing to be an English teacher. Respect and thoughtfulness, along with awareness of the student's lives, in addition to challenging them to do their very best, seem to describe the teachers' behavior that the most helped the students regarding learning to live.

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

How do we make it possible for all girls to learn the lessons of the challenged without having to experience such difficulties as anorexia or the death of a mother? What lessons could teachers provide the "protected" and "supported" girls as they grow to meet life? How do we educate the "protected" to be more courageous, support them to take incremental risks to express their truths, to think constructively, to look beyond their parents and church or the fear of making mistakes that serve as information and guidance? How do we acknowledge the smaller steps that "supported" girls take on the way to autonomy?

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<sup>49</sup> Kate Interview by the author, December 7, 2004

Teachers can shape their elementary and secondary classroom; they can foster relationships among and between students. Teachers can sponsor sports teams or competitive swimming, music lessons and performance, providing opportunities to make choices. A key seems to be helping a student find one thing they can pursue, something that can challenge them to excel. For example, **Stephanie** had music, **Kate** had softball and band, **Abby** had her second grade teacher who was also her swim coach, and **Donna** had her teachers offering the academic test that marked her eligibility for academic summer camps that were so critical to her access to college and to knowing other American Indians who had been or wanted to go to college. I gleaned these pedagogies from the young women's stories. Class work was never described as teaching the girl to live, but extra-curricular activities were often detailed, noting the importance of teachers understanding the "context"<sup>50</sup> within which they teach.

In addition to what we can teach preparing teachers, university teacher education programs must approach their young students as women who are themselves growing and learning to live wisely and well, to discriminate among choices, indeed sometimes to recognize that they have choices and options. Universities can provide experiences that challenge young women preparing to be teachers, along with opportunities to reflect on experience and possible mistakes, to prioritize and claim

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<sup>50</sup> Joan Wink, *Critical Pedagogy Notes from the Real World Third Edition*, (Boston: Pearson, 2005, 1-21.

autonomy. Teacher education programs can urge women students to pursue interests and passions, learn divergently and relate to family and friends as the teacher prepares to become partners with at least one parent of their elementary or secondary students. Experience designed to build courage and self-assertion is important for both girls growing into women and for women preparing to be teachers. These experiences help them come into authentic voice. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule discuss their research speaking in “authentic voice. . . women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and . . . the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined.”<sup>51</sup> Authentic voice is the goal.

I have examined life-wisdom themes in order to make explicit that these eight themes are the curriculum that the challenged girls have learned in order to live wisely and well. The protected and supported girls have learned only some of these life-wisdom themes. Teacher education programs can provide tasks for the “supported girls” as they develop their authentic voice so that not all girls have to go through the experiences the challenged girls had to go through to learn to live wisely and well. Girls should not have to have a drug-addicted mother to learn to speak authentically. Girls should not have to be dyslexic or experience anorexia or poverty in order to develop courage, assert herself or to be connected

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<sup>51</sup> Mary Field Belenky, Blithe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing the Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, (New York: Basic Books, 1997) 214-229.

with relationships. Education programs can provide challenging experiences with connected teachers so the girls develop the ability to talk or to talk back to the teacher to speak their truth to power. Educators can encourage girls to view challenges as opportunities to build themselves. However, as **Jill** said, “When you don’t have another option, you just do it”<sup>52</sup> indicating that teachers can provide challenging opportunities, but they cannot do the work for the girls. The girls must rise to the occasion themselves as the writings of Wollstonecraft and Rich teach.

Belenky, et al. introduce the idea of “connected teaching” for girls and women students “which helps women develop authentic voices.”<sup>53</sup> In the spirit of Paulo Freire’s notion of inquiry and praxis<sup>54</sup> they describe a teacher as a “mid-wife, one who will help students articulate and expand their latent knowledge to draw out knowledge in the learner’s head . . . to assist students in giving birth to their own ideas, in making their own knowledge explicit and elaborating it.”<sup>55</sup> A connected teacher’s authority is based “not on subordination but on cooperation”;<sup>56</sup> she welcomes diverse opinions in conversation.<sup>57</sup> Belenky, et al. quotes Nel Noddings describing the relation between the caring teacher and her students.

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<sup>52</sup> *Jill, Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Belenky et al; Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Paulo Freire in Belenky et al; Ibid., 217.*

<sup>55</sup> *Belenky, et al; Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid., 227.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid., 223.*

I do not need to establish a lasting, time-consuming personal relationship with every student. What I must do is to be totally and nonselectively present to the student --- to each student --- as she addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total.<sup>58</sup>

Belenky, et al. also acknowledge that women who come into authentic voice have been producers as children and young adults in addition to consumers.<sup>59</sup> In my childhood I learned to sew, I produced clothes that I wore. My mother taught my cousin Mary to sew a dress when she visited one summer during our high school years. Reflecting on that today, Mary acknowledged that it was that experience that gave her the courage to major in home economics education. She completed the degree long ago and taught high school for twenty years. Several of the participants in my study produced music, one competed in swim meets, and another babysat with a special needs girl. **Jill** worked to support herself from the time she was sixteen. These **challenged** and **supported** girls were producers.

Opportunities may provide a chance to make personal decisions. For example, when Holly wasn't chosen for pom squad she chose basketball as an extracurricular activity where she would meet friends and learn divergently. When she broke her wrist so that she couldn't play

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<sup>58</sup> Nel Noddings in Belenky et al; *Ibid*, 225.

<sup>59</sup> Belenky et al; *Ibid.*, 162-163.

basketball she continued to seek options and make decisions until she found the yearbook staff, a place to belong, to build friendships, and to learn divergently. Teachers, whether at the high school or college level, can provide incremental challenges or problem solve with the student so the student sees options to tasks that require the student to stretch as far as possible. Or the teacher may encourage the student so far that she rebels on her own behalf, to tell the teacher she has stretched far enough, that she has learned the lesson. I as a daughter had been a “good girl,” following the precepts of the church of my childhood and of my parents, but when I was an adult, responsible for my own life as well as my children’s, when I was far enough away to do my own thinking without rebelling in my parents’ face, I spoke up, I made my stand, I spoke authentically. We can educate teachers to respect their students, to give their students undivided attention at times, and to help the student see options open to her, but not to do the work for the student. This moves girls toward the development of authentic voice and learning to live wisely and well.

### **Future Research**

Finding that multiple education agents are partners for teachers as they educate their students offers another research topic, that of Community Schools. Community Schools are also called Full Service Schools or schools who staff with a social worker who counsel and identifies resources for the students in need. Community Schools partner

with organizations and agencies in their communities to meet the needs of the student and even needs of the student's family(s). For example, when the school nurse in a Title I school with families at or near the poverty line and whose first language is not English may find elementary students with dental cavities. *If* she practices in a Community School, the nurse will know about the agencies such as the Southeast Area Health Organization in the town that provides dental clinics on a sliding scale for families who are poor and who speak Spanish as their first language. If the school does not function as a Community School, she may only be able to tell the elementary student to “tell your mother to take you to the dentist” without acknowledging the poverty and language barriers with which the mother must cope. Some Community Schools collaborate with dentists or organizations in the area to bring a dental clinic staffed by volunteers into the school on a regular basis; the partnerships are a result of students' documented needs. Medicaid may even pay for health care if the family meets the requirements. I am cursorily familiar with this type of Full-Service School and it is only one example of outcomes that are possible when the health, mental-health, and children's services community form intentional partnerships with schools on behalf of their students and families' needs. Jane Addams's Hull House<sup>60</sup> is a historical model that can be used for the development of Community Schools. For example, the leaders at Hull House “maintained three baths in the basement of Hull

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<sup>60</sup> Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House with Autobiographical Notes*, (New York: Bedford/St.Martin's, 1999), 163.

House for the use of the neighborhood” and established from the tenement-house dwellers that there were only “three baths in the adjacent third square mile.” Addams and Hull House residents worked with the City of Chicago and a land-owner with a city lot nearby, to provide the first public bath from the “small appropriation of ten thousand dollars.”<sup>61</sup> This is an example of an early twentieth century organization meeting the needs of their community. A research question for a study with existing Community Schools or Full-Service Schools would be how have they expanded existing resources to meet the needs of their students and families? Jane Roland Martin’s Schoolhome,<sup>62</sup> from which I have taken ideas throughout this study, is another concept of school that could meet needs of today’s students and today’s families. What other multiple education agents can school administration develop for their student body? We know the theory, but what is the experience of Full-Service or Community Schools and how can we provide leadership for schools to meet student’s needs that influence their learning. Economic poverty makes needs apparent but needs that can be met through collaboration may be present in all income levels.

### **Conclusion**

The lessons learned from this research focus two areas: lessons for students preparing to be teachers and lessons as they affect girls. I will

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Martin, 1997, *Ibid.*

address students preparing to be teachers first. In addition to the lessons regarding the subject the teacher is teaching, it is important that university foundations courses prepare student teachers to achieve the golden mean for care, concern, connection, as well as nurturing avoiding total separation from students or smothering them as Martin describes so effectively in the *Schoolhome*.<sup>63</sup> The development of teachers' courage, loyalty and self assertion in order to cultivate her/his voice is also important in teacher-student relationships. Student teachers can personally benefit from understanding the healthy development of adolescent girls, which includes the individual's awareness of self, her dating/romantic relationships, her sexual identity, as well as her social relationships. This prepares the teacher to understand a comprehensive concept of girls' sexual health.

Conclusions regarding the girls' learning begin with understanding that experience is the key to a girls' learning to live, experience that gives them opportunities to make intelligent, authentic, autonomous, imaginative choices including mistakes. The girls learned to live from parents, teachers, coaches, music teachers, church youth leaders, friends, and friend's families. Each affected in some way the lives of all fourteen girls whom I interviewed. They encouraged the girls' imagination, risk taking, decision-making and confrontation of mistakes. These various relationships modeled living and the girls closely observed. For example, **Stephanie's** decision to learn something from every "stand partner" with

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

whom she played cello. **Stephanie** said, “I was more engaged and life was more fun and interesting that year.” Partnerships between teachers and a mother or father increases the girls’ chances for successes in life and may increase her resources. In the event the girl doesn’t have a parent, a teacher can increase the girls’ resources by befriending them, as Laird<sup>64</sup> defines befriending, “to encourage girls’ and young women’s growing capacities and responsibility for learning to love themselves and others, including the non-human natural world, to survive and thrive despite their troubles.” It doesn’t require intimate relationships with all one hundred and twenty students, a high school teacher may have, but instead demands the teacher “be totally and non-selectively present to the student . . . as she addresses [them],”<sup>65</sup> one individual at a time which necessitates a significant amount of a teacher’s personal energy. Laird’s befriending involves putting girls in the way of other relationships from which they can learn; she recognizes the limited amount of emotional strength any one teacher can command at any one time. When I was teaching, a mentoring teacher advised me to choose one student a year that I would invest my energy and offer to help. Befriending can multiply such relationships. The golden mean for care, neither coldness nor excess of indulgence is a wise balance with all students.

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<sup>64</sup> Laird 2004, *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>65</sup> Belenky, *Ibid*, 227.

These teacher perceptions have the potential to dramatically affect the **challenged**, the **supported**, and **protected** girls' lives. However, the teaching aims required are different for each group. The **challenged** require befriending as **Jill** was befriended by her AP history teacher and as **Kate** was befriended by her teacher who noticed one day, "**Kate** just couldn't take it anymore." The teacher called **Kate's** aunt to arrange a talk between niece and aunt. The **protected** and **supported** require nurturing challenges<sup>66</sup> such as **Stephanie** experienced through music, playing the cello and as **Kate** was challenged with softball and playing the clarinet. The challenges for the **protected** and **supported** girls include encouragement to imagine, take risks, to make decisions, to confront mistakes and to be adventurous in learning.

I propose we reframe the idea that we must protect girls, from **protection** to **support**, as each girl imagines options available to her, as she struggles with the challenges life brings her, as she recognizes, imagines, and takes risks, while pursuing interests and passions. Teachers must not protect girls from mistakes but help them to learn from their experiences, encourage them to learn divergently, seeking adventure in new activities as well as imaginative options. Finally, a teacher can play a large role in encouraging friendships, girls relating to male and female friends as well as family. As we reframe **protection** to **support**, a teacher can understand that it is "my job to let my students make their own mistakes." Often a student's most dramatic lessons result from their

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<sup>66</sup> Laird, 2004, *Ibid.*

mistakes. This reframe can make all the difference in the environment we provide girls as they learn to live wisely and well.

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## Appendix I

### Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Research Regarding Girls' Learning to Live

This study is entitled *Coming of Age in Oklahoma: What Diverse Girls' Think about Learning to Live Wisely and Well*. The person directing this project is Deborah Shinn, a doctoral student in Educational Studies at the College of Education Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Susan Laird, Ph.D. is chairperson of the doctoral committee.

This study examines life meaning created by diverse adolescent women through interactions with family and friends, church and school communities. What do they learn; from whom do they learn, what are others means of transmitting knowledge of living wisely and well and what are the girls' learning strategies in order to learn to live? How do the girls define wisely and well? Implications from this work will be meaningful for schools, teachers and families as well as churches and organizations that serve adolescent girls.

**Age:** \_\_\_\_19; \_\_\_\_20; \_\_\_\_21; \_\_\_\_other

**Residence:** \_\_\_\_born and reared in Ok; \_\_\_\_lived in OK \_\_\_\_ years

The interview will be audiotaped, take up to two hours, and conducted on the OU Campus in Collings Hall between the end of the Fall 04-05 semester and March 1. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate or stop at any time. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. All information you provide will remain strictly confidential and released only with explicit written permission.

Yes, I would like to volunteer to participate in this study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Campus Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Permanent Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ female

Return to Deborah Shinn, 271-3390, 4701 Larissa Lane, OKC, OK 73112, [Deborah-shinn@ouhsc.edu](mailto:Deborah-shinn@ouhsc.edu)

## Appendix II

### Demographics

**Residence Location:** \_\_\_\_\_ rural; \_\_\_\_\_ urban; \_\_\_\_\_ suburban;  
\_\_\_\_\_ town population 3,000 or less; \_\_\_\_\_ city 100,000 or less;  
name of town \_\_\_\_\_

**Race & Ethnicity:** \_\_\_\_\_ European American, \_\_\_\_\_ African American;  
\_\_\_\_\_ American Indian, \_\_\_\_\_ Asian-American; \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic; **If Hispanic:**  
\_\_\_\_\_ Mexican American, \_\_\_\_\_ Puerto Rican American, \_\_\_\_\_ Cuban  
American, \_\_\_\_\_ Other.

**Optional: Sexual Identity:** \_\_\_ Heterosexual, \_\_\_ Lesbian, \_\_\_ Bisexual,  
\_\_\_ Transgendered, \_\_\_ Questioning.

## **Appendix III**

### **Interview Schedule**

Collings, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Office, tape recorder with microphone and 90 minute tapes.

Thank you for agreeing to this interview.

#### **1. The Account**

Provide an overview of the research. An educational philosopher, Jane Roland Martin, has recently written a book *The Schoolhome Rethinking Schools for Changing Families*. In it, chapter four is titled “Learning to Live.” Her position is that schools today need to help children learn to live life. What do girls need to “learn to live?” I am also using Deborah Tolman’s work as direction for this study, an article “Femininity as a Barrier to Healthy Sexuality” in which she surveys and interviews young women regarding their views and sexual behaviors. She concludes that femininity is a barrier to adolescent girls’ healthy sexuality. I will interview young women between the ages 19 to 21 who agree to reflect back on their teenage years ages 11-19 and their experiences growing up.

I will offer the interviewee a bottle of water or juice in order to create a relaxed environment hoping that we can approach the interview in a comfortable manner.

## 2. The Consent Form

Read and sign, provide one copy for the interviewee and retain signed copy for record. Guarantee confidentiality and anonymity of information; the participant can stop at any time.

## 3. Orienting Questions

As we make eye contact I will ask the young woman to “picture yourself as the 11-year-old you were.” What year was that? Who did you live with? Where did you go to school? Did you have brothers and sisters, friends? Did you go to church, Girl Scouts, play sports? What do you think this 11-year-old-girl thinks learning to live means?

## 4. Procedures to be followed in the interview:

I will use nondirective methods – to catch a glimpse of the girls’ thought world. I will respond with a clue taking clue process. I will encourage the interviewee to take an active role, asking questions, making suggestions about the study – being a collaborator.

We will fill in a demographics sheet.

I will then tell the interviewee “*I want to hear your story about how you learned to live.*”<sup>1</sup> I want to hear about where you lived, your family, your friends, your school, church and community. I want to hear how you learned to live, from whom you learned, what strategies you used to make things work for you.

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<sup>1</sup> I.E. Karpiak. “As if the Weir had Burst: How Story Transforms in Adult Education” (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: SOPHE, University of Oklahoma, September 25, 2004).

If the interviewee does not respond to “I want to hear your story about how you learned to live” I will continue the interview with an oral version of “clustering,” let your mind complete the sentence, “As an adolescent I learned to live. . . “ Write your thoughts, your free associations, your brainstorming by drawing lines from the center circle, writing your thoughts and then drawing circles around your words. As she completes the clustering process I will ask her to tell me about her clusters.

I will also have a circle and ask her to fill in the pie answering the question who taught you to live? Give the largest portion of the pie to the most influential person in your adolescent life. She can do this orally if preferred.

5. Ending the interview: Thank you for being a part of my study. I hope to have the analysis completed early Spring Semester 2005. May I contact you then for a report of the results and a focus group with all the participants?

6. Field Notes: To be done immediately following the interview. Capture the interviewer’s thoughts, feelings, and memories, and remember all that comes to mind. Capture any “going out the door” disclosures by the interviewee.

7. Journal: During the data collection phase of this dissertation, I, the researcher, will keep a journal of musings and thoughts by clustering and allowing the creative process to occur and capture it.

8. Transcription: I will begin the day of the interview.

## Appendix IV Interview Dates

### 7 Clear cases

Name	Interview Date	Race	Class*	Religion
Jill	February 4, 2005	African American	Working	Baptist
Diane	December 2, 2004	Hispanic	Working	Catholic
Holly	December 9, 2004	Anglo American	Working	Baptist
Terri	December 8, 2004	Anglo American	Working	None
Kate	December 7, 2004	Anglo American	Working	Christian
Donna	February 24, 2005	American Indian	Working	Powwows
Stephanie	March 11, 2005	Anglo American	Middle	Methodist

### 1 Contrary Case

Name	Interview Date	Race	Class*	Religion
Cathy	December 2, 2004	Anglo American	Middle	Baptist

### 6 Borderline Cases

Name	Interview Date	Race	Class*	Religion
Ellie	February 22, 2005	Anglo American	Middle	Baptist
Jessie	March 2, 2005	Anglo American	Middle	Pres/Catholic
Abby	February 25, 2005	Anglo American	Middle	Unidentified Church
Sarah	February 22, 2005	Anglo American	Middle	Baptist
Hayden	March 3, 2005	Anglo American	Middle	Baptist
Jane	February 28, 2005	American Indian & Anglo American	Working	Pentecostal

\* Apparent class

## Appendix V

### **Golden Mean Analysis of Eight Life-Wisdom Themes** **Describing Adolescent Girls' Learning to Live Wisely and Well** ©

<b>Deficit Avoidance or Not Enough</b>	<b>Golden Mean Life-Wisdom Themes</b>	<b>Excess Preoccupation or Overcompensation</b>
Paralyzed	Addresses challenges (e.g., dyslexia, poverty, absent mother)	Obsesses, over-challenges, becomes self-destructive
Lack of reflection, avoids examination	Reflects on experiences or mistakes	Preoccupation with perfection, immobilized, going over and over past "mistakes"
Avoids risk	Recognizes and is willing to take risks, risking from within	Recklessness
Follows rules	Prioritizes, claims autonomy	Lacks organization, follows no rules
Hopeless	Imagines & laughs	Fantasizes
Lacks passion, is sluggish	Pursue interests & passions	Over-attempts and may overachieve
Learns only requirements	Learns divergently, seeks new activities & adventures	Driven by adventure and thrills
Avoids sustained relationships, both family and friendships	Relates to family and friends	Preoccupation with family and friends, cannot be alone

### Golden Mean Analysis of Girls' Learning to Live Wisely and Well

<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Martin's Virtues Golden Mean<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Excess</b>
Cowardice	Courage	Foolhardiness
Betrayal	Loyalty	Blind allegiance
Passivity	Self-assertion	Aggressiveness
Total separation	Connection	Codependency
Coldness	Caring	Excess of indulgence
Disinterest	Concern	Self-sacrifice
Separation or neglect	Nurturing	Smothering

	<b>Golden Mean: Tolman's<sup>3</sup> Female Adolescent Health</b>	
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Golden Mean Individual</b>	<b>Excess</b>
Represses sexuality or is asexual	Experience fully sexual feelings, develop a sense of comfort with own sexuality.	Profess to feel what is expected/supposed to feel
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Golden Mean Dating/Romantic Relationships</b>	<b>Excess</b>
Choose only family approved partner	Feels entitled and free to choose a partner, regardless of race, class, gender, ableness or sexual orientation	Engages in sex promiscuously; fears intimacy

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Tolman, *Ibid.*

Avoids talking to partner about sexual feelings and thoughts	Communicates with partner about sexuality	Has no personal boundaries
Lacks awareness of personal needs	Balances awareness of own needs and feelings with sensitivity and respect for needs and feelings of partner	Lacks sensitivity regarding partner
Lacks assertiveness or awareness regarding personal choices	Makes active choices in consensual sexual and romantic contexts	Accepts partner's choices without respect for own needs
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Social Relationships Golden Mean</b>	<b>Excess</b>
Makes or keeps no friends, avoids communication regarding sexuality with parents or siblings	Relates effectively with close friends, peers, older friends, teammates, siblings, parents, teachers, counselors & church members etc who offer emotional and social support	Self discloses without boundaries
Tolerates abusive sexual & social relationships	Makes safe choices about sexuality and relationships	Exposes self to violent sexual & social relationships
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Sociocultural/Sociopolitical Golden Mean</b>	<b>Excess</b>
Lacks awareness of access to condoms, &	Accesses information and materials to sustain sexual health (condoms,	Denies need for protection to sustain sexual health

contraceptives	contraceptives, knowledge)	
Lacks awareness of information	Accesses information about sexual expression besides sexual intercourse	Aware of only intercourse as sexual expression
Suffers neglect (passive)	Accesses violence-free, safe home & relationships	Suffers abuse (active)
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Body &amp; Food Issues<sup>4</sup> Golden Mean</b>	<b>Excess</b>
Deprecates body-self	Accepts body-self	Perfects body-self
Separates from body-self	Attends to my body, listens to my body	Compares self to images in the media and often finds self lacking
Thinks, feels ashamed and afraid of eating, weight & appetite	Manages & attends to my healthy body	Over-diets, vomits or over-exercises, fasts to feel strong, often feels out of control.

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<sup>4</sup> Overeaters Anonymous, <http://www.oa.org/index.htm>.

**Appendix VI**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH BEING CONDUCTED UNDER THE**  
**AUSPICES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA – NORMAN CAMPUS**

**INTRODUCTION:** This study is entitled *Coming of Age in Oklahoma: What Diverse Girls' Think about Learning to Live Wisely and Well?* The person directing this project is **Deborah Shinn a doctoral candidate in Educational Studies in the College of Education. Susan Laird, Ph.D. is chairperson** of the doctoral committee. This document defines the terms and conditions for consenting to participate in this study.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY:** This study examines life meaning created by diverse adolescent women through interactions with family and friends; church and school communities. What do they learn; from whom do they learn, what are other's means of transmitting knowledge of living wisely and well and what are the girls' learning strategies in order to learn to live? How do the girls define wisely and well? Implications from this work will be meaningful for schools and families as well as churches and organizations that serve adolescent girls.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** The potential risks are becoming aware of overwhelming feelings of sadness, happiness or confusion. Benefits include increased awareness of life lived as an adolescence which serves adults, especially teachers as they prepare to teach girls.

**CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION:** Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. Furthermore, the participant may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Findings will be presented in aggregate form with no identifying information to ensure confidentiality. Audio tapes will be destroyed after transcription, pseudonyms will be used throughout the written copy and transcriptions will be destroyed after data is fully analyzed so that total anonymity is achieved.

**AUDIO TAPING OF STUDY ACTIVITIES:** To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. Participants have the right to refuse to allow such taping without penalty. Please select one of the following options.

- ☐ I consent to the use of audio recording.
- ☐ I do not consent to the use of audio recording.

**CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:** Participants may contact Deborah Shinn, daytime (405) 271-3390 or evening (405) 947-8355 or Susan Laird, Ph.D. via email [lairdou@yahoo.com](mailto:lairdou@yahoo.com) with questions about the study.

For inquires about rights as a research participant, contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at (405) 325-8110 or [irb@ou.edu](mailto:irb@ou.edu).

**PARTICIPANT ASSURANCE:** I have read and understand the terms and conditions of this study and I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research study. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature