TELLING STORIES, EMPOWERING LIVES: THE ROLE OF PERSONAL NARRATIVES ON FEMALE SOCIALIZATION AT THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL

by

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Abstract

Storytelling is essential; myths, legends and fairy tales give significance to our existence. Stories are also a primary tool of culture through which socialization occurs and a way in which children learn the societally defined scripts of adulthood. Children need stories, myths and fairy tales to help them interpret their own lives, and they need to resist patterns in known stories which reinforce and preserve adverse cultural stereotyping. This study explored how replacing existing fairy tales and established literature with the self-narrative storytelling process at the middle elementary school level might empower females to seek alternative definitions and find their own voices. Storytelling sessions with grade five female students attending an inner-city school were observed, first focusing on fairy tales and favourite existing stories and progressing to the sharing of personal stories based on life and experience. The ultimate aim was for each girl to create an empowering self-narrative.
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Chapter I

Introduction

The lure of a story is strong.

Friendships begin as we exchange our stories with each other. We go to see movies and plays and operas to watch a story unfold before our eyes. We gossip with our friends and trade stories about unusual occurrences. We read novels, privately to ourselves, to come to know someone else's story. We are educated and educate through stories.

We see our life experiences as our story. Sometimes our lives are comedies and sometimes they can be tragedies. When we relate our stories to others we group them in different categories. Some make us look like wonderful people, some stories cast us as victims, and sometimes we choose not to share the stories that portray us as villains.

Our stories are important to us. How we see our story unfold has profound influence on how we live the rest of our lives. Do we see ourselves as unlucky, losers, dumb or do we see ourselves as heroines, winners, survivors? How we choose to describe ourselves and interpret the events that occur in our lives, in essence how we tell our stories, and believe our stories to be, have a huge impact on our lives and the lives of those around us. In the telling or dialoguing of our story we provide metaphors for processes in developing meaning from our experiences and constructing our world views.
In storying, we search for and create connections among the signs and dialogues we have experienced. Rosen [1984] says that from the endless stream of experiences in which we are constantly involved, we select, organize, and bring meaning to our experiences through storying. We invent beginnings and endings to create a meaningful sequence that we can share with others.[1]

According to Rosen perceiving and inventing a story is inadequate; the story "must be verbalized, it must be told. In telling the story to others - expressing our understanding in some form - we not only bring the story to life, but we also make new connections and create new meanings."[2]

Anthropologists believe that the need to narrate is a basic individual drive. Storying is an essential component of humanity; it defines us as a people. Stories educate, explain and transmit culture.[3] They provide us with a way of seeing who we are and how we fit into our society. They have the potential to shape children and society.

Stories are also a primary tool of culture, a way in which socialization occurs and a way in which children learn the societally defined and accepted scripts of adulthood.[4] Masculinity and femininity may not be inherent properties of individuals but structural properties of our society arising from social action. The values of the dominant culture have a decisive effect on the problem of female and male self-definition.
Jean Baker Miller states that "A dominant group, inevitably, has the greatest influence in determining a culture's overall outlook - its philosophy, morality, social theory and even its science."[5] Children need stories to help interpret their lives but females need to resist the patterns of known stories that define 'femininity' [as defined by patriarchy] as the goal of their growth.

What Is Being Studied and Why?

This study will explore how replacing existing fairy tales and established literature with the 'self-narrative' storytelling process at middle elementary school levels may empower females to seek alternative definitions and find their own voices. This may enable girls to resist the patriarchal dominant-subordinate model of societal interaction in favour of the partnership model[6], a model based on equality. Specifically it will examine how and what elements of the self-narrative process may be most useful in challenging patriarchal female assumptions and definitions. It will also investigate how the collective group experience and group dynamics effect the process of storying. Empowering children to collectively self-reflect may eventually foster the emergence of a non-discriminatory partnership-model society.
The Question
How can the self-narrative storytelling process, in middle elementary school, empower females to recognize and resist the overwhelming stereotyping imposed by patriarchy, prevent loss of self-esteem and empower girls to self-define and self-script their own identities and destinies?

The Sub-Questions
Why are present societal conditions problematic for females? How do established stories and fairy tales function as tools of the dominant patriarchal culture intent on preserving the existing social structures? What elements of the self-narrative are most useful in helping females resist patriarchal stereotyping? What sort of self-narrative themes are most useful in cultivating positive self-images?
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Problematic Societal Conditions

Females are societally indoctrinated from birth to be subordinate to males. This inequality results in societal disharmony; both males and females are victims. Recent studies suggest that elementary school females are losing their self-esteem compared to their male counterparts.[7]

Peggy Orenstein in her work School Girls examines the results of the American Association of University Women's [AAUW] most extensive national study on gender and self-esteem. Three thousand boys and girls aged 9-15 were surveyed on attitudes toward self, school, family and friends. The results were horrifying. "Passage into adolescence is not marked by menarche alone. It is marked by a loss of confidence in herself and her abilities, especially maths and science. It is marked by a scathingly critical attitude toward her body and a blossoming sense of personal inadequacy." [8] According to the AAUW the most dramatic gender gap in self-esteem is centered in the area of competence. Researchers concur that a drop in confidence precedes a drop in achievement.

Jean Baker Miller, in her work Toward a New Psychology of Women, postulates that women are socialized by society into becoming subordinates whose main function is to service males.[9] Females will not advance until they join together in cooperative action. Providing a forum where females can be "authentic" is
empowering. Miller also contends that personal creativity is a crucial factor in resisting patriarchal domination.

In *Meeting at the Crossroads*,[10] Brown and Gilligan found that as females grew older there was a pronounced loss of voice and an inability to take seriously their own experience and respond authentically to their feelings and thoughts. The 'crossroads' between girls and women is marked by a series of disconnections or disassociations which put girls psychologically at risk.

Belenky, Clichy, Goldberger, and Tarule, in their book, *Women's Ways of Knowing*,[11] use voice and loss of voice as metaphors to describe the extreme sex role stereotyping that afflicts women. Silent women are powerless, while women who find or gain their voice have been empowered. They believe that educators can help women develop their own 'authentic' voices if they emphasize connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment and collaboration over debate, and if they accord respect to knowledge that emerges from firsthand experience.

In *The Girl Within*, Emily Hancock [12] identifies a turning point in a woman's life, the period between eight and ten. Prepuberty females develop a distinct and vital sense of self, which they lose in the process of growing up female. Pubertal changes in males result in an increased ability to dominate, while females' mandate becomes one of nurturing and restraint.
Marcia Harris, in her article "Women Teaching Girls: The Power and the Danger", [13] contends that women teachers must help female students to recognize and resist the false images of themselves and the world.

**Therapeutic Elements of Storytelling**

Storytelling, with its many facets, can have enormous benefits. Implemented in elementary school, storytelling has the potential of being a preemptive therapy, preparing children with an understanding of who they are and how they fit into society. Silenced people, people with no narrative to guide them, suffer from isolation from others and from self.

Marie Winn in her work, *Children Without Childhood*, discusses how psychiatrists have observed a marked increase in the occurrence of childhood depression, a condition considered antithetical to childhood. "Perhaps this phenomenon is at least somewhat connected with the current sense of uselessness and alienation that children feel, a sense that play may once have kept in abeyance." [14]

The art of storytelling goes back to the beginning of human time. Some believe it to be the glue of humanity. The peoples of the Palaeolithic Period, through the wall painting in their cave sanctuaries indicate "that very early in human history the human will to live found expression and reassurance through a variety of rituals and myths..." [15] Storytelling or narrative is the only art form that exists in all human cultures. [16]
Bruno Bettelheim, in his work, *The Uses of Enchantment*, states that the greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives. [17] Bettelheim defines psychological maturity as the individual's understanding of the meaning to one's own life. To achieve this 'psychological maturity' the process must begin in childhood, progressing from a self-centered existence to a belief that one will make a contribution to life. Bettelheim states that "it is obvious to me that if children were reared so life was meaningful to them, they would not need special help."[18]

Psychoanalyst Rollo May, author of *The Cry For Myth*, states:

> Contemporary therapy is almost entirely concerned, when all is surveyed, with the problems of the individual's search for myths. The fact that Western society has all but lost its myths was the main reason for the birth and development of psychoanalysis in the first place. Freud and the divergent therapists made it clear that myths are the essential language in psychoanalysis.[19]

May believes there is an urgent need for myth in today's culture. "Many of the problems of our society including cults and drug addiction, can be traced to the lack of myths which will give us as individuals the inner security we need in order to live adequately in our day."[20] Much of the depression, confusion and disconnection society suffers arises from the lack of narrative context that gives meaning and purpose to life.
I would like to look at four facets of storytelling that I believe to be preemptively therapeutic: gossip, myths, fairytales and self-narrative. Aidan Chambers states that gossip is the most basic form of storytelling. [21] It is a direct descendant of the practice of oral history and it is societally considered as a female pastime. It comes as no surprise that this oral culture has been denigrated by the dominant patriarchy, referred to derogatorily as "gossip". Belenky et al., in their work *Women's Ways of Knowing*, state "'Women's talk' in both style [hesitant, qualified, question-posing] and content [concern for the everyday, the practical, and the interpersonal] is typically devalued by men and women alike."[22]

Mary Ellen Brown states that "like folk culture, women's culture is practised informally outside established institutions and is recognised, though differently characterized, by both insiders [women] and outsiders [men, dominant institutions]."[23] Although gossip is denigrated by the dominant group it has enabled women to connect with each other by their shared readings of events and people around them and has created a major strength for women. Through their shared dialogue an opportunity to see a larger more inclusive framing of the world becomes possible. Gossip concerns the personal, the particular and often the petty, but it is not a trivial activity. "Gossip like poetry and fiction, penetrates to the truth of things. The explicit information gossips share
concerns the behavior of other people; but explicitly, gossipers
tell each other about themselves by showing how they interpret the
information they share."[24]

In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky et al. believe that
gossip proceeds from trust and builds trust. [25] It is the very
nature of gossip that connects people and cements the connection by
the sharing experience of the dialogue: you discourse 'to' a
person but you gossip 'with' someone. This connective ability has
important implications to the well-being of individuals and
society. Dr. Stephen J. Bergman in his article, "Men's
Psychological Development: A Relational Perspective" believes that
the seeds of misery in men's lives are planted in their
disconnection from others, in isolation, violation and dominance,
and in relationships that are not mutually empowering.[26] Unlike
girls who engage in 'gossip', attending and responding to others' emotional states, boys are actively discouraged from this empathy building discourse. Lack of empathy leaves only comparison and competition, and maintains the dominant/subordinate status-quo. Women are not the only victims: in patriarchy men may also be victims. "Hierarchy means that there's always someone more successful and more powerful, and men are haunted by failure."[27]

There is a greater prevalence of clinical depression among women. Belenky et al. attribute this to the fact that as girls approach womanhood they are expected to curtail their voice and
become simply listeners. "The continued injunction against articulating needs, feelings, and experiences must constrain the development of hearts and minds, because it is through speaking and listening that we develop our capacities to talk and to think things through."[28] When men do all the talking they too ultimately suffer. "The frequent failure of men to cultivate their capacity for listening has a profound impact on their capacity for parenting, for it's mothers more than fathers who are most likely to still their own voices so they may hear and draw out the voices of their children."[29]

Encouraging children to share their feelings and insights to events surrounding them enables them to empathize and connect with each other. What patriarchy considers as intellectual dialogue, excluding emotional content, is insufficient in the making of a healthy and happy adult. Children need to share their feelings, dislikes and opinions.

Myths and fairy tales may also be significant therapeutic storytelling tools. Both forms embody the wisdom a society wants to transmit to future generations. Bruno Bettelheim states that these tales and the deep insights they contain have "sustained mankind through the long vicissitudes of its existence, a heritage that is not revealed in any other form as simply, directly, or as accessibly, to children."[30]
A myth is a way of making sense in an often senseless world:
"Myths are narrative patterns that give significance to our
existence."[31] Through the strength of its myths a society can
give its members relief from many neuroses. Rollo May cites the
example of Ancient Greece, a world with empowering myths.

Individuals were able to meet the problems
of existence without overwhelming anxiety
or guilt feeling. Hence we find the
philosophers in those times discussing beauty,
truth, goodness, and courage as values in
human life. The myths freed Plato and
Aeschylus and Sophocles to create their great
philosophic and literary works, which come
down as treasures for us today. [32]

Like gossip, myth is depreciated in present society and we
are constantly reminded that it is 'only' a myth. May contends
that our denial of myths is 'part of our refusal to confront our
own reality and that of our society.'[33] The results are a
fragmented, violent and mentally depressed society.

In his work Dr. May establishes how myths, whether from
Ancient Greece, the Middle Ages, European legend or contemporary
America can provide meaning and structure for people seeking
direction and order in a morally confusing world. Noted
psychiatrist Alfred Adler believed neurosis was caused by a lack of
social interest or the disconnection and isolation of oneself from
society. [34] Adler who was renowned for his great skill in
treating children developed the theory of the 'guiding fiction,'
which Rollo May labels 'a synonym for myth'.[35] It refers to a
significant event in one's early life that the person remembers.
The event is turned into a myth which the person keeps as a guide for his/her life. "The person refers to this guiding fiction down through the subsequent years as the secret myth of oneself." [36]

Bruno Bettelheim believes that myths and fairytales have much in common and are essential in providing children with a sense of the human capacity for struggle and survival. Through most of history a child's intellectual education dealt with myths, religious stories and fairytales. This socializing exposure was integrative.

However, Bettelheim argues that there are differences between myths and fairytales that make the fairytale more beneficial to the young child. Bettelheim contends that myths deal with themes unlocking the mysteries of life. Myths demand the listener attempt to emulate these mythical heroes. Like religious stories and fables, myths attempt to teach correct ways of behaving. They deal with superheroes engaged in majestic struggles; fairytales are presented in a simpler way. Children can easily identify with the characters in fairytales, ordinary people who find themselves in extraordinary situations. The power of the fairytale is that it does have happy endings. "Far from making demands, the fairytale reassures, gives hope for the future, and holds out the promise of a happy ending."[37]
Bruno Bettelheim found that children, regardless of intelligence, found fairytales more satisfying than all other children's stories. Elements of fantasy and transformation appeal to children. His studies have provided fascinating evidence of the essential and therapeutic nature of fairytales. Young children have always dealt with existential problems: today children grow up without the security of an extended family and a cohesive society. Television has further disconnected the family and society from the child. Fairytales help a child make sense out of the turmoil of his or her feelings and create a sense of order in life, and fairytales convey the advantages of a moral education. Fairytales in their difficult struggle and happy ending epitomize the belief that a struggle in life is unavoidable but if one faces and deals with the conflict a happy and successful ending is possible.

Morality is not the issue in these tales, but rather, assurance that one can succeed. Whether one meets life with a belief in the possibility of mastering its difficulties or with the expectation of defeat is also a very important existential problem. [38]

Here lies the greatest preemptive therapy the fairytale provides: the belief that one can conquer the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune"[39] and find happiness. This belief diminishes stress and uncertainty.

Providing children with exposure to myths and fairytales in written and visual form may not be sufficient to ensure therapeutic benefits. There must be dialogue. Dialogue is essential for
reflection to occur; the oral and written forms of language must pass back and forth between individuals sharing reflections and expanding knowledge. Belenky et al. state that such interchanges lead to "ways of knowing" that enable people to enter into the social and intellectual life of their community. "Without them individuals remain isolated from others; and without tools for representing their experiences, people remain isolated from the self."[40]

Unfortunately storytelling has been replaced by television and video games, media that further disconnect the child from society and self.

Not unlike drugs and alcohol, the television experience allows the participant to blot out the real world and enter into a pleasurable and passive state. The television habit distorts the sense of time. It renders their experiences vague and curiously unreal while taking in a greater reality for itself.[41]

There is a serious disparity between a language experience that requires no reciprocal participation and one in which the child must engage actively and alertly. Verbal skill deficiencies have serious consequences. Marie Winn, in her work The Plug-In Drug, states: "The greater the child's verbal opportunities, the greater the likelihood that his language will grow in complexity and his rational verbal thinking abilities will sharpen."[42] Belenky states "concentrating on the written forms of language before the children have developed proficiency in wielding the oral forms is likely to be tragic."[43]
Another harmful danger exists. Before a child learned to read it was difficult for him or her to enter a fantasy world alone. By means of television young children spend substantial portions of their waking time alone, without an adult or caretaker to comfort and help them decode the world around them. The communal experience of storytelling is essential in providing the child with an enduring and beneficial human encounter. This reinforces human connectiveness and interdependence.

The fourth component to storytelling that may be indispensable as a preemptive therapy is the self-narrative. Children telling their own stories is an opportunity for the child to share, explain, communicate, recount, transmit, confide and ultimately understand his or her existence. Self-awareness comes from what Paolo Friere calls 'dialogical encounters with others'.[44] This step is crucial in storytelling. The values of the dominant culture may influence the contents of myths and fairytales, making them problematic and counter-effective and in the process creating unhealthy female self-definitions.

Narrative form has a special place in the growing-up process. On the one hand, storytelling seems particularly important to children as they leave behind the relatively embedded identity of childhood and develop a sense of self in a larger social context; as a process of contextual understanding, personal narrative is one of the ways children identify who they are and how they relate to the culture of which they are part.
But stories are, on the other hand, a primary tool of the culture itself, a way in which socialization takes place and a way in which a child learns the culturally defined roles of adulthood. In the growing up process, narrative is both a powerful cultural tool for reinforcing the status-quo and a powerful personal tool for shaping individual identity.[45]

The implications are evident: children need stories, myths and fairytales, to help interpret their lives, and they need to resist patterns in known stories which reinforce and preserve the dominator-subordinant structure of patriarchy. Encouraged to self-narrate they can examine the destructive elements in their society and critically examine the world they live in together. This communal process could possibly lead to radical change and empowerment. "Ultimately, it is the receiving of the child and hearing what he or she has to say that develops the child's mind and his personhood."[46]
Repressive Elements of Fairy Tales and Myths

Without a doubt myths, legends and fairytales give significance to our existence. We are all influenced by the myths and fairytales we were exposed to as children. In one sense they can become a 'guiding fiction' in one's life. What happens when these stories are encoded with patriarchal bias and perpetuate female oppression?

Do established fairytales empower or encumber girls? How can storytelling enable them to challenge the established status-quo and validate their identity as equals? What type of stories do females need?

Traditionally it has not been fashionable for women to assume the mantle of hero. We are often the 'Prize', or the centre of the dispute. To decide to be the 'hero', [often 'heroine' denotes the passive beauty with a long pointy hat waiting for her knight in shining armor], to even allow ourselves to believe that we can be the hero is a critical first step. We need to start seeing ourselves not as victims of society's cultural beliefs but as heroines able to create change and a better world. As women we are the most qualified to look at how patriarchy frames us and elicit change. This chapter will illustrate through three examples of fairytales how they can be simultaneously therapeutic, empowering and damaging. This chapter will also examine the devastation the fairytale can create for women through its text
and language, and examine how the oral tradition of storytelling and the self-narrative process may empower and encourage girls. "We are without a text and must discover one."[47]

Bettelheim contends that fairytales are works of art. "The fairytale could not have its psychological impact on the child were it not first and foremost a work of art....as with all great art, the fairytale's deepest meaning will be different for each person, and different for the same person at various moments in his life."[48] Jack Zipes in his text, Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairytale, states that "fairy tales and myths hold our attention, we return to them for answers and use them in diverse ways; as private sacred myths, as guiding fictions, as public commercial advertisements." [49]

My son Alex's favourite fairy tale has always been 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. His favourite character in the story is Little Bear. Bettelheim, in his work The Uses of Enchantment, considers this a very meaningful story because it deals symbolically with some of the most important growing up problems of childhood: the search for identity and sibling rivalry.[50] When the story is told from the perspective of Baby Bear, whom Alex loves, Goldilocks is the intruder. She takes away his food, chair and bed: Bettelheim extends that to the fear of losing the love of parents to a sibling.
This is a fascinating analysis because for my son it seems to hold correct. Alex has a twin sister, Vasilikoula, and she is a force to contend with. She's very charismatic, extremely intelligent, brave and wonderful. So is Alex. As twins, comparisons are made and Alex has felt a sibling rivalry that he deals with only on a subconscious level. This fairy tale allows him a healthy way to deal with his feelings of frustration. For him 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' is a therapeutic text; I can still visualize him laughing at the part when Papa Bear hollers and wakens the sleeping Goldilocks who flees for her life and leaves the Three Bears alone again.

My daughter Vasilikoula's favourite fairy tale is 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. Although the townspeople persuade themselves that the Emperor was elegantly costumed, a child possessing an unspoiled vision, showed the people that the Emperor was really naked. I am amazed and happy that she finds this tale so fascinating. To me it reveals a sense of self-confidence in her own ability and intelligence. Already at some primal level she is starting to understand that reality is subjective, subject to social definition, and even as a child she possesses vision and ability. For her this fairy tale is empowering. Yet I have concerns. Vasilikoula is identifying with the 'child'; how will her self-perception of intelligence alter when she begins to identify with 'females' in stories?
When I was a child my favourite fairy tale was "Beauty and the Beast". I was captivated by the romance of the story. The young girl sacrificing herself to protect her father goes to live with the Beast. He is such an ugly and frightful creature but slowly she starts to see his nobler qualities. The beast in return is tamed by her goodness; her love metamorphoses him into not only a man but a Prince. For me, it was a powerful fairy tale that gave significance to my life and became a meaning-making framework.

Bettelheim considers this a 'healing' story.[51] The rose Beauty's father brings back to her symbolizes both his love for her and also an anticipation of her losing her virginity, a "beastly" experience. The story illustrates that their anxieties are unfounded. The beastly experience turns out to be one of deep humility and love.

Beauty and the Beast' offers the child the strength to realize that his fears are the creations of his anxious sexual fantasies; and that may at first seem beast-like, in reality love between woman and man is the most satisfying of all emotions, and the only one which makes for permanent happiness.[52]

According to Dr. Bettelheim no other fairy tale makes it as obvious that a child's oedipal attachment to a parent is natural and the most positive consequence is, during the process of maturation it is transferred and transformed from the parent and concentrated to the lover. The Beast also represents the break between the animal and the higher aspects of man. "It is also the end point of an evolution from a self-centered, immature sexuality
to one that finds its fulfilment in a human relation of deep devotion...the marriage of the Beauty and the Beast is the humanization and socialization of the id by the superego."[53]

Neither Bettelheim nor Campbell see any problematic issues to this fairy tale. For me 'Beauty and the Beast' is a 'sexist' narrative about the framing of women's lives through a male discourse. Here is the problem with fairy tales: their narrative and language perpetuate a female condition that is becoming intolerable in an age where female abuse and denigration is a common occurrence. No matter how romantic I found the fairy tale to be it still encourages a selfless devotion on the part of a nameless 'Beauty'. The theme of young girl as innocent nurturer who can transform a beast through her goodness and love is one that many young girls adopt. The belief that love can change people promotes a false empowerment that may result in women staying with abusive men and perpetuates a sense of illusive hope. At the same time it represents a severely patriarchal attitude of females passing from their father's hands into the hands of their husbands.

For Roland Barthes myth and fairy tale are collective representations that are socially determined and then inverted so as not to appear as cultural artifacts.

Myth consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the 'natural'. What is nothing but a product of class division and its moral, cultural and aesthetic consequences is presented as being 'a matter of course'; under the effect of mythical inversion, the
quite contingent foundations of the utterance become Common Sense, Right Reason, the Norm, General Opinion, in short the doxa [which is the secular figure of the origin]. [54]

Jack Zipes in his text *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale*, agrees with Barthes; he believes the fairy tale as a genre sets parameters for a discourse of the mores, values, gender, and power in the socializing process and how these parameters are frozen and become standardized. "To duplicate a classical fairy tale is to reproduce a set pattern of ideas and images that reinforce a traditional way of seeing, believing and behaving."[55]

The duplicate provides the deeply entrenched modes of thinking, conceiving and believing that provides our life with structure.

Fairy tales were first told by gifted tellers and were based on rituals intended to endow meaning to the daily lives of members of a tribe. Anthropologist Michael Carrithers, in his work, *Why Humans Have Cultures*, contends that humans do not gain their livelihood individually but collectively.

Human beings, in contrast to other social animals, do not just live in relationships, they produce relationships in order to live. In the course of their existence, they invent new ways of thinking and acting - both upon each other and the nature that surrounds them. They therefore produce culture and create history. [56]

Storytelling is crucially important anthropologically and psychologically. Carrithers states that storytelling is perhaps the most powerful human capacity "...which is to understand one's own and other's moods, plans and beliefs, and the metamorphosis of
those mental states, in a long flow of action."[57] Oral folk tales were intended to explain natural occurrences such as the change of seasons, shifts in weather, celebrations of marriage, harvesting, hunting, etc. The emphasis on most folk tales was on communal and collective harmony. The tales came from common experiences and beliefs. They were intimately told, in person, face to face, and they were changed as the beliefs and behaviours of a particular group changed.

Zipes argues that with the rise of literacy and the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century the oral tradition of storytelling underwent an immense revolution. "The oral tales were taken over by a different social class, and the form, themes, production and reception of the tales were transformed."[58] Zipes states that the shift from oral to literal tradition was 'violent' and the violation of oral storytelling was crucial for the development and establishment of the bourgeoisie because it concerned the control of desire and imagination within the symbolic order of western culture. Once recorded in a written form these fairy tales became private and ended the communal aspects of the folk tale. Also during the middle ages few people could read; thus fairy tales became elitist. Zipes contends that they also became another tool in the reinforcement of patriarchy.[59]
Beauty is praised most for her submissiveness, docility, and eagerness to please. Self-sacrificing and virtuous behaviour is 'true' beauty and only true beauty will be rewarded. The self-sacrificing virtues of females are recognized in the story and encouraged. 'Beauty and the Beast' is a classical example of patriarchal bias as it encourages women to maintain their subservient position, while encouraging the [false] belief that these subservient duties are exalted. In this way women are manipulated to collude with their own subordination.

When the folklorists first recorded the fairy tales in written form they included the existing patriarchal and benevolent attitude towards women still seen in Disney cartoons such as 'The Little Mermaid'.[60]

Established fairy tales are a part of our society's ideology, the system of beliefs and assumptions, which socially construct gender definitions. "It is generally true that gender is constructed in patriarchy to serve the interests of male supremacy."[61] This may be dangerous to young girls as they perpetuate a male bias toward women and promote a female self-image based on self-sacrifice.

In virtually all heroic tales the man takes the assertive and active role while the woman remains passive, the prize to be won or fought over, the classical 'damsel in distress'. The heroine is gentle, quiet, unassuming, and of course beautiful. No female beasts are rescued and transformed. In fact 'beastly' women
like Medusa in Greek Mythology are beheaded. Only men are allowed to be animals and be transformed, the framing being that they can get away with animalistic behaviour on the basis of their sex and if they are kissed by a woman or have a woman fall in love with them all can be forgiven. For females there are no second chances in fairy tales. They are expected to be perfect from the beginning. To be good is the only way to have a man in their lives. Thus marriage becomes the successful enactment of a male-designed script. Male culture has built a large mythology around the idea of feminine evil e.g., Eve, Pandora's Box.

And while women and girls can derive strength and inspiration from stories of heroic men, the dearth of similar stories about women leaves many of us believing that should we strive for adventure and self-awareness, we have no alternative but to model ourselves after, or be rescued by - men.[62]

These attitudes affect women adversely; the stereotype of the heroines reinforces the subordinate attitudes toward women in patriarchal cultures. Women are not permitted to have access to myths and fairy tales that portray them as strong, resourceful and courageous. Instead adolescent girls lose their resiliency and optimism. Simone deBeauvoir believed this was because girls came to realize that in their worlds men have the power and their only power came from consenting to become submissive adored objects.[63]

Fairy tales predict the nature of this phenomenon. Females in fairy tales eat poison apples, are pricked by needles and fall asleep for a hundred years. They wait to be rescued by the Prince, become passive and docile creatures and live 'happily' ever after!
The story of Ophelia, from Shakespeare's Hamlet, shows the destructive forces that affect young women. As a girl, Ophelia is happy and free, but with adolescence she loses herself. When she falls in love with Hamlet, she lives only for his approval. She has no inner direction; rather she struggles to meet the demands of Hamlet and her father. Her value is determined utterly by their approval. Ophelia is torn apart by her efforts to please. When Hamlet spurns her because she is an obedient daughter, she goes mad with grief...she drowns in a stream filled with flowers [64].

In fairy tales there is often an absence of mother; the stepmother is always evil, and although she may appear to be beautiful her real face unmasked is ugly. If a woman is not self-sacrificing then she must be villainous [wicked] and will suffer the consequences for her lack of goodness, passivity, and domesticity. An example of this is Snow White's stepmother. In 'Beauty and the Beast' females are taught that the two sisters of Beauty are 'bad' because they enjoy going out and do not sacrifice themselves to go and live with the Beast in order to save their father. They are punished for their wicked ways, not following the patriarchal-designed female script. It is a female witch that causes Sleeping Beauty to fall into her slumber.

Simply the titles of the fairy tales perpetuate a female concentration on looks and body image. No fairy tale heroine is ever fat, ugly or handicapped. Even Cinderella emerges a great beauty once the Fairy Godmother helps her. However, the Fairy Godmother does not have complete power. Males do not relinquish complete authority to females in fairy tales. Instead, her power will only remain until midnight, signifying another male control.
over women and the importance of their being home at a "decent" time.

In the text Man Made Language, Dale Spender defines patriarchal society as one based on the belief "that the male is the superior sex and many of the social institutions and much social practice is then organized so that the belief in male supremacy "comes true"."[65] Spender argues that language plays a major and crucial part in male domination.

Mary Daly asserts it is men who have named the world.[66] In a world where naming and language are power, silence is oppression. Language creates the limits of our reality. It is the way we order, classify, manipulate and understand the world. Language allows us to be a meaningful human community through communication. Language creates our world. Simultaneously it has the capacity to restrict our world as well. Lack of language is also problematic; there is an absence of words for certain feelings and ideas that are female because the male language makers have chosen not to name them. "Since feelings and ideas without words to express them may remain fleeting, inchoate, and unrecognized by the world at large, our languages are less than perfect vehicles for expressing women's most pressing concerns."[67]

Having learned the language of a patriarchal society we have also learned to classify and manage the world in accordance with patriarchal order and to preclude many possibilities for alternative ways of making sense of the world.[68]
This bias has been called 'sexism' in language or androcentric [male centered]. Established fairy tales that have been read and are read by children contain the patriarchal language. They are no longer part of the oral tradition that allows them to be changed by the storyteller, circumstances, and natural evolution. Instead these stories continue to frame the world in favour of only the male sex.

When the bourgeoisie society wrote down the stories they became part of the cultural guarantee of the continuation of the status-quo. The written, classical fairy tale for children and adults reinforces the patriarchal symbolical order based on rigid presumptions of sexuality and gender.

There has always been a tension between the literary and oral traditions. "The oral tales continued and continue to threaten the more conventional and classical tales because they can question, dislodge and deconstruct the written tales."[69] The devaluation of storytelling in our society is not surprising. All forms of oppression encourage people to enlist in their own enslavement and discourage activities that would ultimately lead to freedom and equality.

What's a girl to do? Where can young girls look to see themselves portrayed as heroines and find guiding fictions that empower instead of enslave them? "And how can women create stories of women's lives if they have only male language with which to do so?"[70]
New experiences come when women break the silence and violate patriarchal definitions by talking to each other. "Out of this supportive hearing emerge new words."[71]...and new meanings. The return of oral storytelling in female groups can be therapeutic for females and society as well. The oral process allows females to face the teller, to question and debate and to learn outside the confines of patriarchy. Rollo May, Bruno Bettelheim, Peter Brooks, Joseph Campbell, and Joanne Frye, all agree that humans need stories, fairy tales and myths to provide a framework for their lives. However these established and written texts may not always empower; at times they enslave women to subordinate status. Carolyn Heilbrun states the ultimate anonymity is to be storyless.[72]

The implications for a growing girl are clear; she needs stories to help interpret her life and she needs to resist the patterns of the known stories that define femininity as the goal of her growth. For female empowerment to occur women need to create their own myths and stories in their own words. To create empowering female frameworks two aspects need to be present. The first is that it must be oral and communal; the second that it involve self-narratives.

According to Walter Benjamin "the art of storytelling is coming to an end", which means we are losing the "ability to exchange experiences." The very communicability of experience is
threatened with loss.[73] For Benjamin storytelling is not simply a form of entertainment but it embodies the collective wisdom of the group. With the written word there can be no questioning and there is always room for false interpretations.

Storytelling also means the communication is authentic because it concerns the transmission and sharing of experience. The story cannot escape the imprint of the storyteller and this personal imprint is a valuable commodity in a world that reproduces a million copies of pulp fiction daily.

Peter Brooks, in his work *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling*, states that in oral cultures meaning depends on the context of speech. Writing on the other hand "abolishes context, to create an autonomous discourse, a discourse that one cannot directly question or respond to because it is detached from its author and belongs, strictly speaking, to no one."[74] In an age of mechanical reproduction women need oral storytelling to tell their own lives and to have that generosity reciprocated by another woman telling her own story. This live communication, although denigrated by patriarchy is the means where new definitions and new language can be created. Communicating our stories publicly with the hope that our narratives can make a difference in someone else's life is a compassionate and heroic act. It implies wisdom, counsel, sharing and exchange.
Carolyn Heilbrun states that we live our lives through stories.[75] Helping young girls to see their lives as meaningful stories can create a personal mythology that may help them journey successfully through life. Jean Baker Miller, in her work, Toward a New Psychology of Women, states that females will not advance until they join together in cooperative action. "One exciting aspect of the current ferment by women is the fact that as they struggle for authenticity, they simultaneously illuminate their personal creativity."[76] This personal creativity is a continuing process of bringing forward a changing image of oneself. Significantly the image is self-made and self-changed. Female groups may be able to collectively react to patriarchy and self-define themselves in a nurturing environment. This fosters self-determination and gynacy.

Psychiatrists such as Adler believe that people experience problems when the stories of their lives, as they or others have invented them, do not sufficiently represent their lived experience.[77] The process of storying or restorying their lives is therapeutic. Storytelling groups in elementary schools may benefit and encourage girls to resist societal interpretations of their gender and see their own experiences and stories evolve into empowering legends. To create a better society based on mutualism and interdependence we must encourage young females to see themselves as heroines: capable, intelligent and able to implement. Only through dialogue can this come about.
A critical point in the evolution of patriarchal society is being reached. Educators can empower children, through the preemptive therapeutic qualities of storytelling, to find meaning and a sense of purpose to their lives. The elements of storytelling [gossip, myths, fairy tales and the self-narrative] can invest children with a meaning-making framework that will enable them to self-determine and self-script a happy and productive life. A free society needs constantly to consider and discuss its present reality in light of past traditions and reflect on where it wants to go.

The communal experience of storytelling in a technologically isolating age allows for collaboration and cooperation to replace competition and loneliness, two by-products of patriarchy. Jean Baker Miller argues that individual development proceeds by means of connection.[78]

The devaluation of storytelling in our society is not surprising. All forms of oppression encourage people to enlist in their own enslavement and discourage activities that would ultimately lead to freedom and equality. Only through dialogue and understanding can we hope to change lives and society. Storytelling teaches us how.
CHAPTER III

Methodology and Procedures

To understand the impact and significance storytelling has on young females I have chosen a qualitative methodology as the technique most appropriate to investigating the descriptive nature of storytelling and the participants' perspectives. "Qualitative researchers set up strategies and procedures to enable them to consider experiences from the informants' perspectives. The procedure of doing qualitative research reflects a kind of dialogue or interplay between researchers and their subjects since researchers do not approach their subjects neutrally."[79]

This study observed and interpreted storytelling sessions among six grade five female students attending an inner-city school. Students volunteered their interest in participating to their teacher. The group first focused on fairytales and favourite existing stories and progressed to sharing personal stories based on their lives and experiences. The ultimate aim was for each girl to create an empowering self-narrative. Storytelling sessions were bi-weekly thirty minute meetings for a three-month duration. All storytelling sessions were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher verbatim and then analyzed in order to identify the communal self-narrative effects of storytelling on preexisting patriarchal assumptions and definitions. The researcher made field notes and kept a journal with personal observations.
The Participants

This is the story of five wonderful girls involved in their own heroics: growing up.

The location is a very depressed inner-city area, unemployment is high and it is considered on the 'wrong' sides of the tracks, figuratively and literally speaking. A business man whose office is in the same street as the school confided that he never goes to the office at night because the area is 'unsafe'.

I talked first to the principal and procured her permission to use students from her school for the study. The staff were very accommodating and interested in the study. The school was welcoming of any possibility of positive outcome for the students. I attended the teachers' lounge and talked to the teachers who shared their concerns for their students.

The students attending the school have problems such as moving from one school to another. One child in grade four has moved a total of thirty times, in and out of the school. Reasons for this are socioeconomic. Children at this school faced challenges like getting to school on time, empty stomachs in the morning, undone homework and little parental support. Teachers were hopeful but pessimistic on the likelihood students would graduate from high school let alone make it to university. Children who generally did well in public school often started faltering in senior public and fell further behind in high school.
Girls were selected for inclusion in the study by their teacher on a voluntary basis. A description of the study as a female-only storytelling group was given. The teacher chose the girls by requesting a show of hands and judging their enthusiasm for the project. Letters requesting consent were sent to their parents describing the study and indicating that participants were free to withdraw at any time. [See Appendix A] The teacher chose Donna, Sammi, Viv, Tara, Jane and Angie. [Names changed for anonymity.]

I had limited the number to six girls in the hope of encountering diverse opinions in a group small enough to maintain an intimate atmosphere. To successfully share personal stories requires adequate time and an ambience of respect and friendship. My intention in limiting the group to six was also to provide sufficient time for individuals to share their stories in a safe environment.

First Impressions

At the beginning of the study all the girls were ten years old. Birthdays were in April, May, July, August and September with the girls turning eleven. The first session took place on the tenth of April. My journal entry indicates my initial impression:

My first session was such a shock to me. I expected these street-smart ten year olds and I got these lovely, innocent, naive little girls. In many ways my daughter who is in grade three as opposed to grade five is more mature and more aware of what is going on in life. Maybe that's why we do have to worry about them - because they are so naive. Really they're
Description of Participants

The girls were all in grade five attending an inner-city school that reflects the depressed socioeconomic situation of the area. This school is in a southern Ontario city. The city is a working class city that has been hard hit by the recession and unemployment. The area the school occupies is further compromised by a high incidence of crime and evidence of neglect in parks and recreational facilities. The area also accommodates heavy industry and abandoned factories.

I hope that my description will not sound racist or prejudiced in anyway. It is not intended to be so. The background of each girl is important in understanding their attitudes and philosophies. They all mentioned their background and I believe that their familial history is important in their narrations. I find it essential to provide a brief description of each participant to facilitate data comprehension. As my journal states I was shocked at how young and 'innocent' the girls were.

Donna is extroverted, a black girl whose parents have come from the islands. Her home life was 'stable'; her parents were married and worked. Donna is the only girl in a family with four boys. This she found to be 'boring'. She is athletic and enjoys sports more than school.
Sammi is shy and quiet, the daughter of Portuguese immigrants. Her parents are married and both work in factory jobs. Their English is minimal. Sammi has an older brother and is fully aware of her parents struggle to make a better life for the family. She attends Portuguese school and Sunday school and is very respectful of her parents' hard work and sacrifices. She has long dark hair and is very petite.

Vivian is very pretty, quiet and unsure of herself. She has an older sister who has recently been getting into trouble at school and at home. Her mother is a divorced waitress who is planning to wed her live-in boyfriend soon. Vivian misses her father and feels isolated from her mother who works very hard and has her hands full with her older daughter at this point. Vivian is very sensitive.

Tara is quiet, soft spoken and articulate. She is doing very well in school and finds school to be easy. Her parents are divorced. She has a younger brother who had a heart transplant when he was two. Her brother lives with her mother out West. Tara lives with her father, stepmother and half brother. Her father and stepmother both work. She has difficulty dealing with her stepmother and her half-brother.

Jane is a short plumpish girl. Her parents are on welfare and she talks about poverty with undisguised anger. She has a younger brother who is six years old. Recently a baby sister was
still-born. Jane tends to interrupt while the other girls are talking. She likes to be the center of attention and sometimes uses a 'baby' voice. At times I found it difficult to like her. These feelings of dislike towards her alarmed me and I monitored my behaviour towards her carefully by reminding myself that she was a prime candidate for this kind of storytelling and could possibly benefit the most from the process. My concern was that my bias would influence my interactions with her negatively. I believe her environment was a self-perpetuating process of victimization and poverty.

Angie is an intelligent happy extrovert. She is a big girl, tall and solidly built. She places a great importance on accomplishments and excels in activities such as bowling and swimming. She is a Native Canadian [Inuit] living at home with her parents, one brother and a sister. Her parents are married, her father works and her mother is in the process of adopting a foster child.
CHAPTER IV

Session Analysis

To explore the significance and implications of the data I have chosen to analyze each storytelling session individually and sequentially.

First Session

The initial session started with birthday disclosures. All the girls were ten years old with Angie celebrating a birthday in a week's time. I asked them to describe themselves to me and this created an awkward moment. My field notes state that they found the concept of discussing themselves difficult, as if the idea that an adult would express interest was antithetical to what they were used to. In their work, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky et al. explain this attitude: "All women grow up having to deal with historically and culturally engrained definitions of femininity and womanhood – one common theme being that women, like children, should be seen and not heard."[80] It was clearly evident that as girls unused to discussing themselves they had no idea where to begin. They needed to be focused to some starting point. I asked if they found it difficult to discuss themselves and they all replied that they did. I proceeded to ask if they thought boys would find it easier to discuss themselves. There was unanimous agreement. Tara said "Oh yeah, they can't shut-up about themselves." At the same time that these girls were finding it difficult to talk personally they all believed that boys would feel overly confident in discussing themselves.
Donna gave short answers to my questions. When asked if she had a special hobby she enjoyed she replied "I don't know." When asked to describe themselves Donna's principal self-description is "I am the only girl in the family and I have four brothers." She portrays her life surrounded by brothers as "boring" and states that they are always "fighting or doing boy stuff. Sometimes I want to do something with them and they won't let me; they say you're not a boy or something." When asked how she feels about the exclusion she pauses and remains quiet. A rephrased question is put to her: "Happy you're not a boy, sad that you're not a boy and you can't join them?" Defiantly she responds she is "Happy I'm not a boy!". When I quiz Donna about boy stuff and girl stuff I enquire if there are things females cannot do.

Tara strongly responds:

  Tara: No that's what they think!
  Dina: That's what they think?
  Tara: They think we're weak and everything. We're considered half as good.
  Dina: Do you think you are half as good?
  Girls: No way, No!!!
  Dina: Do you think the boys really believe that the girls are half as good?
  Girls: Yeah!! [all of them in unison].

This interchange illuminates several interesting points. First the societally approved scripts of 'man's work' and 'woman's work' has filtered down to these ten year-old girls with a separation of 'boy stuff' versus 'girl stuff'. They no longer perceive themselves as 'children' but are already gender-defined.
The girls recognized that they were being defined by their sex and that the female sex was found to be deficient and inadequate. The two genders are in the process of becoming polarized.

Male and female are perceived as polar opposites; male is equated with general human capacity; female is defined in terms of relational capacities and expressiveness. [81]

The other side—males or "they" believe that "we're weak and everything. We're considered half as good."

At this point the girls demonstrate a strong opposition to this perceived male belief. What are the consequences to self-esteem when you are constantly reminded that others find you inferior? "Once a group is defined as inferior, the superiors tend to label it as defective or substandard in various ways... All historical evidence confirms this tendency." [82]

Indicators of feeling uneasy about discussing themselves occurred regularly in the first session. When Donna was asked if she had a special hobby she enjoyed she replied ambivalently: "I don't know."

Following Donna's lead, Sylvia reveals that she has an older brother that always bugs her and sometimes he "Hurts" her and she "Hurts him back". I respond to this reference to 'hurting' by asking the girls who they think is more violent: girls, boys or equal? They all reply "boys". When asked if there was too much violence in the world they respond:

Girls: Yes.
Viv: Way too much!
Dina: Who do you think commits the most violence? Think its males, females or equal?
Girls: Males.
Jane: Girls don't.

The girls are cognizant of the societal realities of male violence. Are they afraid? They reply "no". When asked if they are afraid to walk alone at night their answer is a strongly voiced "Yeah!". Societal conditioning is evident. Although they say they are not afraid of 'male violence' they are all intimidated by the thought of walking alone at nighttime. This fear they consider as normal. Societal conditioning has made them unaware that there are alternatives to being intimidated by the night.

The girls also exhibited the patriarchal silencing of the female voice by their awkwardness in discussing themselves in a communal forum. This silencing process that Belenky et al. discuss in their work Women's Ways of Knowing precedes the loss of self-esteem.[83] Viv would rather be questioned than volunteer information. Two questions I posed to her she replied to with "I don't remember".

Adolescence is a time of disconnection, sometimes of dissociation or repression in women's lives, so that women often do not remember - tend to forget or to cover over - what as girls they have experienced and known. As the phrase "I don't know" enters our interviews with girls at this developmental juncture, we observe girls struggling over speaking and not speaking, knowing and not knowing, feeling and not feeling and we see the making of an inner division as girls come to a place where they feel they cannot say or feel or know what they have experienced - what they have felt and known...Girls struggle to stay in connection with themselves and others, to voice their feelings and thoughts and
experiences in relationships, to show what Annie Rodgers has called "ordinary courage", the ability "to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart." And we saw this struggle affect their feelings about themselves, their relationships with others and their ability to act in the world. [84]

Viv's first disclosure is about her dog and that she hates her thirteen-year-old sister. She alternates from an initial shyness to revealing very personal information about her family: her parents are divorced, her mother is planning to remarry, the age of her mom, dad, and future stepfather, and to a cathartic emotional release: she hates her sister.

Viv: My sister tells me a lot of things.
Tara: Like what?
Viv: Everything, things she's done she tells me, but I'm not suppose to tell anybody.
Dina: How do you feel when she tells you things?
Viv: Happy because she tells me things.
Dina: Do you help her?
Viv: Yeah!
Dina: She needs you to talk to doesn't she?
Viv: I'm her only sister.
Tara: It's like she's a taperecorder.
Dina: Its not the same thing, sometimes just having someone to listen is so important. Do you ever give her any advice?
Viv: She asks me things about, like she almost had to go to jail, and she said she's not going to do it again because she knows its bad, the police told her things about it, and she said I don't want to do it cause I know its bad.
Dina: Does she also give you advice?
Viv: Yeah!
Dina: Do you listen?
Viv: Yeah.

Viv's disclosures present a young girl struggling to manage many stresses. I don't believe she hates her sister as much that she cannot verbalize her inability to deal with her sister's
problems, on top of her parent's divorce and her mother's plans to remarry. This was an opportunity for the therapeutic nature of storytelling to emerge. The occasion to discuss and think out loud and develop new thought patterns and language that will adequately describe what we are feeling allows us to deal with these emotions more effectively. "Language is a tool for representing experience, and tools contribute to creative endeavors only when used."[85]

Viv may hate the symbolic transformation her older sister represents of females losing the self in patriarchy.

Adolescent girls experience a conflict between their autonomous selves and their need to be feminine, between their status as human beings and their vocation as females. DeBeauvoir says "Girls stop being and start seeming"... The gap between girls' true selves and cultural prescriptions for what is properly female creates enormous problems.[86]

Tara's first communication was short, to the point and focused on her accomplishments.

Tara: In my spare time I like to do crafts and art and every Saturday morning I go to gymnastics.
Dina: Gymnastics is a lot of fun. Have you been going for a long time?
Tara: No for about ten weeks. I have nothing else to say.
Dina: Okay that was great!

Tara centred on her accomplishments and without any ambivalence clearly stated that she had nothing else to say. My impression was someone with high self-esteem.
Jane's first personal revelation followed no sequential order. Again my first impression was that she was unused to discussing herself. She brought up crafts, her having had a broken leg, the tragedy of a still-born sister, living in Cayuga, and having a cat. All these statements were presented in a perfunctory fashion. Jane did not concentrate or develop any of her statements. One thought lead to another for her as she watched to see my reaction to her statements. My impression was of someone who had not often engaged in conversation or reflective thinking.

"Growing up without opportunity for play and dialogue poses the greatest danger for the growing child. Vygotsky [1962, 1978] and his colleagues suggest that exterior dialogues are a necessary precursor to inner speech and an awareness of one's own thought process."[87]

Angie introduced herself in a strong modulated voice and described her accomplishments proudly, herself and her background:

Angie: I like to go every Saturday morning at nine o'clock to bowling. My highest game was 225, I've won lots of cups and trophies....ahh, I go swimming right after at eleven o'clock. I am on the colour white.

Dina: Is that the colour before life saver one or something?

Angie: Lifesaver two. I am the only one in my class. I have been in white before and I failed.

Dina: Aw! How do you feel about that?

Angie: It's okay. I have lots of friends, I was born in Hamilton, my Mother said that when I was born I didn't even cry. I was asleep, aaa, every summer and winter I go up north in Cuttler to see my family. Almost everyone in Cuttler is an Awagasi, ah..

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Angie discussed herself with confidence; she was proud of her accomplishments, she dealt with adversity [failing swimming] in a positive way and had positive statements to make about herself and her background. My first impression was of a strong sense of self, and self-confidence.

We brought the first session to closure by discussing our favourite fairy tales. What immediately became apparent was the extent that television had infiltrated our culture, and how insignificant fairy tales were to these girls.

Dina:... Let me ask we still have a couple of minutes, when you were little what was your favourite, favourite fairy tale? Let's start with Donna.

Donna: [pauses] CareBears.

Sammi: I think it was CareBears.

Dina: Viv?

Viv: It use to be Pinnochio, my favourite show was Sesame Street.

Dina: Now did you see Pinocchio on video or TV or did you read it?

Viv: My Dad use to read it to us all the time.

Dina: Why did you like Pinocchio?

Viv: [Laughter] I don't know, my Dad used to tell my sister and me that if we'd lie our nose would get bigger. [laughter]

Dina: What about you Tara?

Tara: My favourite was always Sleeping Beauty.

Dina: Did you see it somewhere, did someone read it to you?
Tara: I use to watch it all the time.

Dina: What did you like about it?

Tara: I don't know I was pretty little.

Dina: Jane?

Jane: My favourite show [sic] Cinderella and Old Mother Hubbard, and my favourite show was Sesame Street.

Dina: Do you have the book or the movie of Cinderella?

Jane: I have both but I like the book better. I loved the mice in the story.

Dina: What about you Angie?

Angie: I learned to read in kindergarten, my Mother never read to me though, I just learned how to read in kindergarten so I read them myself. My favourite was the Aristocats, I've seen the movie and the book, I like the book better. My favourite show is Sesame Street and I learned French out of it.

Dina: Well that's great.

Tara: I'd like to see Lady and the Tramp.

Donna and Sammi mentioned cartoons as their favourite fairy tales. Only one girl was read to - Viv's father would read Pinocchio to her and her sister. The other girls either watched Disney videos or read Disney books. Angie stated that her Mother never read to her; she taught herself to read in kindergarten. There was no evidence that these girls were being read to or that they were finding, what Bruno Bettelheim would call: 'meaning to their lives' through fairy tales. They seemed to be far removed from the therapeutic contribution fairy tales make to the process of healthy human development. At the same time they were
highly influenced by the Disney version of fairy tales, watching the videos and reading the Disney fairy tale versions and mentioning Disney stories that are not 'true' fairy tales such as The Aristocats and Lady and the Tramp.

Oral storytelling has been replaced for these children by television, a medium that further disconnects the child from society and self. Marie Winn, in her work The Plug-In Drug, states:

Not unlike drugs and alcohol, the television experience allows the participants to blot out the real world and enter into a pleasurable and passive state. This television habit distorts the sense of time. It turns their experiences vague and curiously unreal while taking in a greater reality for itself.[89]

Emerging factors in the first session were awkwardness in discussing themselves, an awareness of male-perpetrated violence, evidence of high self-esteem and low self-esteem, and surprisingly little awareness of non-Disney traditional fairy tales.
Second Session

For the second session I had asked the girls to create their own versions of a fairy tale. It had to start with 'Once upon a time' and finish with the traditional 'and they lived happily ever after'. Unexpectedly all the girls wrote down their fairy tales although I had not asked them to. In retrospect, people who are not used to talking may choose written forms of communication. I have reproduced the stories here exactly as they were written.

[Jane was absent for this session.]

Vivian

Viv volunteered to go first and read her story that was based on 'The Paperbag Princess'.

How I Want my Life!

Once upon a time there was a girl named Vivian. She had a boyfriend named Jack. They were about to get married. They had a big house you may think that it is so big that it looks like a castle. Anyway, one day a big huge dragon came up to their house and said "I am going to take my fiery breath and blow up your house!" The man named Jack said "No your not because I'm going to call my Loir!" Vivian said "That wouldn't do any good the dragon will probly take you away before you can even get in the house." "Hey" the dragon said that's a good idia!" "Thanks" said Jack. So the dragon blew up the house and took Jack and Vivian set off to find Jack. She walked and walked and walked until she came to a big cave. As you should know she was dirty and he cloths where ripped, she knocked on the big door 5 times, the dragon came out and said "Hi" "What do you want" Vivian said back, "I want my boyfriend!" "the dragon said back "you can see him but you can't have him."

So the dragon went and got Jack "Well hello!" Jack said what are you doing here?" "I am here to save you what elts would I be here for?" "Go away and change your clothes!" Jack said to Vivian. "How can I the house is gone!" "The marriage is off you big bum!"
She called out the dragon and said "you can have him now!" "ok" The dragon said in a soft voice because the man was all skin and bones now because he was a real eater at home and he didn't eat a thing at the dragon's cave. "BUT I'M LEAVING Now!" and when she got home she met a nother man his name was Brian. She moved in with him and they lived happily ever after. 

THE END!

Vivian's story has subtle changes from the original that are significant. In Vivian's version she walks to the dragon's cave and demands the return of her boyfriend. The dragon refuses but allows her to see him and talk to him. Jack rejects her appearance and she breaks off her engagement and leaves him to the dragon. In the original version the Princess uses her cunning and intelligence to rescue the Prince from the dragon, and she goes off alone - independently. Vivian's version has her meeting another man. "She moved in with him and they lived happily ever after." Vivian's story is a classical example of the dominant culture's control over girls.

Although "The Paperbag Princess" is a feminist interpretation meant to encourage females to seek other possibilities and roles Vivian has made her heroine passive [she does not rescue him or do anything heroic] and once again, dependent on a male for her happiness [the ending], thus restoring the traditional patriarchal principles of fairytales. Both stories focus on the loss of appearance as the reason for the breakup and both stories perpetuate a discourse that polarizes the genders. Significantly, although feminist reinterpretations aim to liberate they are chained to the interpretations of girls already socialized by the
dominant culture.

Vivian was very proud of her story. She considered it an important accomplishment and she was beaming with happiness after reading it and sharing it with the group. To read her story was an empowering experience for her.

Sammi's story:

Once upon a time I wished I was Snow White and suddenly I felt weird and then seven dwarfs came up to me and said "Snow white! Snow white! "There is a witch in our garden!" "What " I said "You go along I will catch up." Suddenly there was a knock at the door "Who is it?" "It is I" I slowly opened the door there was an old ladie standing with a basket of apples. "Will you care to buy an apple" came wicked voice. "Why thank you." Suddenly I fell to the floor. The dwarfs came back and they saw me laying on the floor they put me in a glass cofen with rubys and jewals and flowers on the bottom of it. The dwarfs set off to find a prince to cure me. They found a prince and they brout him to cure me. He kissed me on the cheak and then I woke up. Me and the prince got married and lived in a casel as for the dwarfs they are still at ther little house in the garden. We are very happy together. [The End]

Sammi's fairy tale recreation followed the pattern of Snow White. In the story she wishes she was Snow White and is transformed into her. As in the traditional fairy tale she is rescued by a handsome Prince who kisses her and wakens her from her slumber. I asked her if Snow White could possibly wake up the Prince in similar circumstances. She replied "I don't know." Sammi has already received the message that in our society power resides with men. ["The dwarfs set off to find a Prince to cure me"]. Although Sammi recognised that it was the power of love
that awakened Snow White she doesn't know if a woman could resurrect a sleeping male with a kiss. In fairy tales males and females do not share an equal amount of power.

When asked her opinion on reversing the story with a female as a heroine she was unsure; she "thinks it would be okay". Viv and Donna contribute that they think it's okay. For Sammi hearing her friends approve of a story reversal may be an opportunity for her to reexamine her own held beliefs and widen her frame of reference. Unfortunately we did not pursue this any further.

Sammi enjoyed reading her story to the group. It was an opportunity to entertain and be the focus of the group in a very protected setting. She read her story concentrating on the paper she was reading. The discussion that followed afterwards presented her with an opportunity to change her preconceived notions of power in fairy tales.

Donna

Donna's story:

Deberella

Once upon a time there lived a ten year old girl with 3 kind brothers. Deberella was the youngest and her brothers' names were Michael, Mark and Desmond. Time went by and Deb's parents announced that they were get a foster kid. Deberella became angry because she wanted to stay the youngest. Deberella did stay the youngest because she got an older brother and his name was Dwain he was mean and nasty. The other guys didn't like him at all because he was so mean to Deberella. Deberella told her mom and dad and her mom said "he just needs some time to get use to you guys." Deberella gave Dwain another chance. When he
started to bug Deb she said enough is enough and she punch him right in the jaw. The next time when Dwain came to bother her Deberella said back off or I'll knock you out. And she lived happily ever after.

The End

Donna's story was fascinating because it highlighted her major life concerns of the moment so well: her struggle to define her power within a family of four brothers. Her story illustrates that at this point she believes 'might is right' and the use of force is acceptable to attain desired results. In her story Dwain is her foster brother in reality Michael, Mark, Desmond and Dwain are her 'real' brothers with Dwain having displaced Donna as the youngest child, a situation that Donna still finds difficult to accept.

Dina: He's younger than you? In a big family is it best to be younger do you think?

Donna: Yeah you get most of the attention. Life changed when he was born. Sometimes I feel like throwing him down the stairs.

Donna's fairy tale is therapeutic because it allows her to deal effectively with her anger at being displaced by Dwain who is a difficult and bothersome brother. In her story she protects her position by making Dwain an older foster brother and she asserts herself when he commences to bother her. She retains control, emerges victoriously, and validates her power within the family. Donna has chosen to reject the traditional structure of fairy tales by rescuing herself.
Angie

Angie's story:

Once upon a time there was a Princess. She had everything she wanted. But she had two younger siblings who bugged her and she would tell the king and queen and they would just say "oh, Dear its just your brother and sister like you, and they can't leave you alone because you have to go to the town and look at birthday presents for your father with them. But before you go do your room and clean out the closet"! "oh, mom I'm not taking the kids and they messed up my room so why do I have to clean it. Why"? "Because its your room and its your side." "Fine then I want my own room so I can keep it clean". "Well I'll ask your father dear". One hour later the princess walked in her room and saw that her stuff was not in her room and that her dog was in her brother's room when she came back from shopping in the town plaza. "Mike I'm going to tell mom that you have spike". Walking into his room She saw all her furniture in it and it did look beautiful. It was freshly wall papered and painted. The wallpaper was really pretty and it was white and pink. She finally got amazed and was speechless for the first time in her life. She said "Thank you, thank you, thank you"!!! "Well your welcome, welcome, welcome. I hope you like it by the way get ready for dinner we are having tacos tonight". The Princess got dressed and went to dinner in the royal hall. She loved every part of it so far but what about when she has to go to bed what will it be like and will she like it. She thought about the window you can hardly see the clouds the sun the best part of a window". She went down the stairs and got a bowl of icecream. She sat and watched some television and saw in the back of her eye her brother and sister were standing there with a note they dropped their notes and ran off. tried to read her brothers first but it was all scribbles like he was drawing but her sisters note was clearly readable:
Dear Angie,

I'm glad you moved into your own room I can now do whatever I want without you ratting on me. I think you are really weird even though you are my sister well you are getting boring and I am still going to mess up your stupid room.

Love your caring loving Sister,

Sincerely,

Leeann.

Well the princess was certainly shocked she ran and showed her mother the note she was even shocked. Her mother was horrified her kind daughter would write a note like that. She marched right up those stairs and said "why did you write that note to your sister the end was ok but why I am horrified you are grounded for the month of April and May. I am truly disgusted". Leeann started crying and pouting she went in her room and slammed the door. Leeann was not satisfied she wanted revenge on the Princess she was really horrified so she planned to mess up the princesses room so she would share a room with her so she planned it out. She though it was fool proof. The next day when the princess went out to the town plaza Lee put all her toys under the princesses bed. Next she got mud in the back yard and made mud tracks. finally the princess came home she cleaned up the mess before her parents came home and when they did come home The princess told and Leeanns plan was sabotaged and she swore she would get the Princess back but she never did and she lived happily ever after. The end.

Angie called her story 'The Princess' and similarly to Donna's it dealt with her present familial situation. Angie wanted to have her own room away from her younger, messy sister and her story focused on this. In her story she described her new beautiful room with the white and pink wallpaper. For Angie this story evolved into a perfect day scenario: tacos for dinner, icecream for dessert and with her sister's nasty note the proof she needs to show her mother her sister's true colours. The result is the younger sister is punished. The princess also manages to subvert her sister's plans for revenge.
Angie's story may be empowering for her. It deals with her immediate issues; her dreams of her own room and of her sister getting what she deserves—punishment. There are no gender issues or evidence of lack of self-esteem. Quite the opposite; Angie knows what she likes. She is victorious by using her own abilities. She is not rescued by a male and marriage is not her final reward. Donna's and Angie's stories were very similar in dealing with familial situations and the girls asserting themselves. Is this because they are rejecting and consciously subverting the patriarchal scripts imposed on females or because they are still defining themselves as 'children' and not 'females'? Both stories dealt with parental authority and sibling problems, issues usually associated with children.

Tara

Tara's story:

Once upon a time in a kingdom far away, lived an ordinary girl named Amber. Her and her father lived in a cottage on the far side of the river. Amber's mother and father got a divorce when she was only one. Her mother had moved away and left her with her father. When she was three she went to live with her mother but after awhile she was getting tired of living with her mother so she went to live with her father. So in the past few years she has been helping her father support themselves. Amber had no free time or spending money because she spent all her time in the village selling pottery that her father makes. Sometimes she sells extra pottery to try and buy some meat. One day, the prince came riding through the little village and saw Amber. He said to her, "My dear lady, what is such a pretty lady doing in a market place like this selling pottery. Would you like to work in my castle?" Amber was shocked! She said, "Why yes, of course." So the next day she went over to the castle. She did not yet know what she was to be doing. She went and asked the prince and he said, "Start scrubbing the floors." Amber walked out very disappointed. After a few
days she got used to the job and learned to like it. One day, Amber was in a room when she heard lots of laughter. She went to find out what it was. She opened a door and saw lots of people. She soon found out that it was a wedding. It was a wedding for the prince. Amber had secretly fallen in love with him. She ran as fast as she could down the hall and started weeping. The prince must have seen her because he came out after her. After a few minutes of silence, the prince said, "Why are you crying?" Amber said, "Because I love you." So the Prince said, "May I take your hand in marriage?" Amber said "Of course!" And they lived happily ever after.

The end.

Tara did not want to read her fairy tale to the group. Angie volunteered to and I asked her if she wanted me to read it; she replied "Sure". The first part of Tara's fairy tale was revealing because it represented her own life. Her parent's had divorced when she was very little and she lived with her father. This may be why she was reticent about reading the story herself.

In Tara's story we see the regressive elements of fairy tales fulfilled. Like all good daughters in fairytales 'Amber' helps her father support themselves by selling the pottery the father makes. The script of virtuous females being self-sacrificing is reenacted in Tara's story. Reminiscent of traditional fairy tales, Amber is one day rescued by the prince who comes riding through the village. It is her good looks that he has noticed. Her story is a reaffirmation of the societal focus on female appearance.

He said to her, "My dear lady, what is such a pretty lady doing in a market place like this, selling pottery. Would you like to work in my castle? Amber was shocked. She said "Why of course."
When she goes to the castle she is at first disappointed to find out that he wants her to scrub floors: "After a few days she got used to the job and learned to like it," the text being that although women recognize this initially as demeaning work they soon grow to like it. After she finished her story I asked her one question and was stunned at the response.

Dina: ... But let me ask you a question. What do you think is better, to sell pottery in the market place or to scrub floors in the castle?

Tara: To scrub floors.

Sammi: Yes, to scrub floors.

Viv: I would rather sell the pottery and I'm even shy.

Dina: What about you Donna?

Donna: I don't know.

Dina: What about you Sammi?

Sammi: Well if you get married you have to scrub floors anyway.

Dina: I see. What about you Angie?

Angie: Scrub floors.

Dina: Why?

Angie: Cause I like scrubbing floors.

In Tara's case the fairy tale has regressive and inhibiting elements to it. Already by the age of ten and eleven four out of the five girls believe it is better to hold a subservient position to a male with power [if it includes the reward of marriage] than to be an independent vendor. Through fairy tales the dominant group legitimizes unequal relationships between the sexes and
incorporates them into society's guiding principles by influencing a culture's outlook. These girls have already begun to accept subserviency to males as superior to solitary independence.

Dominant groups usually define one or more acceptable roles for the subordinates. Acceptable roles typically involve providing services that no dominant group wants to perform for itself [for example, cleaning up the dominant's waste products]. [91]

The indoctrinated message is that the characteristics required to marry a Prince and live happily ever after are beauty, compliance, servility, submissiveness and self-subordination. The idea is that female suffering will be rewarded, the reward being marriage.

In our culture "serving others" is for losers, it is low-level stuff. Yet serving others is a basic principle around which women's lives are organized; it is far from such for men.[92]

What became even more alarming was the discussion that followed:

Dina: But how are you going to get rich. You all say you want to be rich, what are your plans for obtaining these riches?

All of them in Unison: Marry a rich guy!!!

Dina: Marry a rich guy?

Girls: Yeah!! [lots of laughing]

Donna: My dad told me I should marry a doctor.

Angie: Or marry a lawyer.

Donna: I want to be a lawyer.

Viv: Dentists make good money.
Dina: Yes, dentists make good money. So Viv doesn't want to marry a dentist she wants to become a dentist. The rest of you say you'll just marry one, is that it?

Girls: Yeah!

Sammi: Why become one when you can marry one.

Dina: And what are you going to do with your day?

Sammi: Stay home and watch 'Oprah'. [laughter]

Dina: One question! Where are you going to find all these rich guys? With all this great education.

Donna: Go to Bermuda.

Dina: Where are you going to find the money to fly to Bermuda?

Tara, Sammi: My Dad.

They all want to be rich. The girls think that the easiest way to accomplish this is to 'marry a rich guy'. The girls recognized the humour in their ambitions while still maintaining a seriousness at the prospect, a belief in the possibility of this dream. The girls have been indoctrinated to look at men as the providers and themselves as 'floor scrubbers'. The dominant culture manipulates females into thinking that self-sacrificing virtues are societally rewarded. How can girls be motivated to have aspirations beyond marriage when the contradictory belief "Why be one when you can marry one" exists? What happens when girls have these great expectations of riches but no means to support themselves and no power beyond their looks to make them happen? Then they truly become subordinate.
The fairy tales that emerged demonstrated a range of high and low self-esteem and evidence of patriarchal stereotyping. Two [Donna and Angie] were empowering and three showed signs of the perpetuation of patriarchal bias through fairy tales as women are encouraged to cultivate weakness and subservience as ways of being. Prevailing notions of proper feminine and masculine behaviour lead to stereotypes. Masculinity and femininity are not inherent properties of individuals but structural properties of our society arising from social action.
Third Session: Male and Female Role Models

For the third session the girls were asked to think of one male model and one female model. Tara chose Mickey and Minnie Mouse for her role models: "Because I don't like violence and they are not violent." When the girls asked her if she would like to be like Mickey and Minnie she replied: "No, [giggling] they're cartoon figures."

Donna's hero was her aunt, her mother's sister who is in the army and had gone to Haiti on a peacekeeping mission. Donna was very impressed with her aunt.

Donna: My hero is my mother's sister and my aunt. My aunt is in the army and she is like a hero...

Donna did not mention a male role model. She may have been identifying with her aunt as she was obviously in awe of her. This was an interesting choice because it involved a woman in a non-traditional role. The inference may be that Donna can see females doing what has historically been considered "male" work. It also fit Donna's pattern, the focus on the martial arts and using force to assert herself.

Viv's role model selection was disconcerting. She chose her older sister whom she had said she hated in the first session.

Viv: My role model is my sister. I don't know why I don't....like she tells me a lot of stuff that I'm not suppose to tell anyone. She does a lot of stuff and I'm learning not to do that stuff because its bad.

Dina: Hmmh
Viv: There's that one thing that I don't want to learn from her.

Dina: Would you like to say what that is or would you prefer not to say?

Viv: It was that she beat up on this other girl. She waited for her after school and then she beat her up.

Vivian is learning from her sister not to do `stuff that's bad'. Instead of emulating a role model, Viv's task is to evade the imitation of her sister. Viv's selecting her sister may illustrate an ambivalence towards herself and may be an indication of low self-esteem. By taking a negative role model she may be inferring that badness is innately within herself [already established] and her only option is to control that `badness' rather than developing her own goodness. This is a heavy burden for a young girl to carry. By passively accepting negativity in a role model Viv may begin to mimic that negativity. Viv's exchange also highlighted her continued concern for her sister.

Viv was very proud of the three accomplishments she singled out from her week. She was very excited to share her list.

Viv: I did three things I'm proud of.
Dina: That's great let's hear them.
Viv: I made an Easter basket.
Dina: Wow.
Viv: It's hard there's all this weaving. I bought my Mom an Easter present from the money I got from Easter and I gave my sister two dollars to buy something she wanted. But I owed her the money anyway.
When I initially asked the girls to tell me at every session three things they were proud of it was really an afterthought. I thought that if we ran out of things to say we would have something to fall back on. I did not expect what an important part of the sessions they would become. All the girls enjoyed sharing things they were proud of. If things became stressful the topic of proud accomplishments would change the mood and bring the sessions to closure.

Viv did not mention a male role-model.

Sammi had both a male and female role model. Her male model was 'Will Smith' whom I had never heard of. It turns out that he is the star of a television program, 'The Prince of Bel Air'. He was her role model because "he makes me laugh". It was interesting to note that her role model was someone in the entertainment field. Her female role model "...is my Mother because I think she's smart." Sammi did not elaborate any further about her choice of female role model electing to talk about the three things she had done for the week that she was proud of.

Sammi is a happy child and I think seeing her Mother as smart and a role model was empowering for her. It was also interesting to note that out of the five girls only two mentioned their mothers as role models.
Before Jane talked about her role model selections we discussed her mother having been in the newspaper two days previously. Jane's mother had complained about the terrible conditions at the local park [broken glass, alcohol, broken equipment]. As a result of her mother's contacting the media the park had already been cleaned up. Jane was very proud of her mother's affirmative action.

Jane chose her parents as her role models. "My male role model is my Dad because he always makes me laugh and my female role model is my Mom because she is always helpful and she always helps me when I have a problem with math." When Donna remarked that her Mother is not good at math Jane revealed some unflattering facts about her father.

Jane: My Dad doesn't even know how to spell lightbulb.

Dina: Well some words are pretty hard to spell, even adults make mistakes.

Jane: Yeah, but he can't spell anything. Not even refrigerator.

Dina: That's nice that your parents are your role models. Did you do three things you were proud of this week...

As group facilitator I brought that particular discussion to an end because I felt we were slandering Jane's father needlessly in front of the group. I felt that it was my duty to keep in mind the invisible boundaries between empowering and inappropriate dialogue.
What and who and why do we have role models? Are Minnie and Mickey and Will Smith role models? Are older sisters in trouble with the police role models? To have a role model that inspires and empowers is an uplifting experience. It was evident that the girls were confused as to the definition and purpose of role models. This has to be defined. Words like mentor and model have to be explained, discussed and reflected upon. Children need an opportunity to discuss who and what a role model is. On a personal note I missed an important opportunity to present Vivian with a chance to communally reflect and trade stories on more accurate definitions of role models and provide positive examples. A forum for group self-narratives should be a place where beliefs and attitudes are questioned and expanded through the use of examples and stories.
Session Four

Who and What is Powerful

To improve society there must be a reexamination of the way we define power.

The words "power" and "self-determinism" have acquired certain connotations, that is they imply certain modes of behaviour more typical of men than women. But it may be that these modes are not necessary or essential to their meanings. Like all the concepts and actions of a dominant group, "power" may have been distorted and skewed...[93]

How we define power affects how we construct the reality that surrounds us. Is power something we believe we possess or is it exclusively the property of males? My reasoning for choosing this topic was to see what definitions and descriptions the girls had. My own definition of 'power' was inspired by Jean Baker Miller who believes that 'power is the ability to implement'.[94]

Viv volunteered to begin:

Viv: What I think powerful is that someone can control others. The thing that he or she is controlling listens to them. I think my Mom is powerful because she says things and after she says them she gets it.

Dina: Can you give us an example?

Viv: If she says, "hmmm, go do the dishes", we fight because we don't want to do it, so she says fine I'll do it. Then she pretends she's going to do it and we say okay we'll do it.

Vivian already possesses the patriarchal definition of power; control. "Power has generally meant the ability to advance oneself and, simultaneously, to control, limit, and, if possible,
destroy the power of others... power for oneself and power over others."[95] Also when she talks about her mother's indirect approach she is describing one of the methods females have been forced to use to get power: pretence and manipulation. Is this indirect approach of pretence a female trait that Viv is going to model from her mother? This may be one way that cultural indoctrination occurs.

Simply because they carry out the demeaning tasks associated with caring for the young, women are discounted as weak and subordinate. Discredited through their identification with emotional aspects of living and assigned to the private sphere, females are rendered powerless...Powerlessness, because of its association with females, gets handed down from mother to daughter like an unwanted family heirloom.[96]

Sammi's definition includes elements of self-determinism: "I think powerful means being able to stand up to your fears. And I think that God is powerful." 'Standing up to your fears' is an empowering definition. It promotes the belief that we all have fears and that we all may be able to face them. Some may argue that choosing God as powerful highlights possible patriarchal influences - God is considered as male. However, I prefer to regard it as acceptable and inspiring. Deep belief alone can sustain and nourish a healthy self-esteem.

The definition of power as facing fears struck a chord with the girls and gave us an opportunity to voice our own fears: brothers, fire, tornadoes, hurricanes, lightning storms, vomit.
Fears were something we could all relate to and possibly the thought of power as conquering those fears was empowering. This is when the self-narrative can be effective. Sammi defined the word and the girls added their own voices and experiences making it something that belonged to all of them. When I asked if anyone had faced a very big fear Tara replied:

Tara: My brother, keeping alive when he had a heart transplant. He was two.

Dina: Your brother had a heart transplant?

Tara: Yep.


Jane: My sister died. She was stillborn.

Dina: That must have been very hard.

Tara: My brother was very brave, he understood everything that was going on.

Perhaps Tara saw a different way of seeing her brother's heart transplant, as a situation where he faced and conquered his own fears.

Jane defined power:

Jane: I sometimes think strength is power and I sometimes think that love is power, and God.

Dina: Why do you think love is power?

Jane: When you love somebody and you're kind to them they will respect you and do things for you. And love is 99% of your life.
Jane touched on the significance of relationships and attachments to females. Traditionally nurturing has not been interpreted as powerful. However, it can and should be construed as a strength. The peril to Jane's definition is that it may perpetuate subordinant ways of being for women if they believe that if they love and do things for others they will in turn be respected and rewarded with love. This is one assumption commonly repeated in fairy tales.

Angie saw power as synonymous with strength, money and prestige.

Angie: ...I think powerful is strong and someone who has a high rank like a prime minister or a millionaire. I think Jean Chretien is powerful because he rules the whole country.

Tara's definition also included characteristics of control:

Tara: Okay, I think powerful means in charge and you can control things. I think my father is powerful because he takes charge of things and solves them and he won't give up until he's solved them.

Donna interpreted powerful as:

Donna: I think powerful means strong physically and mind power and I think God is powerful because he does everything.

Dina: What do you mean by mind power Donna?

Donna: Like you want to do something but someone says you can't do it, your mind is telling you you can.
For all the girls [except Sammi] strength and control exemplified power. The girls have already been biased to the dominant culture's definition of power as control and domination. They mentioned men such as Alexander the Great, Jean Chretien and Bill Clinton as powerful and significantly there was only one female example, Viv's Mother.

Sammi said that facing fears was powerful and Donna explained mind power as the ability to believe in yourself when others don't. These two definitions are empowering for females and I was happy to have them presented to the group.

If females at ten years old decipher power as physical strength, control and money do they see themselves as future participants in the creation of power or as those ultimately controlled? Girls need new definitions of power. Sammi and Donna provided more enabling interpretations. Hopefully they were able to influence the other girls in seeing different possibilities.

When girls are presented with an opportunity to engage in talk other meaningful perspectives and opinions emerge. In this session the subject of 'giving up' was addressed with the girls admitting and providing examples of 'giving up'. Another topic focused on math and studying. As an adult and a possible role model I encouraged them to study and to always try again and not to give up.
Again I was impressed with how meaningful sharing the things they were proud of was to the girls. This is significant as an admission that their accomplishments mean something to them and they want them to be publicly acknowledged. This can be one method of positively reinforcing their self-esteem.
Session Five

Open Session 'Any Story You'd Like'

The fifth session was left completely open. I had concerns that continuous specific topics would be limiting and I wanted them to have an opportunity to decide what we would dialogue about. I also was curious to see what themes the girls would choose to discuss. I had left them with very vague guidelines: any story they wanted to tell, or book they liked; my only request was that it should be entertaining.

Jane brought in her baby pictures and Donna brought baby pictures and photos from her trip to Trinidad. Donna and Jane enjoyed showing their pictures to the group. When I asked if they felt good to see how cute they were as babies they replied "Yeah!". Seeing ourselves as babies may enhance self-esteem because it is an opportunity to see ourselves as lovable since all babies are adorable. Pride in ourselves should always be encouraged.

Tara, Angie and Viv brought in their favourite books. Tara chose a humorous Robert Munsch book about a baby who goes to school one day. Although she had not wanted to read her own version of a fairy tale to the group [I read it for her] Tara enjoyed reading the book to the girls. Angie chose a book, 'The Grey Wolf'. It had beautiful illustrations that Angie liked. The book had great significance for her.

Angie: I chose it because I am Indian and that's my culture.

Sammi: Your background.
Dina: It's good to honour your culture and to see where you came from.

Angie: My Mom has a lot of books about Indians.

Dina: That's good your culture is important to you.

Angie: Oh yeah!

For Angie the familial focus on her culture is a continuing source of self-esteem and self-respect.

Viv chose a book about a snotty pig that she confessed that she had not finished reading. This was confusing because she had said this was her favourite book.

Viv: I haven't read all of it. It's about a pig who jumps off a diving board and saves a girl who is drowning.

Dina: Is it a humorous book, a funny book?

Viv: I don't know I haven't read all of it.

Viv's comment that it was her favourite book and that she had not finished reading it was perplexing. It seemed that she was muddling through, unsure of herself. It may also be indicative of the beginning of loss of self-confidence in that she is displaying ambivalence and confusion over things she says are important to her. It may also be denotative of serious personal problems; she may be focusing on her internal problems and is losing touch with external situations. When children have problems they cannot deal with their school work may suffer because their energy is going towards worrying about the 'problem'. Children need help to learn techniques to cope with problems: self-narratives are one way this can be achieved.

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Significant discussion developed in this open-ended session. The mood of the group was high because they were articulating themes that they were interested in. When the focus was on their own interests more positive self-esteem was exhibited. One of the issues that was presented for discussion was obviously something that was causing some discomfort and stress to them:

Angie: The school we're going to next year there is a lot of violence.

Dina: Oh no, how do you know?

Angie: Because my cousin goes there and he said that they are always beating up kids.

Dina: What grades go there?

Angie: Grade six, seven, and eight.

Dina: Gee do they beat the girls or boys more or equal?

Girls: Boys.

Dina: That's terrible.

Donna: I have a cousin who goes there too and he's big so I'm going to hang around with him...

Sammi: At XXX they put your head in the toilet and they flush it. And I asked her if she was scared but she said no because one of the boys liked her and she was safe.

Donna: Yeah if the boys like you they leave you alone they don't beat you up.

Fear of the unknown is common; the thought of a new school can create tensions for everyone. What is abnormal is to see Donna the girl who wants to emulate the Power Rangers and who always asserts herself talk about aligning herself with an older,
big, male cousin for protection. Then again, perhaps and unfortunately it is normal as girls grow older. The realization that there are dangers in the world has started to emerge. Dangerously, the belief that being an object of desire or affection to males provides safety is being embraced. To presume and accept male protection as necessary marks the end of self-autonomy and the beginning of subservience.

I also saw my own role evolving from an outsider to a concerned and encouraging mentor as I invited them to believe that "all things are possible". We discussed interesting careers such as writers and book illustrators and things they wanted an opportunity to learn: Spanish, Gibawee, gymnastics. They also started to display a supportive comraderie towards each other. Affiliations between females encourages pro-activism and fosters confidence.

Jane: Some boys in the class think that girls can't really draw good and Scott drew a parrot three weeks ago and he thought it was so great. And Angie drew one this week and it was way better than his.

Tara: It was better than his!

Articulating our experiences and thoughts enables us to see and understand discrepancies in our society. This awareness empowers us to reject gender scripts that are unacceptable and demeaning to females.
Ideas and beliefs were evolving from previous group discussions. In the previous session we had dialogued about giving up. In this session we talked about learning and taking lessons. The emerging exchange was very different from the defeatist attitude of the preceding session.

Angie: It's difficult at the beginning but as soon as you get the knack of it you get really good. I took bowling for four years and my top game is 255.

Dina: Good. If you had a friend who told you she wanted to be a writer and she got back a paper from the teacher that said 'terrible story' and your friend told you she was going to give up what would you say to her?

Girls: Don't give up!!

Angie: Don't give up try again.

Dina: Great!!! You know there really is no such thing as just a mistake everything is a learning tool.

Donna: Sometimes you learn not to do it again.

Dina: Oh Donna, you are wise beyond your age. That's right sometimes we learn never to do it again.

The 'never give-up' message the girls endorsed to each other was a beneficial approach to better self-esteem.

When girls have an opportunity to engage in real talk and gossip there are numerous opportunities for both personal and reaffirming as well as impersonal and informative discussions to occur. Through talk, ways of knowing and understanding develop.
When the focus was on their personal interests the girls displayed a high level of self-esteem. Their talk was animated, there was laughter and a positive, excited atmosphere.

Patriarchal influence was exposed when the girls discussed the new school, the need for protection and the emerging image of male as protector, female as protected and ultimately subordinate.
Sixth Session

`Exotic' Careers

The sixth session's theme was exotic careers or careers outside the norm. I wanted to see what career possibilities the group would select. Would they be traditional female options or non-gender specific.

I also had asked them to do some research into their career choice; did they know what the job entailed, the necessary background, and did they think they could possibly do the job one day? This would perhaps illustrate if the girls considered it a feasible and achievable option for them.

Vivian volunteered to go first. She chose archaeologist because she had seen a television show the previous night. She knew what an archaeologist did but did not know the background necessary to becoming one. We talked about possible academic plans to achieve this. The girls all participated with suggestions of archaeology locations. During the exchange I asked if one had to be fit to be an archaeologist. Jane replied:

Jane: Yeah, you can't be fat like me.

Dina: Jane you're not fat.

Jane: Yeah, I am a little bit, my Mom tells me.

Dina: Do you get out of wind when you climb the stairs to go to class?

Jane: No.

Dina: Then that just proves it you're in good condition. You would make a great archaeologist.
Jane was not fat. It's typical of girls in her age group to start focusing on appearance and weight. This is another way girls lose self-esteem.

Vivian and all the girls thought archaeologist was a non-gender specific occupation. My impression was that Viv had not put any serious thought into archaeology and had not seriously considered it for herself.

Angie chose 'dolphin trainer' as an exotic profession. She had some idea of what was necessary: "You have to be a real good swimmer, able to work with animals, you shouldn't mind getting wet, and able to deal with animals who have temper tantrums." Angie and the group thought this was a good career choice for women.

Donna was drawn to a television character, a Power Ranger, as her exotic career: "Yeah I want to be a Power Ranger that would be so cool. I would have to take a course in acting and the martial arts, that's about it, cause all it is a bunch of acting and martial arts." Donna was extremely enthusiastic about being a power ranger. Although I have reservations about the effect of television on children, for Donna it was definitely an empowering show.

Dina: Now I don't watch that show tell me are the male power rangers and the girl power rangers equal?

Jane: Oh yeah!

Dina: So the women are portrayed well in the show?

Jane: Yeah really well, they fight just as good as the guys do.
Although the girls laughed at the thought of Donna as a power ranger she remained undeterred and unaffected by their response. The group did not affect her enthusiasm for her selection and it reminded me of her definition of 'mind power' in the previous session: to believe in yourself when no one else does. She showed a high level of confidence and commitment to her dream job.

Jane's exotic career was artist. However, what she said and how she said it [mumbling, and timidly] indicated that she felt it was an unrealistic ambition for her. She lacked faith in her abilities. "Yeah, [mumbling] cause I like to draw but I'm not very good at it." Jane's confidence grew as she talked about her art. She had an aunt who was an artist and had helped her.

Jane: She showed me how to make a good tree and now my trees are really good.

Dina: Ah, so you see you've already seen some improvement. Sometimes we think we're not good and with a little bit of practice we see major improvement.

Jane: And you know what! [Very enthusiastically] My teacher thinks I'm good at art too, lots of times my art is up on the board.

Dina: That's great!

Dialoguing in groups allows females to nurture the belief that they can excel and that they have the right too. "... the only thing women lack is practice in the 'real world' this, plus the opportunity to practice and the lifelong belief that one has the right to do so."[97] For Jane, talking about her art and receiving positive input was an empowering opportunity.
Sammi did not have an exotic career to share. She had expressed an interest in teaching and felt that was adequate. Tara had also said at the end of the previous session that she wanted to be a teacher. I asked her if there was anything else she wanted to do and she talked about becoming an actress.

Tara: Yeah I'd like to be an actress. But the only problem is that I'm too shy.

Dina: Well, did you know that a lot of shy people go into acting. Cause they're not so shy when they are playing different roles. What kind of background do you think you need for acting?

Tara: [Silence]

It was apparent that the girls had not done any research into the subject and I asked why. Was it because they were uninterested or did they find it difficult to do? All the girls stated that they had found the task too intimidating and arduous. These were some of the comments:

Angie: Yeah it was difficult to do, all I could think of to find out about dolphin trainer is to call Marineland but that's long distance.

Tara: I didn't know how to do it at all.

Viv: Me neither.

Donna: I couldn't figure out how to find out how to ask about becoming a power ranger.

Jane: I bet they would just hang up if they knew you were just a kid.

Tara: It's because we're too embarrassed.

Viv: Yeah. Like what do you say to them, who do you speak to?
This communication denotes a sense of powerlessness and lack of attention in cultivating the self. The girls did not feel confident in making phone calls or obtaining information for themselves. This may be another manifestation of the girls' colluding in their own subordination.

In a situation of inequality the woman is not encouraged to take her own needs seriously, to explore them, to try to act on them as a full-fledged person. She is enjoined from developing some valid and reliable sense of her own worth. Instead the woman is encouraged to concentrate on the needs and development of the man.[98]

Not feeling they have the right to information is repressive. When alternative concepts are introduced and discussed the internalization of dominant beliefs may be foiled.

Towards the end of the session we changed the focus to Mother's Day and what impressed them most about their mothers or other women they considered special. All the girls replied their mothers were special and the impressive traits varied:

Jane: Her voice when she yells. [laughter]

Donna: The way she gives me money to get me off her back.

Tara: My stepmother is really nice. When my father married her I was scared she was going to be mean and everything but she's not.

Angie: The way my mother has all the power in the family. She tells my father what to do and he does it.

Viv: I don't know. I guess the way my mother has rules. I don't know.
It was evident that the daughters saw their mothers as strong and powerful. Except for Viv who responded in a hesitant and uncertain manner. Every week as I collected bits and pieces of Viv's stories I felt that something was worrying and unsettling her. All the characteristics the girls stated involved the domestic world of the house and the family.

During this session I started to share my own story with the girls. This was of great importance because I wanted them to feel that we were all sharing our stories and I hoped that my story could be inspirational and motivating for them. The last sentence to my narrative provoked this response from Jane:

Dina:...You know your life is a journey it doesn't stop when you finish highschool or get married it continues. New wonderful things can happen to you every day.

Jane: My mother is dumb, she's a highschool dropout, she didn't even finish grade ten.

Dina: That doesn't mean she's dumb Jane. Maybe circumstances were very difficult for her. My mother didn't even go to highschool. But I'm sure your mother wants you to finish highschool.

Jane: Yeah she even wants me to go to university.

We decide, and are societally influenced in this decision, how we choose to see our mothers: as heroes or failures, as dropouts or women doing the best they can in oppressive conditions, as dumb or smart. Hating or putting down our mothers occurs frequently in our society.
Daughter's are as confused as mothers by our culture's expectations. Girls are encouraged to separate from their mothers and to devalue their relationships to them. They are expected to respect but not to be like them. In our culture, loving one's mother is linked with dependency, passivity and regression, while rejecting one's mother implies individuation, activity and independence. Distancing from one's mother is viewed as a necessary step toward adult development.[99]

If young girls are inspired and model themselves after their mothers what happens when they start to see their mothers as lacking? Does their own self-esteem suffer? "Mothers have been deprived and devalued and conscripted as agents of a system that diminishes all women."[100]

We brought the session to closure by discussing the weekly three accomplishments. This gathering was the first time that one of the girls responded negatively to this exercise.

Viv: Everything went wrong for me this week.

Dina: Oh no, well we all have weeks like that. I could tell you didn't look so happy today.

Viv: Yeah I didn't get much sleep last night.

Tara: I have days when I want to cry at the end of them.

Dina: I know what you mean, I guess we all must, but things always look better in the morning. I know that's a cliche but things are cliches because they are often true.

Viv: Yeah things look better.
This exchange was significant because it demonstrated that as a group we had evolved to a stage where we could confide in each other and share all our stories, good and bad. This point of group evolution enables therapeutic opportunities to take place by providing what is felt to be a safe and nurturing atmosphere. By sharing the fact that others have bad days [Tara] and things always look better in the morning [Dina] we may have provided Viv with two powerful messages: you are not alone and things will get better. This reinforcement prompted Viv to acknowledge that things do look better afterwards. If group self-narratives could encourage only that one conviction they should be mandatory.
Session Seven:

Problems

This session was of great significance to me because it provoked an in-depth analysis of the fine line between providing opportunities for therapeutic experiences and therapy. What is the role of an holistic arts facilitator?[101] What training is necessary? Why is it so easy for self-narrative groups to disintegrate into therapy groups?

Sharing problems and brainstorming in a female group where commonalities exist may offer solutions or new ways of seeing difficulties. By dedicating one session to listening and discussing problems the message to the girls is 'you are important' and 'your problems deserve to be heard'. Sharing predicaments alleviates the burdens that cripple self-esteem when adolescent girls carry them alone and isolated from others. All dilemmas big or small could be confronted; a self-narrative group provides the forum for healthy evaluation and for proactivism towards finding solutions.

I had two major reservations about presenting this theme. I was concerned it would encroach into personal information and transform the group into voyeurs. Voyeurism does not empower; it represses. Secondly, I did not want the storytelling group to diminish into a therapy group where we simply discussed and rediscussed problems. There is always the imminent danger of the
group disintegrating into a psychoanalytical session because stories are the basis of all therapies.[102] The facilitator must remember to sustain the atmosphere of self-discovery instead of imposing modes of treatment. This has to be the facilitator's main purpose.

Donna volunteered to go first and in her self-narrative we share a glimpse of her world and how she deals within it.

Donna: I have trouble with my cousin, he's always bugging me, he never listens, he keeps on laughing at things that are not funny...and like he pushed me so I pushed him back, and then he pushed me again so I pushed him back again and then he hit me hard so I picked him up and threw him against a car and the car got a dent in it. [Laughter from the girls] He was crying and then a teenage girl whose name is Brenda came out and started swearing at him. She said if you want to hit a girl than hit me and everything. She showed me a big bruise on her face that a guy did, and she said that something like that happened to her aunt, it was her husband, he kept on hitting her and one day he killed her. [pause] And she said if a guy ever hits you again just come and hit the door on this house.

This is Donna's reality. She is not going to allow anyone to hit her without a retaliation. Unfortunately I responded like a middleclass, university educated mother and tried to convince her that violence is wrong, and that she should not be hitting anyone.

Dina: Do you think that its acceptable for her cousin to hit her?

Girls: No.

Donna: But I beat him up though. [pause]

Dina: Well you can tell him that you're going to stop hitting him.
Donna: He started it.

Dina: He started it, hmhm, but it might start like that, he hits you and you hit him back and he starts to believe that it's okay to hit and then look what happened to that girl's aunt, her husband killed her one day. He kept on beating her, if people don't respect women then women have to stand up and say this is unacceptable. What do you think?

Tara: It is unacceptable.

Donna: He stopped when I started hitting him.

Dina: So when he saw that you could beat him he stopped.

Donna: Yeah.

Dina: What a dilemma. This is interesting. Because on the one hand he learned a lesson just because you are a girl doesn't mean that you can't beat him, although I do feel sorry for the owner of that car with a big dent in it now. Donna you sound like you solved this problem now and I think that's great. But I think what's troubling you is that you had to use violence, could that be it, is that it, you didn't like the means?

Donna: No.

Dina: No?

Donna: I use violence everyday. No one is going to hit me.

Dina: That's great that you feel that no one should beat you. Does it trouble you at all that you had to use violence to get him to stop being violent?

Donna: No, that was the only way to get him to stop.

Dina: I understand Donna. I have trouble with violence, I don't think it's the right way to deal with problems, but that's me personally...So Donna if he ever does it again what are you going to do?

Donna: I'm going to beat him up again!
Donna who loved the Power Rangers had strong convictions that no one was going to hit her and she would defend herself with any means. These principles are definitely empowering for Donna and enable her to cope and survive within her paradigm. She may be emulating male aggressive behaviour but for her there are no alternative acceptable behaviours. If she does not fight back she will be beaten. Donna did not show any timidity or passivity in dealing with her problems. However, I challenged her attitudes. Was my challenge repressive? It may have been. My attempt to pass on my beliefs and abhorrence of violence was inappropriate. In Donna's paradigm her use of violence is empowering. I may not want it or like it to be but I do respect and admire the strength of her beliefs in defending herself and thereby maintaining her sense of self-worth. By not doing so she would easily reduce herself to subordinate status. Was I unwittingly the dominant culture's tool in trying to challenge her use of aggression and attempting to recondition her to the society's traditional female role of passive subordinate?

We discussed her cousin at some length to try to comprehend his behaviour. Cognizance of his background and discussing it collectively may have given Donna a better understanding of her cousin. After thorough analysis of this session's data I concluded that Donna's attitudes and perspective were empowering. She showed tremendous self-confidence by resisting my prejudicious request for nonviolent solutions. At times failure teaches more than success.
Jane also had problems with a cousin:

Jane: I have a problem with my cousin. Once she chased me around with a knife and once she chased my brother around with a knife...She lives up the mountain. And she has a spoiled brat as a daughter.

Dina: She's already a mommy?

Jane: [nods her head] With a spoiled brat, and she wants my mom, she doesn't even take care of it because she just wants to get rid of it. She's going to get rid of it because she always wants to go to parties and to tanning salons and out and once she comes over to our house she gets really mad. Once I told her to be quiet, her daughter to be quiet, and she started to chase me around trying to cut my tongue... I have a problem with another cousin. She's on drugs.

Dina: They need a lot, a lot of help. It must be hard for you. At this stage you don't know how to help them, you don't know how to help yourself sometimes. But you know what I think, kids have a lot of wisdom, give yourself a lot of credit.

Jane: You know what I felt like punching her. I want to punch her.

Dina: I understand she scared you with her violence, but to punch her wouldn't be the right thing to do.

Jane: What should I do?

What should Jane do? The group engaged in a fascinating and observant dialogue on Jane's predicament. They all knew someone who was a bad mother; they all empathised with a child whose mother didn't want her/him. They all intuitively believed that children could sense when they were not wanted. In the holistic arts the assumption exists that children have the answers to their problems.
and all they need is an opportunity to express them and deal with them. Discussing Jane's problem in an open forum permitted an opportunity for their compassionate and sympathetic abilities to emerge and develop. Even though Jane had called the little girl a 'spoiled brat' all the girls felt sympathy and empathy for her.

Dina: ... What about the little girl?

Sammi or Tara: Like when she sees her she should pay attention to her.

Dina: Yeah, show your little cousin a little bit of love, because she probably needs to feel loved.

Vivian: She needs love.

When we talk about something we see it from different perspectives and gain a better understanding of it. How will Jane be influenced by her experiences? Will she learn to resist the behaviours she sees surrounding her or will she emulate them as acceptable scripts? At this point she sees them as wrong but the fact that her mother assumes a passive role and the unfortunate truth that Jane does not feel empowered to act keeps her trapped into feeling badly and wishing she could punch her cousin while she remains inactive. These ways of being repress her and contribute to a powerless state. Jane has already started to dehumanize others: she called her little cousin 'it' several times. By collective empathy we remind ourselves that self-respect means respecting others as well. I believe Jane benefitted by listening to the other girls feel pity for the little cousin, this gave Jane permission to sympathize for her little cousin.
Dina: ...but you are learning a lesson though. You're learning what not to do, you're learning not to take drugs, not to have a baby when you're sixteen, not to chase people around the house with a knife threatening to cut their tongue out. You are learning something. Right?

I sincerely hope they did. I was concerned for Jane; she did not express any solutions of her own, she wanted me or the group to tell her what to do. This may signify a tendency towards self-subjugation and dependency.

After Jane's problem we moved on to Tara. She was succinct and articulate in describing her dilemma.

Tara: My problem is my little brother. He's always getting things, he's got toy boxes filled with toys, and I don't have any. He's got tons of clothes, he's got everything he wants, whatever he wants he gets it.

Tara's brother was four years old. She felt a strong sense of injustice and frustration that needed to be released. This is a classical example of self-narratives providing a therapeutic opportunity.

Dina: Are you jealous of your brother Tara?

Tara: [nods her head affirmatively] Cause he gets e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g.

Dina: And you mean attention too, you're not meaning just material things?

Tara: He gets attention, he gets everything!

In a therapy group the fact that this was her half-brother would have probably been focused on. In a self-narrative group each person determines the extent they wish to reveal and where they want the focus to be. Self-narrative provides opportunities
for self-growth. The group worked well together. This was a problem they could all identify with to some extent. We discussed different ways for Tara to communicate her feelings to her parents.

Dina: Do you think you should bring this up when you're having a fight with them?

Jane: Yup, that's how I did it!

Angie: No not when you're having a fight or when your parents are mad at you. They won't listen.

What does Tara want? "For them to be more fair." Tara kept on repeating that her brother got everything; she finally completed her thoughts and revealed where the real pain was coming from: "he gets everything. And I don't get anything." Feeling unimportant and forgotten by parents adversely affects and damages self-esteem. By internalizing these feelings young girls become more susceptible to feelings of unworthiness. Tara thinks she gets nothing, emotionally and materially. Whether this is true or not is irrelevant; how Tara perceives her reality is the only pertinence.

Did discussing her problem offer Tara a therapeutic experience? Probably. She discussed it with others in the group who felt similarly and she was reminded that her parents care about her and she should attempt to talk to them.

When Tara first started narrating her problem Vivian had interrupted her:
Vivian: It looks like you're about to cry!

Tara: No. [Big pause.]

After listening to Tara admit to feeling ignored, insignificant and hurt Vivian emotionally and verbally connected to the conversation and shared her own feelings.

Vivian: My mother is always yelling at me. I don't know why! And she starts to cry all the time and so do I.

Vivian had been very quiet the last three sessions. The session prior to this one she had confessed that nothing had gone right for her. I sensed that something had been troubling her. Retrospectively, I may have chosen the topic 'Problems' as a vehicle for Viv to express herself. I'm not sure. Again I did not want to interfere and intrude. I wanted her to decide what she wanted to share with the group.

Vivian: Like my grandmother said to me like who do you think loves you more, your mother or us, like your grandfather and me. And she said we love you more than anybody else in the world, even your mother. And my mother started crying.

Dina: Well I think your grandmother. I think your grandparents love you more than anybody else in the world but not as much as your mother probably. Maybe they were trying to tell you that they love you with all their hearts. But do you think that was the right thing to say to a child?

Tara: I don't because it could make you unhappy.

Dina: Exactly.

Vivian: And now my grandmother isn't talking to my mother.
Dina: You know sometimes grandparents don't agree with what their children do. Like your mother or your father, even my own parents sometimes don't think the decisions I make are Okay. Viv, Viv do you believe that your mother loves you a lot?

Vivian: [nods her head yes, she is crying.]

Dina: You feel bad that they had a fight, everyone feels bad when there is a fight in the family. It's okay to feel bad, it shows that you're a sensitive person. And everyone cries, especially over things like this. Have you ever had a fight with your mother?

Viv: All the time.

Dina: But after everything's okay again?

Vivian: Yeah.

Dina: That's because a mother and a daughter have a bond, a very strong bond. Your grandmother is your mother's mother right? They maybe had a bad fight but in a little while they are going to be friends again, there's a bond between a mother and a daughter.

Vivian: My grandmother had a fight with my aunt too, my mother's sister. Because my aunt feels that my grandparents love us more than my cousins. And my grandma is mad that they are blaming her, she says its not her its my grandpa who spoils us.

Dina: Does anyone have anything to say to that? You know just because someone is an adult doesn't mean that they act maturely. I'm sure that you girls would act more maturely than a lot of adults from what I've seen of you. But you know what Viv you are not to blame if your grandparents spoil you more than your cousins or if your mother and your grandmother have fights....This is really bothering you because you want your mother and grandmother to get along. Because you love your grandparents a lot.

Viv: [nodding affirmatively]

Dina: Is there anything Viv can do in this situation?
Tara: Just be happy that they do love you.

Dina: And are you bothered because you know your mother is hurt too?

Viv: Yeah, because her mother doesn't think she loves her kids.

Dina: Sometimes adults say things that they don't mean, because they are trying to deal with their own hurt feelings.

Viv: Like my mom cries all the time. [silence]

Dina: I guess your mother needs to know that you love her and that your sister loves her. And she needs to have her parents approval too and it's difficult.

Viv: Like she cries when my sister gets into a fight with her.

Dina: You know growing up is very hard.

Jane: My dad left my mom. He took off for two days he went drinking in a different city.

Dina: It's hard to be a kid and its hard to be an adult and to have problems and children, and responsibilities, and not to feel good as an adult. It's very hard....

Someone: She should write a letter to her grandmother explaining how she feels.

Dina: It might help.

Tara: Maybe if she tells them how much its hurting her maybe they'll stop.

This was a very difficult and emotionally charged story for all. It was a cathartic opportunity for Viv and a critical catalyst for me to research and investigate the role of facilitator in self-narrative storytelling. Initially I did not know how to best deal with this confession and situation. The dilemma for the
drama facilitator is s/he must walk a narrow and ill-defined road. The preventive and therapeutic elements of the arts must not become therapy with the facilitator as central actor, a patriarchal authority figure dispensing advice. Gary L. Landreth correctly stated "the best discovery the discoverer makes for himself."[103]

As a cohesive group we were able to help Viv by putting the event in perspective allowing her to lead and we to follow. Viv's catharsis, her ability to put her emotions to words and the authentic caring of the group provided a healing opportunity for her.

This was a pivotal session for the group. For myself it was an epiphany that I had to reexamine the blurred line between 'therapeutic' and 'therapy' and define guidelines for my role as facilitator. For the girls it was an occasion to speak, express and be heard. Each girl revealed as much as she wanted to. They were in control, were developing coping skills and cultivating the ability to empathize and encourage others in the group. Angie chose not to say anything. Donna demonstrated her strength in maintaining her right to defend herself and taught me something in the process. Jane, Tara and Viv expressed feelings of hurt, confusion and loss. All were shown respect, acceptance, empathy and encouragement. Confidence grows when experiences are validated and given significance through verbal communication.[104]
Session Eight

Family Stories

This session was dedicated to stories about families. The story could be any type: funny, sad, etc. The purpose was to have the girls validate themselves by sharing family stories. What familial stories could they come up with? How did they see their families?

Family stories contribute to the framework of one's personal identity. Sam Keen interprets 'family stories' as 'informing myths'.[105]

These informing myths ...have the power to propel individuals forward with confidence in their ability and a healthy perspective on their place in the world or they can stifle feelings of self-worth and leave people feeling powerless to change their fate. [106]

Viv volunteered to go first. At the previous session Viv's problem story had been intensely emotional. Her family story was very humorous. It was as if she was trying to create an emotional balance for herself. Her family story was another way of coping.

Viv: Okay, this is a funny one. When me and my sister were little we use to bathe together and my sister went to the washroom in it and then my mom came up and my sister told my mom that I wouldn't eat her 'chocolate'...
[laughter]

Dina: Does your mother still tell that story sometimes?
Viv: Yeah, she tells everyone else. [laughter]

Dina: That's a very funny story. Families have a lot of funny stories that they can share and laugh at together don't they? Of course they can be somewhat embarrassing.

Tara: It wouldn't be a family if it wasn't embarrassing!!
I believe this gathering offered Viv another therapeutic opportunity. After the cathartic and emotionally draining narrative the previous week Viv had an occasion to recall a funny story that her mother enjoyed telling people. It was a reminder that the family has a history with happy memories as well as sad ones. This positive and optimistic memory may enable her to survive the negative and destructive episodes that occur in every family. By articulating the story she substantiates that good times have occurred and may transpire again. The story offers her the gift of hope. Tara brought Viv's story to closure with the truthful and humorous comment: "It wouldn't be a family if it wasn't embarrassing!!" Her comment elucidated the reality that all families have good and bad memories. This type of sharing facilitates self-acceptance.

Viv's story influenced Jane and Donna who both shared stories containing 'poo' and younger siblings. The girls found these stories very amusing.

Tara's family story was moving and inspirational. She narrated the events of her brother's heart transplant. What was significant besides the meaningful contents was that her storytelling abilities were improving and evolving.

Tara: My story is about when my brother got sick. With his heart. It was at seven at night and he was going to bed but before he fell asleep he started to throw up, and throwing up, and throwing up. It was almost eight and he was still puking so we went to the hospital and it took us an hour just to get in.
And they took x-rays and everything and they thought he had a lung infection. But then they sent him to Mac and then he didn't have pneumonia it was heart disease. And then, so they sent him to London and they said 'we'll put him on the list for a heart because the ribs are closing in on the heart and he may die.' So he had to have the puffers...

Tara recounted her story from the heart with an emotional and dramatic flair that had all of us at the edge of our seats. It was evident that this experience had influenced her immensely. When I asked her if this episode had taught her anything she replied simply: "That miracles happen".

This is a profound and significantly empowering belief: miracles happen. I told the girls that I believed in miracles and miracles happened everyday.

Dina: ...in fact you may have already had a miracle in your life.

Angie: Like being born.

Jane: I didn't lose my eye with that knife... and my foot, my foot.

Sammi: My foot too, my aunt was holding a nail gun and she shot it by accident and the nail went into my foot.

This was an opportunity for the girls to see certain incidents in their lives as miracles.

The girls responded very well to this session. Tara's story was inspirational to the group collectively. I concluded that the whole group benefitted from this session. Viv had a chance to reframe for herself her family not as a troubled unhappy group but
to recall happy memories together. Instead of a mother who is always crying she recalls a mother laughing joyously. For Viv remembering a happier time provided a therapeutic experience. Viv engaged in restorying, the 'reinterpretation of one's biography.'[107]

It changes the meanings we attach to things and events and so reconstrues our world. Such a perspective implies that the patient is a victim not of her history but of the story in which she has put that history.[108]

Tara's story was deeply and profoundly inspirational and a wonderful teaching story: miracles do happen. Tara gave a gift to all the girls with her storytelling. The story affected each girl. Appropriate female ego development relies on the tangibility of hope in their lives.

The family stories did not dictate traditional gender roles to the girls. The stories facilitated their ego development by offering humour and inspiration in a communal atmosphere. These characteristics are essential if females are to overcome patriarchal bias.
Session Nine

Philosophies of Life

Thinking about our approach to life: our ideals, reflections, beliefs, attitudes, theories, opinions and convictions may be crucial in developing our personal paradigms. Articulating these beliefs is essential in understanding patterns and detecting conflicts. Talking and verbalizing our theories allows us the opportunity to refine, generate, cultivate and change our ideologies to get us where we want to go. For females this is especially significant and meaningful. Often females operate in paradigms that are full of contradictions and disempower them from acting in their own self-interest. Collective speaking bestows the occasion for disparities to be discovered and better planning to take place.

During the process of self-examination, women feel a heightened consciousness and sense of choice about "how I want to think" and "how I want to be". They develop a narrative sense of the self – past and future. [109]

Discussing our philosophies obliges us to extrapolate on them. Girls cannot design empowering scripts for themselves if they do not first understand how they think and what they want. This session was offered to give the girls an opportunity to ask themselves what their operative philosophies were.
Jane was very excited about this topic and volunteered to go first:

Jane: My philosophies are one a good education, two be ready when you want to move out, three get a good job. Four get a good family, five live happily ever after.

Dina: Hmm, Now where...[mumbling voices]

Jane: And get a good house.

Dina: What do you mean to be ready when its time to move out?

Jane: When you don't have enough money or the right stuff to move out, like a couch a sofa a fridge.

Dina: And when do you think its a good age to move out?

Jane: Sixteen, my mother said she's going to kick me out when I'm sixteen, yeah right, or when I graduate from college.

Donna: College?

Jane: yeah, college.

Viv: Why are you talking like a baby Jane?

Jane: I'm not.

Dina: And what would be a good job for you Jane?

Jane: A job, a teacher or an artist.

Dina: And what do you mean by a good family?

Jane: Like a rich husband and two kids.

Dina: And a good house?

Jane: Yeah a good house, not like a stupid small apartment.
Jane wants a better life. She already knows that a good education may help her attain the things she wants; however her voice lacks conviction. While she's narrating her articulation does sound like a younger child's. Viv asks her why she is talking like a baby; she denies it. This may be another manifestation of patriarchal conditioning. Jane is adopting the role of passive and weak subordinate and the assumption that she has no right to better herself.

These characteristics form a certain familiar cluster: submissiveness, passivity, docility, dependency, a lack of initiative, inability to act, to decide, to think and the like. In general, this cluster includes qualities more characteristic of children than adults - immaturity, weakness, and helplessness. If subordinates adopt these characteristics they are considered well-adjusted.[110]

Her philosophies are slightly muddled: she believes sixteen is a good age to move out as long as you have the 'stuff' you need. Jane's narrative reveals that she has not really thought about careers, work she may want to do or the education necessary. This may be simply because she is quite young and these things are still abstract for her.

A good family still means a rich husband for Jane. Already there is a male focus in her life - a rich husband is something to strive for. This philosophy is a byproduct of the dominant culture's influence. A script is being written for her to perpetuate the female dependency on males. Her use of a 'baby' voice, lack of interest in jobs and her description of a good
family as one with a rich husband strips her of her own motivation to strive for the better life herself. She may want a better life but she is waiting to be rescued - to 'live happily ever after'.

Viv's five philosophies were:

Viv: Okay, number one treat people the way you want to be treated. Two go to school and learn, get a useful job that pays good money. Four get a good education. Five and remember the saying if you think you can't do something try, try again until you do it.

Dina: Viv tell me what number three was again.

Viv: Get a good job with good money.

Dina: Now treat people the way you want to be treated, what does that mean to you?

Viv: It means like if you want to be treated in some way treat someone the same way so you'll be treated well too.

Dina: Do you guys agree with that?

Girls: Yeah.

Dina: That's a good one, go to school and get a useful job, what would be a useful job?

Viv: One that got you good money.

Dina: And a good education, does that mean finishing high school, finishing university?

Viv: Like get your diploma.

Dina: High school diploma?

Viv: Yeah.

Jane: I want to be a doctor and a lawyer.

Dina: Remember the saying try, try again. Don't give up. Do you think that's a good one guys?

Girls: Yes!!!
Jane: My mom gave up in ninth grade.

Female poverty has an extreme affect on young girls. Viv's mother is a single mother trying to raise two daughters in difficult circumstances. Viv places an importance on education and a job that pays well. But what is a good education? There is confusion on this point. Viv may think a high school diploma is sufficient to get a good job. She doesn't know any better. There is no exposure at all to outside future possibilities. There is no information for these girls to formulate future plans from. Without access to knowledge there is the continuity of oppression and poverty.

Viv does believe in treating others well, and not giving up easily. These may be empowering principles for her. However the lack of knowledge Jane and Viv both display on the subject of academic and career possibilities is disturbing. In the exchange Jane states that she wants to be a doctor and a lawyer. These comments do not sound realistic; they sound false. Jane also shares that her mother gave up in grade nine. Throughout the sessions Jane made demeaning remarks about both her parents.

Donna's philosophies were inspired by her Christianity;

Donna: I always like pray in the morning and when I get my food, I thank God for it so I pray, even when I go to a restaurant. Like I pray that the food won't poison me, and treat everyone well even if they're not your friend. Forgive and forget, and obey your parents and older people.

Dina:...And what does this belief in God mean to you, you pray to him quite a bit.
Donna: God is important. And he takes care of me.

Dina: How do you feel when you think that God is taking care of you?

Donna: Good.

Donna's belief in God influences her outlooks to life. She believes in prayer, treating all people well, respecting her parents and elders and the very Christian ideology of forgiving. Although having a belief system in place can be excellent in preserving and maintaining female self-esteem at the same time it can be problematic. Having religious beliefs and teachings helps people codify and evaluate who they are and how they want to live their lives. Religion can be very empowering but is it liberating for women? There has been much debate on this. It is not religion that is repressive to women but how the Church and patriarchy have chosen to interpret it. Many times the interpretations have resulted in female subjugation.

Unfortunately, those cloistered celibate males doing most of the writing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries emphasized the contrast between heavenly Mary and the biological version of Mom...Instead, they exhorted females to be celibate...To be like the Madonna, one must have an intact hymen, not a baby.[111]

In Donna's situation her faith, so far, has been a beneficial and constructive element in her life. When I asked her for an example of forgiving and forgetting she brought up her episode with her cousin whom she had beaten. She holds no grudges, she forgave him.
Angie's philosophy of life was as follows:

Angie: The first one is get a good education, uh number two is get everything before I move out. I already have a bed and a dresser. Number three don't talk or even go near any weird or crazy people. Four get a good job that pays well, so I can take care of my family. Five get a good husband and everything else I need.

Jane: Get a rich husband.

Dina: A good education, what's a good education high school diploma, university diploma what?

Angie: All the diplomas I need, a university diploma.

It is evident that Angie has given some thought to her future plans. Angie already has a goal in mind when she discusses her plans. She wants to have a good job and she has a reason; 'to take care of her family'. There is some confusion for her when I asked her what age she thought was appropriate to move out. She first replied "seventeen, eighteen..." When I asked what she thought would be a good job she replied:

Angie: Maybe a doctor.

Jane: That's what I'm going to be.

Angie: Or a lawyer, or just not a surgeon, cause I couldn't cut open a person it would be like killing them. Or a psychiatrist.

The girls displayed little selection when it came to careers. The top occupations were doctor and lawyer. These professions are societally considered to be the highest in prestige and prosperity. Was this another area where the girls had little exposure to and knowledge of the existence of other career paths? Or is it normal for these two professions to be mentioned so frequently? I think in
this case it was a combination of both. When the girls were thinking of successful lives they congregated around these two careers. However it is unfortunate because these are also very difficult careers to be accepted into and to complete. Are they setting themselves up for failure? Are they indeed interested in these jobs? Or do they choose them because they are regarded by our society as the most impressive? Do they truly believe they can complete their studies in these areas, especially if they don't want to go to university or if they want to move out at sixteen? There was an ambivalence surrounding their talk that can be described as a defeatist attitude.

A significant conversation emerged on the subject of husbands.

Dina: And a good husband, what is a good husband?

Angie: A good husband is a loving husband.

Jane: A good husband is a rich husband.

Dina: What's more important a rich husband or a loving husband?

Voice: Loving.

Voice: Loving.

Donna: If he's too rich some other girl is going to go after him too.

Dina: ... We often don't know what we want till we think about it. Like the rich husband, but when Angie thought about it she decided that a loving husband is more important.

Jane: But then you're poor and on welfare like my mom and my dad.
Dina: There are ways to have a lo...

Jane: My dad is loving and he's on welfare.

Angie: My dad is loving and he's not on welfare.

Jane: Well my dad is loving and he's on welfare and we don't have any money, just two dollars.

Dina: So then its important for you to finish high school, you know that there are better things out there. You know your parents love you and want the best for you. And they tell you. Your mother is always telling you to finish high school right?

Jane: Yeah she keeps on saying you don't want to be dumb like me.

Dina: And Angie is telling you that there are loving husbands who are not on welfare.

Viv: Be thankful you're still alive and you have food in the cupboard.

Jane: We hardly have any left, we have to do major shopping at 'no frills'.

Angie: That's where my mom does her shopping.

Jane: Last time my mom went to IGA

Viv: We shop at IGA all the time.

Jane: Last time she had only a hundred dollars and she only bought ten things.

Dina: She tries her best. It's not an easy life and life isn't fair. Well what you can do Jane is get an education.

Jane: I have another philosophy too, do not smoke and do not drink.
In the second session all the girls had expressed interest in marrying a rich husband. This was actually a vital component in their fairy tales. In this session we see the girls deciding that a good husband is better than a rich husband. All except Jane.

Two factors are significant in this dialogue. First, two of the girls mentioned getting a husband as an important part of their philosophies. This is not unusual; patriarchy conditions females to accept marriage as a natural script. At the same time males are not expected to attach the same importance to attracting a wife. Secondly, in this session a rich husband loses some of his attraction as the girls decide that a good husband is better than a rich husband.

All the girls agreed with this assessment except for Jane. She is being impelled not only by patriarchal influences but by the effects of poverty on familial circumstances. As a result of her circumstances Jane has made an erroneous analogy between loving father and family on welfare. Not only is she expecting the 'man' to be the supporter she is learning to believe that most men are unreliable and that money takes precedence over love and decency. These philosophies are the stuff which nightmares are made of. Attitudes like these are instrumental in the continued subordination of females. Growing up to believe that it is the man's responsibility to financially support the whole family and equating love with poverty chains women to a futureless impoverishment.
Having the other girls respond affirmatively and constructively towards loving husbands may have allowed Jane to reframe her own ideas about males. Unfortunately it is not only patriarchy that cheats females of their self-esteem; poverty also prevents females from becoming empowered women.

There has been a transformation between the second session when all the girls rated a rich husband as important to evolving the idea to a loving husband.

The girls who described their philosophies in this session were all prejudiced by their lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Jobs that made good money were very important to them yet little effort had gone into thinking of promising careers or knowledge of what it would take to achieve financial security.

This theme was continued into the tenth session.
Session Ten

Philosophies Continued

Tara and Sammi did not have an opportunity in the last session to discuss their own philosophies. This was more of a relaxed session where we discussed a variety of related themes because we had the time to do so. Sammi began;

Sammi: Yea, the first one is don't treat people the way you would not like to be treated. And the other one is don't fool around in school or you won't get a good education....don't give up, if you work hard enough you'll get it right.

The theme of not giving up was one that we had discussed in previous sessions. I believe that having dialogued on the subject extensively made an impact on the girls in a very positive way. The way Sammi phrases her first philosophy illustrates the inarticulation that was prevalent in the group. The girls did not display high verbal skills. This is to be expected. Skills have to be used to be perfected. To master and show proficiency requires the application of the skill.

Sammi mentioned behaving in school as a way to do well. Behaviour in the school was an actual problem. Bad behaviour from students was very disruptive and all the girls gave examples of this.

Dina: How do you explain those behaviours?
Donna: They do it for fun.
Tara: Boredom.
Donna: They don't like French.
Dina:.. And how does the French teacher deal with it?
Tara: She hardly notices it.
Donna: She doesn't know. She never notices us.

Their education is being compromised by unsatisfactory student conduct and they are learning that they are unimportant because their French teacher doesn't even appear to notice them.

Tara's first philosophy was 'Hakunamatata', a word from Disney's cartoon 'The Lion King' which means "don't worry about things." Her other philosophies were:

Tara: Okay, get a good education for a good job.

Sammi: Talk louder.

Tara: Get a good job, treat others like you want to be treated [laughs], don't smoke and be responsible.

Dina: Don't smoke and be responsible. What do you mean by responsible?

Tara: Like don't do drugs.

Jane: Don't get drunk and do drugs.

Angie: Like suicide.

Tara: Like don't walk on a balcony that you might fall off. Don't commit any crimes.

Dina: Angie you said don't commit suicide.

Angie: Yeah, that's a crazy thing to do.

Tara: If you do something take the credit.

Dina: Take responsibility for your actions right?

Tara: Yeah.
Tara's philosophies were sensible and had been issues that the other girls had brought up as well. Significantly Tara also demonstrated a lack of verbal fluency: "if you do something take the credit". I interpreted this to indicate taking responsibility for your own actions and Tara agreed. Effective talk means articulate and expressive talk.

Tara's narrative propelled us into discussing peer pressure and smoking. This was an occasion for the group to exchange opinions and ideas. All the girls agreed that smoking was bad and that there would be heavy peer pressure coming when they entered high school.

Jane continued to disparage her parents' lifestyle throughout the session. This was a common theme for Jane throughout the history of the group.

Jane: All my mother knows to say in French is hello and goodbye.

Dina: Your mother? That's okay.

Jane: Yeah but she wanted to be a veterinarian.

Dina: So what does that tell you?

Jane: Go all the way in school.

Later on in the same session:

Jane: My mother doesn't want me to smoke and drink and she smokes and drinks. So she's setting a bad example.

For Jane this persistent theme of criticizing her parents was probably repressive. Her attitude was one of challenge and disdain, and it concerned me.
As the adult in the group I could not resist encouraging them with their studies and giving them advice. In review of the transcripts I believe that they had an opportunity to think and discuss study habits due to my intervention. As an interested adult my opinions seemed to have a great deal of clout and my giving significance to school work may have influenced them.

Dina:... You have an idea of what you want and that's great. That's half the battle. But implementing them, putting them into practice may be hard. You must be prepared. You can't be unprepared, because its hard sometimes. Like 'get a good education', that's hard when people are telling you don't study.

Sammi: I just ignore it.

Dina: Let's say you had a big test.

Sammi: Or a big essay.

Dina: Or a big essay and your friends are not serious about school its so easy to say I want to go out with my friends and have a good time. Sometimes you're going to have to encourage yourself and that's hard. Have you ever thought how hard it may be?

Angie: Yes when our teacher gives us homework and my friends want me to go out and play I say well in about twenty minutes.

Dina: That's very strong of you Angie.

Tara: I do my homework after supper.

Viv: I'm not allowed to go out until I've done my homework.

Dina: That's an excellent way to do it.

Viv: On Thursdays I study.
The topic of philosophies allowed the group to collectively review some of their frames of reference. Some patriarchal influences were demonstrated and the effects of poverty were obvious. The lack of language fluency displayed in discussing these ideas may be a result of lack of exposure and practice. These girls were unused to discussing and thinking about these types of issues. Developing a self-empowering script requires an understanding of one's values and ideals. This knowledge is cultivated by opportunities to contemplate and verbally reflect. "Language is a tool for representing experience, and tools contribute to creative endeavors only when used."[112]

Closure to the session was marked by a discussion of the three things they had done that they were proud of. The girls illustrated a great interest and excitement in sharing these feats. This exercise continued to encourage positive self-image.
Session Eleven

`My Perfect Life`

The theme for the eleventh session was `My Perfect Life`. I had asked the girls to think about and describe what their ideal existence would be. The rationale for this session was an opportunity to use the imagination, the power of pretend, and enable fantasies and creativity to evolve. The articulation of one's fantasy life also highlights if and how much one has been influenced by the dominant culture. Do the girls seek to fulfil a male script that has subserviency as their fate? Is the perfect life described by the girls a product of cultural stereotyping? Is their definition of the perfect life self-empowering or oppressive?

Tara volunteered to start the dialogue:

Tara: My perfect life would be this a loving husband, a nice house, a good education, and two kids. I would have to have a job that paid good money. My husband would have to have rich parents and a good looking body. [laughter] We would live in Burlington because that is my home city. We would live where the rich live because the houses are big and nice. I would have healthy and nutritious food and my kids would be disciplined and they would not do anything bad. This would be my perfect life. [everyone claps]

Dina:...Does anyone have any comments about Tara's perfect life?

Viv: It was great!

Angie: What happens if you meet a really nice guy with a really cute face but he's a little chubby?

Tara: No way, he's got to be in good condition.

Dina: Do you all think it's a good life that she's thought of?

Girls: Yeah!
In Tara's description we see the affects of cultural stereotyping; money and appearance play an important role in her fantasy life. Her husband must be in good condition and his parents should be rich. These requirements have been conventional and commonplace in patriarchy, except the positions were reversed. In some societies men still ask for dowries and looks have always played an important role in women getting married. Here Tara has chosen to imitate patriarchal standards. Although she has been biased by the dominant culture her interpretation is empowering because she cites a good education and a well-paying job as part of her desired life. Her husband's parents are rich but he is predominantly a 'loving' husband. This deviates from the stereotype of the rich man being the ultimate goal for women. She also continues the role of nurturer to her future children, making sure that they have nutritious food and are well disciplined. It is obvious that thought and reflection had occurred here. Tara was articulate and confident when she spoke.

Sammi's description was next:

Sammi: My perfect life would be with a rich husband living in a mansion. We don't have to work. We have two girls, we have a really beautiful car, like a Corvette or a Porsche or some other good car. And the perfect life would be like living in Snow White's life except not getting the apple by the witch.

Angie: It sounds like a fairy tale.

Dina: Yes it does, it was very good, let's give Sammi a hand. [applause] Do you live happily ever after?
Sammi: [giggles] Yeah.

Dina: ... And Sammi no work for you or your husband? Let me ask you do you think you might get bored?

Sammi: No it would be great.

Tara and Angie: It would be boring.

Viv: I would get bored.

Donna: Not me not if I had a TV.

Dina: How about you Jane?

Jane: I would get bored too.

Sammi's interpretation has been directly biased by the dominant culture's purpose of subjugating females. In her perfect life she married a very rich man. They live in a mansion, have a beautiful car and never work. This fantasy is not an empowering one because its achievement relies on the existence of the rich husband. Without him Sammi has nothing. There is no self-motivation except to catch a rich husband and to look good and there is no desire for self-accomplishments. These types of illusions keep women chained to a life of subservience and unhappiness, yet they are very easy to fall into. Part of their attraction is that they are falsely perceived as easy to attain.

Jane's perfect life began;

Jane: First I graduate with a great education. Then I become a part time doctor and a part time teacher. In my spare time I'm an artist. I'd marry a loving husband and have well-mannered kids. Before I moved out with my husband I'm ready with all the things that I would need like maybe a bed, a stove, a fridge, things like that. I'd be a nice mom, a very nice mom, even though I'd be taking night school and be gone all week, but on the weekend I'd be home.
I want to have two girls and one boy. Neither of them would like Barney. Plus every summer we would go everywhere, from Disneyland to the Toronto science centre. We would live in British Columbia. When I died millions of people came and thanked me for curing cancer and saving them. And then they, everybody except my husband and three kids leave, and they say good-bye. I went up to heaven and started life all over again.

Dina: ...And you'd be a very good mother. What do you mean by that?

Jane: Not yelling.

Tara: Not spoiling them too much.

Viv: My kids are going to be very spoiled.

Dina: You're going to spoil your kids Viv?

Viv: I'm going to spoil them with things but they won't be stuck up.

Jane's perfect life encompasses many of the elements discussed in the group. The collective dialoguing was a catalyst in her shaping of the perfect life. The irony is that its scope is so wide and varied that it could never come to any culmination or fruition. Is Jane trying to tell me what she thinks I want to hear? Possibly. Has she been influenced by the group's evolving theories and discussions? Evidently. Will the affect be enduring and empowering? I hope so.

Jane has successfully incorporated many of our evolving theories on a wide range of issues: the importance of a good education, having a good job and some means of independence, the transfer from wanting a rich husband to a loving husband and
wanting to achieve something spectacular in her life such as finding the cure for cancer. She has also maintained parts of the cultural stereotyping. Wanting to be a doctor is considered a major accomplishment. However by flooding her story with so many diverse and incongruous ambitions she may be undermining and foiling her own ability to attain these goals. Is this another way women incapacitate their potential? By dreaming of things that they know they cannot accomplish in one lifetime they prepare themselves for a life where dreams do not come true. They learn to live with disappointment and unfulfilled aspirations.

Viv: Okay, my perfect life is to have a good life. Lots of money, a nice husband, a good job. To know how to read and write etc., a good education. To be nice to other people. Don't tease animals. Don't mouth back to adults. Treat people like you want to be treated. Buy a good and nice house. Speed all I want and never get a ticket. Be spoiled but not rotten. Be able to draw, play gymnastics and other sports.

Dina: ....And playing sports is important. And a good job, let me ask what do you think is a good job?

Viv: A dentist's nurse.

Viv has also assimilated the evolving theories from our collective dialoguing into her perfect life. In her case they seem to be empowering. She starts off her narrative by stating that she wants to have a good life and she goes on to describe what that would consist of. She has money, marriage and a nice husband as goals; this was consistent in the group. Significantly she has many ambitions and aims that focus on her alone. Some of the
elements involve altruistic self-improvement and ethical considerations and others entail the self-enjoyment of life through sports and the arts. To me this was an empowering descriptive narrative that may have also influenced the group. This was a strong and promising description of a perfect life and hopefully it inspired.

Angie: My perfect life. I'm rich I have a loving husband and I'm laying in a inner tube in my HUGE pool. While the kids are in the other pool, I will wrap their birthday presents. Me and my husband John are wrapping the kids Sommer and Chris are busy at the computer. They are playing some game. Ring, Ring, "hello" "yes hello the butler Carling tried to break the computer and he hit Sommer. I am sorry she's in the hospital badly bruised." "oh no, I have to get there but where is Chris, I just can't leave him here all alone!" My husband says "He's just fine my cupcake. He's at Sophia's playing at Steven's mansion. I'll come and pick you up as soon as possible." I rushed to the door and waited for about fifteen minutes. Well I knew it was a practical joke because it took so long. I just knew it. They must have thought that I didn't figure it out, but I knew. They must have known that it was April Fools as well as Sommer's birthday. In the end they found out that I figured it out. Because I didn't have tears in my eyes. That's only one of the joys of having the perfect life.

Dina:...And how did you make all your money?

Angie: My husband works, sort of, he has a candy company, a phone company and a TV company.

Angie's anecdote of the perfect life was dramatic and entertaining. She presented it with a considerable amount of flair and immensely amused the girls. It was meant to be funny and she presented in a creatively inventive manner. Her way of presenting
her perfect life highlighted solid self-confidence and a sense of humour. However the gender stereotyping typical of patriarchy was evident in her narrative. It was her husband who worked and owned all the companies. The traditional theme of male as provider was again demonstrated.

Donna: My perfect life. My idea of a perfect life is being rich and famous. For a job I would want to be a lawyer and a part time rapper. I don't want to get married but if I do he would have to be caring and have a lot of money so we can pay the bills. He would have to have a Mustang 5.0 or a Corvette or a limo. Also we'd have to live in big mansion and if he cheats on me he's dead because I'll murder him. In my life I would love for it to be peaceful and have no pollution.

Donna spent a great deal of time describing the husband she says she doesn't want to have. This may be seen as an outcome of her living in a patriarchal society. Even though she says she doesn't want to marry she continues to focus on men and to see her own life revolving around them. She has not realized that she can be the one with the Mustang or the Corvette. She sees the luxuries of life as something that men provide to women. This is not an enabling assumption; it is instead a deeply damaging one. Although Donna had previously said she wanted to be an actress so she could be a Power Ranger she chose a more traditionally prestigious occupation, that of lawyer, to describe her perfect life.
The girls showed a range of empowering and repressive interpretations of the perfect life. All the narratives displayed some patriarchal influence, some more than others. Of the six Tara's and Viv's were the most empowering because they embodied a focus on the self and involved a degree of self-sufficiency and some assumption that they were responsible for their own happiness. Angie's was humorous and because of its presentation it is difficult to analyze. Her reference to her husband as being the only breadwinner was disconcerting. Sammi's version also relied heavily on the rich rescuing male motif. Jane's story had so many dreams to achieve that it was as if she was colluding in her failure by overreaching her ability, and Donna focused on 'man' as the meaningful and significant entity in her perfect life.

As facilitator I did not criticize their interpretations. I complemented the effort that went into each one and asked them to clarify aspects I found repressive. Listening to Viv and Tara's versions may have provided an opportunity for them to rethink their idealized lives. Also the chance to discuss out loud their ideas may be enough of a push to elicit some rethinking for more empowering scripts.

What was striking about this meeting was that the girls were becoming much more animated and articulate in their narratives. It seems that simply having an opportunity to verbalize was sufficient to produce ameliorated conversation.
Session Twelve

Seven Things I Want to Be When I Grow Up,
Seven Things I Don't Want to Be

The twelfth session's theme was seven things they wanted to be when they were adults and the seven things they did not want to be. I also asked what they saw themselves doing at ages 23, 43, 62 and 92. The rationale behind this session was to provide an opportunity to collectively self-direct their futures and determine what they wanted to be and what they did not aspire to. The topic was meant to be provocative and require some reflection.

The subject was given to them at the previous gathering and some of the girls chose to write down their responses.

Angie volunteered to lead the session.

Angie: Do grown-ups drive me crazy? Yes they bug me when someone does something wrong and I get blamed for it. When I'm grown-up I hope I'll be kind, generous, happy, loved, smart, employed and a mother of tame children. I hope I won't be poor, hated, stupid, single, unhappy, greedy, a drug addict.

When I'm twenty-three I'll have a good job like a lawyer or a doctor. When I'm forty-three I'll hope to see lots of countries and scenery. When I'm sixty-two I'll hope to do lots of exercises so I can live longer. If I reach the age of ninety-two I'll take it easy but still exercise and eat healthy and nutritious foods like veggies and fruit.

Dina: ...This is great but why don't you want to be single? What happens if you're single?

Angie: That means there's no one to love.

Angiea's narrative was very impressive; she articulated her thoughts well and her response demonstrated contemplation and
maturity. She displayed a healthy perspective towards life and the
importance of emotional connections with others. She would not
want to be single because that would mean that there is no one to
love. This healthy attitude is impressive in someone so young. It
is not the fear of being unloved but not having someone to love
that propels her to wanting a relationship.

Donna: ...Do grown-ups sometimes drive you crazy? Grown-ups do drive me crazy. I hate it when they pinch your cheeks and say "my you've grown". When I'm grown-up I'll probably still be living with my parents and if nothing happens to me I'll be alive. I'm going to be smart, cool, nice, pretty, alive, average height, an actor or rich and famous. I don't want to be ugly, stupid, weird, poor, dead, uncool and below average height.

When I'm twenty-three I'll probably be a student in college or university. When I'm forty-three I'll see my first grandchild. At the age of sixty-two I'll probably be rocking back and forth in my rocking chair. If I'm alive at ninety-five I'll probably be offering candy to my great grandchild or in an old folk's home.

Donna's verbal skills had also improved significantly. I asked her about becoming a grandmother at the age of forty-three and she responded that her own mother was around that age and already a grandmother.

Jane: Do grown-ups drive you crazy? Yes they always drive me crazy. When I'm grown-up I'm going to be a mother of three, a doctor, happy, an artist, rich, helpful, ahh a nice mom. I hope I won't be poor, [mumble], a drug addict, single, snobby, a liar.

When I'm twenty-three I'll be a doctor, when I'm forty-three I hope to see nice scenery like...

Angie: Like to travel.

Jane: Yea like travelling, when I'm sixty-three I'll have my first grandchild, when I'm ninety-five ahh, I'll exercise to stay alive.
Dina: ...And you don't want to be single either? What's wrong with being single Jane?

Jane: Because I won't have any kids.

Jane's oral capabilities had also been enhanced by the storytelling sessions. As well she had developed more patience in waiting her turn to talk and not interrupting others in the group. These were significant improvements for Jane. Previously she had attempted to be the focus of the group by consistently interrupting others. This slowing down may have served in giving her more time to self-reflect.

Viv: Do grown-ups drive me crazy? Yes grown-ups always drive me up the wall. When I grow up I will try to be the nicest mom. A good mom, have one kid and lots of money, have a job, money, money, money, save small children. I am going to be a truck driver, I was dared to say that, I will have lots of friends. I hope I am not going to be a hateful mother, no friends, no food, only two dollars in my name, a loser, unpopular, and a bad job.

Okay, I will be an orthodontist when I'm twenty-three. I will see things in the country when I am forty three because that is where I am going to move. When I am sixty-two I will be a rap star like Will Smith. [laughter] And at ninety five I hope I will be a Toronto Maple Leaf's Hockey Player.

For Viv the stresses with her mother are visibly displayed in her narrative. At this point in her development she is trying to comprehend her relationships with her mother and her grandparents. This is evidently causing her anxiety which is exposed in her self-narrative. She wants to be 'the nicest mom' and 'a good mom' and the one thing she doesn't want to be is a 'hateful mother'. It was
also an opportunity to ruminate on how her relationships had affected her and consider and expand her focus to other considerations. She had a chance to examine how she is feeling within her own paradigm and an opportunity to expand her way of seeing the world by considering other ways of being. By having to mention seven components she had a chance to move from obsessing over her problems with her own mother to considering other ways of being and thinking.

Giving children an opportunity to consider the bigger picture is an opportunity to develop their minds and an exercise in learning to know what they want from life.

Sammi: Do grown-ups drive me crazy? You'll be a grown-up soon. What will you be like? I do not know, I hope I will be kind, a teacher, nice to people, pretty, still alive, smart, cool. I hope I will not be mean, selfish, ugly, dead, dumb, a brat and poor. What will I be when I'm twenty-three? When I'm twenty-three I will probably be a teacher. What will I see when I'm forty-three? I will probably see lots of needles when I'm forty-three because I will probably crotchet a lot. What will I do when I'm sixty-two? When I am sixty-two I will probably crochet a lot because that is what people do when they are sixty-two. If I am alive at 95 I will probably be sweet to my grandsons or my granddaughters and give them lots of sweets.

Sammi's self-narrative reflects her happiness and general well-being. It is interesting to observe how she sees older people as crocheting and being sweet to their grandchildren. She had a positive perspective to all things. In past narratives there was evidence of gender stereotyping but in this personal disclosure she concentrates on her own self-development.
Tara had forgotten to bring her responses and did not remember them. I gave her the option of discussing them another time and she agreed to do that; she never followed through.

This session was highly enjoyed and a very articulate one. The girls had developed more fluency in their talk and displayed a sense of humour coupled with evidence of thought and reflection. They all responded with circumstances and events that affected them whether it was being a good mom as in Vivian's case or not being poor as in Jane's case. They had taken their life experiences into account and had given them value. They had developed their own ideas of what they wanted and did not want in their lives. The opportunity to reflect and cultivate an awareness of the future as an entity they could control was, I hope, tremendously beneficial for them.

At best, our conceptions will be an accurate reflection of what we have experienced and how we think and feel about the experience. The closer we can come to this ideal of authenticity, the better off we are. [113]
Session Thirteen

Three Wishes

The rationale behind this session was to provide an opportunity for expressive dialogue in a stress-free environment. Conversing on wishes and desires unleashes the imagination and allows the individual to experience fantasies and the healing properties that fantasies provide. By this time I knew what created anxiety and pressure on the girls and made a decision to cultivate themes that were optimistic, beneficial and constructive for them. Themes such as family stories and careers were reminders of failures in their relationships with family members and their economic situations. This was not the case for every girl, however; Viv and Jane displayed high levels of anxiety with certain topics.

In this gathering I was exploring what the girls found important enough to wish for. Would they wish for things for themselves, their families, society? I was also interested to observe what their wishes revealed about their sense of self-esteem and if there was evidence of patriarchal socialization bias in their narratives.

Angie: My three wishes. Wish #1, I wish that I was rich and I was not a rich snob because if I was a snob I would not have any friends. Wish #2, I would cure any diseases that are troubling people. Wish #3, I wish there was no pollution in this whole world. Wish #4, I wish there was no violence. Wish #5 I wish there was no starving people in the world. Wish #6 I wish that all endangered species were alive except for dinosaurs.
Angie's three wishes had expanded to six. This illustrates that she felt confident to expand the issues within the group and she was stimulated by the subject matter. From the six wishes she made only one directly related to her; she would like to be rich but not to be a snob. Her wishes were altruistic and noble and very admirable in someone so young. I was surprised and pleased by her account. When we discussed her answers she continued to display a compassionate approach to life and a very mature perspective. I had always been impressed with Angie's self-assurance and this session highlighted her confidence.

Jane: You know what my three wishes are? I am going to, I wish I am going to save endangered species. Be a kind and famous doctor and number three have a good family. I want to cure cancer maybe. Because my grandfather died from cancer.

Jane's three wishes include the typical fantasies that all children have after they have lost someone to cancer: to find the cure. Often children who have lost a loved one to cancer dream of the chance to find the cure and save countless people. Her wish to save endangered species also exhibits compassion. Her third wish is to have a good family. I now regret that I did not ask her to define a good family. I am not sure if she could have easily articulated this abstraction; she is young and families are complex entities. I think she felt insecure about her family, their poverty, being on welfare, smoking and drinking; she knew these were not healthy familial attributes.
Tara: My three wishes I wish that when I grew up I have a good family, a fair amount of money, and [pause] my third wish is that I have a happy life.

Dina: Those are good three wishes. You know girls just because you wish that today doesn't mean that they have to be the same wishes tomorrow. So don't be afraid to say it it doesn't mean they're the same wishes for the rest of your life. I think its neat that most of you are saying that you wish for nice families. We all want to have a good family...

Tara spoke hesitantly when she expressed her three wishes. She focused on herself communicating some level of anxiety about the future. With the exception of wealth her wishes were things that most people take for granted. I felt it necessary to remind the group that wishes could easily change and evolve over time, thus diffusing any anxiety over their selections.

Viv: Yes thank-you. My three wishes. My first one is a family that cares for me and loves me. My second wish that I become an orthodontist, and my third wish is not to be a racist person.

The structure of Viv's phrase was exceptionally interesting. She wished for a family that cared 'for her' and 'loved her'. I took the opportunity to discuss and expand on this theme. I did so because a good family was mentioned by several of the girls and I knew it to be of significant interest to them. Also the theme of a good family is a universal one when seen through the context of unconditional love which I consider an innate desire and crucial to the healthy development of self.
Dina: A family that cares we all want that. How does a family show that it cares?

Tara: By spending time together.

Dina: That's right. Also forgiving and accepting the people in your family.

Angie: When I get really mad at my family I don't take it out on them what I do is I beat up the stuffed animals on my bed.

Dina: I'm glad I'm not a stuffed animal on your bed. I think we rely on our family to give us unconditional love. Do you know what unconditional love is?

Angie: When your family accepts you no matter what.

Dina: That's a very good definition Angie. We all need unconditional love...Who here feels that they have unconditional love?

Donna: I do.

Jane: I do everyone loves me. Even my dog.

Viv: I feel it from my grandpa. Just from my grandpa.

Dina: Your grandpa?

Angie: Yeah I have it.

Sammi: Me too from my mom and dad.

It was a very poignant moment when Viv confessed she felt unconditional love only from her grandfather. Low self-esteem must be generated from recognizing deficiencies in how we are loved. The disabling thought continues to develop: if my family doesn't love me how can anyone love me to I am not worthy of being loved. Feelings of isolation and the withdrawal of love may result in
depression. Jean Baker Miller states: "Depression, for example, which is related to one's sense of the loss of connection with other[s], is much more common in women."[114] I think it took a great deal of courage for Viv to articulate her feelings to herself and the group.

Sammi: I want to go to Portugal next year so I can visit my grandmother. I want to be a googlionaire [millionaire] and when I grow up I want to be a famous movie star.

Sammi's approach to all the sessions was one of enjoyment and entertainment. In many sessions there was evidence of patriarchal conditioning in her narratives; however she still displayed a high level of confidence and sense of pleasure in her life.

Unfortunately due to tape malfunction I have lost Donna's narrative. My notes indicate she wanted to be famous like a power ranger and rich. Donna was also enjoying the session as an opportunity to fantasize on life.

The girls enjoyed sharing their wishes. Here was an opportunity to think about the future in an unstressed atmosphere and an occasion to see themselves as choice-making individuals in charge of their destinies. This is the beginning of self-direction. Viv's narrative demonstrates that if an individual has a need to deal with critical concerns these issues will find a way to be expressed. To this extent collective dialoguing on dilemmas may be therapeutic as it provides a cathartic opportunity and a chance to articulate what otherwise remains silenced.
Session Fourteen

Who are you Most Like; Your Mother or Your Father?

In the second to last session I had chosen three topics for dialogue.

The first one enquired as to whom the girls identified with, their mothers or their fathers? The justification for this topic was to examine what characteristics the group felt they shared with their parents. Were the traits positive or negative, were they gender specific, and did they illustrate an affirmative or destructive approach to life? How did the girls perceive their own evolving personality characteristics such as disposition and temperament? Did they focus on positive elements or did they exhibit insecurity and doubt?

The second asked, if they could drive a car where would they go? This was meant to provide a lighthearted atmosphere and be entertaining. I also wanted to see if they would make any connections between driving a car and the freedom to choose their own destinations and the ability to pilot their own lives.

The third topic for discussion was ideas on raising children.

Jane: My mother and my father.

Dina: Your mother and your father?

Jane: Yeah, because I'm funny like my Dad and crazy like my mom. No I'm funny like my Mom and crazy like my Dad...Like if we put our nose against the door and press t up like this he'll give us anything we want. I got two dollars once. And I think I'm like my Mom because I get mad at my dad easily. [laughter].....My dad, my mom gets
really mad at him sometimes. But my Dad gets mad easily, one day we woke up and he was mad and he kicked the fridge and the milk spilled inside everywhere and I had to clean it all up. So I get mad easily and my Dad gets mad easily.

Dina: So you both have tempers.

Jane: Yeah, especially at my brother. My dad beats him up and I get mad at him a lot.

Jane started by saying that she was funny and crazy like her parents and concludes that she has a bad temper like her father and gets mad easily like her mother. When individuals look at their parents they may recognise certain shared traits. Jane selected a negative personality attribute, a bad temper. There was no evidence to suggest that she saw it as an inferior or inappropriate characteristic. In fact she approached her narrative as something humourous. With Jane I was worried that she would find herself in a situation where she would perpetuate her familial situation by repeating what she herself regarded as her parent's mistakes. This involved drinking, fighting and being on welfare. Although she wanted to change she was equipped with little knowledge from which to elicit change and inadequate information to make change. There was also little motivation; she saw events as beyond her control many times. Here again she compares her parents' tempers and makes the observation that they are the same. Out of all the personality characteristics to choose from Jane found the similarity to be their bad temper. This is a self-defeating likeness she has selected.
Donna: My Mother and my Father... My Mom because I get mad and yell a lot like her and my Dad because I look like him, they say I look like my Mom especially my eyes but they say that because they never saw my Dad before. My Dad gets mad at Desmond especially and so do I. My Dad tells lots of lies and so do I.

Dina: How do you know that your Dad says a lot of lies?

Donna: Cause a lot of times he said he was going to get me a bike and he still hasn't. One time he told me he was going to get it at the end of the week and that was like two months ago already. Last year he even told me he was going to get me a bike.

Dina: And what do you lie about Donna? You look like a very honest person to me.

Donna: If I do something bad I blame my brothers so I lie, or sometimes I hit my brother and then I say I didn't touch him.

Like Jane, Donna selected negative personality traits as commonalities. Although she states that she lies she came across as brutally honest in her assessments of her parents and herself. She knew lying was wrong and she felt very disturbed that her father had said he would buy her a bike and had failed to do so. This was a classic example of how children emulate their parents. The message is, if they can do it so can I. Even knowing intellectually that lying is wrong the message she received from her father was that it is acceptable to deceive. I do not want to suggest that I believe her father is a liar; this is Donna's perception and it may be totally inaccurate. There may be a plausible reason why her father did not buy her a bike; perhaps there is no money for such extras or maybe there are already many
good bikes in the family she could use. Because he has not communicated the reasons to her, Donna concludes that he is a liar and infers this behaviour to be acceptable.

Donna describes her mother as someone who gets mad easily and yells a lot. There may be some patriarchal influence in that statement.

Viv: My mother and my father... Well my mother has a bad temper and so do I...Yes I have a bad temper, my Dad he's really white so I'm like my Dad because I have blonde hair and that's the only reason I'm like my Dad. I'm the only one in my mother's family that has blonde hair. Cause we're Indians.

The trend continued with Vivian stating that she and her mother both had 'bad tempers'. The only comparison she could make to her father was in their physical appearance.

Sammi: Hmmm, like my Mother because she's small. Hmmm I can't think of anything else...I have a bad temper but not my Mother or my Father have a bad temper.

Sammi perceived her life as an innocent, peaceful and simple affair. This is what she projected in almost all our sessions. She approached most situations with a calm and level-headed perspective. Her similarity to her mother is grounded on their both being 'petite'. Unlike the other girls she seems to regard her parents as positive role-models with no dubious personality traits. She does admit that she has a temper but in no way associates it
with her parents. Although Sammi was influenced by the dominant culture's socialization agenda for females she demonstrated good self-esteem and felt unconditionally loved. She also had a strong two-parent family.

Tara: Both of them I guess... Because I like to solve problems... I think I look like both of them.

Dina: And you said you had a bad temper, too?

Tara: Yep but I got that from neither of my parents they don't have a really bad temper. I think my Mom doesn't have one. I haven't seen her for over a year now but when I talk to her on the phone she's always cheerful.

Tara was the first in the group to state that she shared a positive and empowering personality characteristic with her parents; she liked to problem solve and so did they! She was also the first to display a healthy self-image of herself and her parents. The other girls had concentrated on their bad tempers as their defining and shared traits, but Tara had found a constructive element within her family. This analogy provided a familial identity which may be empowering for Tara as she matures and faces the predicaments of life. She saw herself as a problem solver. She did admit to having a 'bad temper' but this was not her dominant focus.
Angie: I think my Mom... She's always smiling and happy. She has a bad temper like me too and she's always getting angry at my sister and my brother and so am I. My sister always threw her clothes underneath the bed. She shoves them. And my brother he's six years old and he can't clean his room properly and I could do that when I was two. Ah, and like my Mom we're both the eldest in the family, and she's a boss like me. Mostly she gets mad at my sister and brother.

Angie identifies with her Mother's happy demeanour and her temper. The temper is directed to the younger siblings who are messy. Angie also relates to her mother because they are both the eldest in their perspective families and they are natural 'bosses'. This perception may be beneficial to Angie if she continues to consider herself as a boss and in control of situations, especially if it is accompanied by a positive self-image that includes a happy state of mind.

Surprisingly all the girls stated that they had bad tempers. This was a common characteristic. When we discover young girls with adverse opinions about themselves and their parents this must cause concern. It may affect feelings of self-worth and the perpetuation of deficient and inappropriate preconceived familial patterns.

If you could drive a car where would you go?

This topic provided a good transition between familial traits and the third theme of raising children. It was light and everyone enjoyed fantasizing about where they would go. Most of the girls selected exotic locations and entertaining destinations. It was
interesting to note that Viv chose to drive up and visit her grandparents. The implication may be that she would want to be with the people who provide her with unconditional love. Again, it seemed that what needed to be expressed created a way to be communicated.

**Parenting Ideas**

For the third theme in this session I phrased the question in a specific way. I asked them to pretend they were in their late twenties or early thirties and had just had a baby, what did they want for he/r and how were they going to raise the baby? I considered the question acceptable because they had all mentioned having and wanting children. Therefore I did not perceive it as a further socialization in which women's options are often limited to and directed to having children.

I was interested to observe their philosophies on parenting, what issues they found critical and how they would react to this topic.

Angie: Very careful, hoping he or she will not be spoiled [sic]. Ah, I 'd feed them every meal and clean them so they wouldn't be messy they would be nice and very loving. And when they're older I would want them to be prime minister or get a good education and get a good job.

All Angie's narratives revealed that neatness and an orderly life were important to her.

Donna: My kids will grow up disciplined and not steal. I'll spoil them but I won't spoil them too badly so they won't wind up getting in trouble...Hmmm and healthy food, and I'll never spank them just yell at them a lot.
Donna at ten years old sees parenting as the importance of not 'spoiling' them too much and proper nutrition. Donna's response was not a particularly in-depth one but I did not expect it to be. Her interests were directed towards the martial arts and being a power ranger.

Jane: Okay I would make sure it wasn't violent. No Barney but I would let it watch Sesame Street. It would have like a lot of clothes like dresses. On the first day of school it would wear its prettiest clothes and then I would take it to daycare while I was at work, and I'll love them, and love them and love them and I'll never swear. And I'll play soccer.

Jane's reply was interesting, she referred to the baby throughout her narrative as 'it'. This was perhaps a result of a conceptual deficiency, not knowing what to call a baby or an indication that she had trouble appreciating the baby as a human being and not a doll. She would make sure her baby had very pretty clothes and she would love 'them'.

Individuals are influenced by the way they have been raised by their own parents; in Jane's case she makes the point of stating that she would not swear. I assume from previous revelations that Jane heard a great deal of swearing from her parents. This is my own presumption and may be totally inaccurate. These are glimpses into personal lives that drama facilitators are exposed to when they engage in storytelling. We are subject to personal and private disclosures that must be handled with sensitivity towards the child. I did not question her any further.
I complemented her narrative as I did with all the girls who had the fortitude to share their own stories.

Viv: I don't know what I'll be like I hope my child will love me and care for me.

Dina: I'm sure he or she will. Do you think that as females being a mother is instinctive?

Girls: Yeah.

Dina: Well, how can we explain mothers who abuse their children?

Tara: Maybe they're on drugs.

Dina: Hmmm, I believe too that part of it is instinctive but I have trouble understanding mothers who don't take care of their babies.

Viv: There was one girl who had a baby and it was a little girl and then she had another baby and he was a boy, his name is Paul and the mother ignored the little girl after that. She had dirty clothes and her hair was all over and the little boy is always dressed perfectly.

Dina: That's very sad. What do you think happened to that child that isn't favoured by the parents? Who knows that he or she is not the favourite?

Angie: They lose self-esteem and they're not that strong...Children are hard to raise.

This exchange highlighted what compassionate people these girls are. In this dialogue one observes their maturity and ability to see life clearly and accurately. I was very impressed with all of them.

The foundations that the holistic arts are based on is the premise that we provide a therapeutic opportunity: the atmosphere for self-growth and self-healing. If someone needs to deal with
certain realities they have a safe environment in which to do so. In this session Viv again dealt with how much she needed to be loved. It was apparent in many sessions that she felt unsure of her relationship with her mother. In this meeting she directed the need to be loved onto her future children. This transference is disturbing: the belief that a baby will be able to give love and fill a need is fallacious and inaccurate and often presents major disappointments to teenage mothers. Presenting Viv with opportunities to communicate and assess her own feelings may be valuable in helping her understand and accept herself.

Was this session beneficial to the girls? It gave them a chance to discuss personality traits, cars and babies. Furthermore it was an opportunity to hear each others' stories, philosophies and attitudes towards life. When they all admitted that they had bad tempers it may have been easier for them to accept what they were because it was a communal characteristic. Discussing babies allowed them to hear the matriarchal ideas they all had. The consensus was that raising children was hard work. Information exchanged in informal situations can often effect deep change and transformation in an individual.


Last Session

Closure

In our last session I had brought food to mark the occasion as a festive one. The girls had prepared banners and had written me thank you notes. I was very touched by their thoughtfulness. I had bought each of them a novel and had written a personal and what I hope was an encouraging message in each book. After giving the matter much thought I had decided to prepare a questionnaire asking the girls how they felt and what they liked about the sessions. [See Appendix B] The document contained six questions. Here is a breakdown of the questions and how they were answered.

My first question was: 'Did you enjoy the storytelling sessions? How did you feel during the sessions? Happy? Anxious? Bored?' Out of the six participants four said they felt happy, one said anxious and one said happy and anxious during the sessions. Angie had written that she felt anxious. Tara wrote: "Yes! It was fun! I felt anxious." Donna communicated: "I felt happy because I was having a good time." Jane, Sammi and Vivian wrote they were happy during the sessions.

The second question was: 'What kind of stories did you enjoy talking about and sharing with the girls in your group?' The most popular choice was 'My Perfect Life'. This was selected by Sammi and Jane. That session may have been so popular because it captured the imagination at the same time as the girls focused on
their future. Angie recorded she had enjoyed talking about all of them. Tara stated: "I liked trying to help solve others' problems." [The Problem Session] Vivian enjoyed the open sessions: "The kind of story that we can talk about anything." Sammi had also enjoyed the Three Wishes Session. Donna had left the question unanswered.

The third question was 'Did you think that half an hour was enough time. If not how much time is suitable?'. The unanimous consensus was that half an hour was insufficient. All the girls suggested one hour sessions. I agree.

The fourth question was a difficult one: 'Did you learn anything new about yourself during the sessions? If so what?' This question required some contemplation and there was little time for any real reflection. I was again impressed with the maturity of their responses. Each one assimilated something uniquely their own. Angie replied: "I like the sessions and I have things in common." One of my objectives was to have them experience the empowerment in recognizing the universality of a cohesive group with common interests and collective ambitions. Feelings of commonality lead to self-acceptance and to self-confidence by validating each others' feelings and experiences.

Vivian wrote: "I learnt lots of stuff about myself — sometimes I can control my temper." I was surprised and overwhelmed to read her answer. If she did indeed learn that she can control
her temper she may begin to discover that she has the ability and
the prerogative to control other areas of her life. Simply
learning to control her emotions may help her make better
decisions.

Sammi's reply was; "Yes, lots of things like we should
always try again." This theme of not giving up was one that we
returned to often during our storying as we described events from
our lives. I believe that it was an empowering concept that
although they may have heard it before took a stronger significance
for them during our sessions. If they did adopt this approach it
may be of major value to them as they mature.

Donna wrote that she learned something as well: "Don't have
a baby when I'm in college or university." We had discussed topics
such as children, education and good ages to move out. We had not
spoken specifically on the subject of having children in
university. Significantly Donna was able to correlate all our
discussions on life and conclude that having children while
pursuing her education would create difficulties. This may have
helped Donna in doing some planning for her future, another goal
of this exercise.

Tara's answer was meaningful as well: "Yes. Life isn't all
fun. There is a little crisis." In each life some rain must fall.
Initially I was surprised to read her reply. The group sessions
with the exception of one [the 'Problems session'] were always
entertaining as we educated each other. Retrospectively I can
distinguish the issues we talked about that highlighted the
difficulties of life as well. All the girls had concerns over
different matters. Realizing that conflict exists for everyone may
be the first step in effectively dealing with it and accepting it
as something that can be dealt with successfully. Tara stated that
there was a 'little crisis' in life. The fact that she perceives it
as small is important; it may mean that she already feels capable
and competent in dealing with crises.

I was concerned and somewhat disturbed by only one answer.
This was Jane's who wrote that she learned: "That I have a bad
temper". This displayed a very different attitude from Vivian who
had stated that she had learned that sometimes she could control
her temper. Jane's statement was not an empowering one and it may
become an oppressive foundation if she internalizes that as who she
is.

The fifth question I posed for them was :`Do you think girls
in grade five could benefit by participating in small self-
narrative groups? In what way?' The unanimous conclusion was that
girls would benefit from self-narrative groups. Tara wrote;" Yes.
It would make them think about life a little more." One of my
goals was to foster the creative opportunity to contemplate,
meditate, ruminate and anticipate their futures. Angie's reply
supported Tara's. "I think they can get ready for the big world."
This statement highlighted my intentions accurately. Sammi believed that it would be beneficial because: "I think they would have fun." The sessions were meant to be 'fun', the gratification, pleasure and fulfilment that occurs from the creative evolution of self. This is the gift the creative arts may bestow on humanity, assisting us in becoming full and happy individuals.

Vivian's reply was also fascinating: "I think that if you can trust someone go ahead and express yourself!" The element of trust was of major importance for the group. Real change can occur when people engage in dialogue; meaningful dialogue can only develop in a trusting and supportive environment. I believe her statement supported the theory that our group dynamics were conducive to free expression and the development of thought and self-confidence. Donna and Jane replied "Yes" to the question but did not elaborate.

The final question was: "Can you suggest other topics that would be good for female storytelling sessions?" This was a difficult question. In retrospect I would have worded it differently: "What other topics would you have liked to talk about?" This would have been a pertinent question because they had acquired some experience in the self-narrative framework. I think my original wording was confusing. Sammi communicated "Not really" to this query. Viv and Tara as well could not think of any suggestions. Jane's reply was: "What we do in summer or our hobbies or our favourites." Angie suggested: "Abused boys and being a mom."
The unexpected answer came from Donna, who loved the martial arts and the Power Rangers and suggested: "Clothing. Example: What kind of clothing do you like wearing." We had not discussed this subject at all. I think her suggestion was very interesting and one that I would consider in future sessions with other groups. The implications of this topic would be extremely interesting to explore.

The girls gave me thank-you notes with personal messages and their addresses. There is a deep emotional connection that develops in storying groups. We delayed our goodbyes by my promising to go to their graduation ceremony. I thought it was fitting that we would thereby bring closure during a festive occasion celebrating a major accomplishment and focusing on the future.
CHAPTER V

The Facilitator's Role in Group Storytelling

The most critical issue that arose during my primary research was the challenge of defining the appropriate role of the facilitator.

The therapeutic elements of storytelling quickly became apparent. Storytelling by nature is a healing art. There was definitely the exuberance of play involved and the reinforcement of self-esteem but there was also a desire from some of the girls to express and deal with problems in their personal lives. As the group leader I was unprepared to effectively deal with these admissions because I felt I lacked the proper psychological and group dynamics background to help these girls. I was unsure of my role.

When I first started the storytelling sessions I was confident that I could handle any topic that came up. I knew that all the elements of play and drama were therapeutic and felt prepared. It was the confidence of an enthusiastic but ignorant person. I assumed that it would come 'naturally' to me. Realistically, very few things in life come naturally. In the holistic art therapies we are told that the participants are on a voyage of self-discovery and we are there to facilitate that process.[115] Nothing is that simple. Paradoxically a facilitator in the holistic arts therapies requires great training and education so that s/he will not 'interfere' with a child's own
ability to grow. You cannot rely exclusively on your intuition and good intentions.

This chapter will review the numerous definitions of the therapeutic elements of storytelling and the arts. It will look at the differences between 'therapy' and 'therapeutic' and focus on how storytelling by its very nature possesses both therapeutic properties and elements of therapy. As a healing art the facilitator has responsibilities to the group. This chapter will attempt to define guidelines for the facilitator.

What is dramatherapy or therapeutic storytelling? There are multiple definitions available. Indeed this has long been a major problem with the Holistic Art Therapies; there seem to be as many definitions as there are therapists. In the absence of a universal definition the aims of dramatherapy become blurred and open to condescension. In 1979 the British Association for Dramatherapists [BADth] defined dramatherapy as:

The means of helping to understand and alleviate social and psychological problems, mental illness and handicap and of facilitating symbolic expression through which man may get in touch with himself, both as individual and group, through creative structures involving vocal and physical communication.[116]

In 1991 BADth redefined their definition; "Dramatherapy is the intentional [planned] use of the healing aspects of drama in the therapeutic process."[117]
Sue Jennings et al., in their work *The Handbook of Dramatherapy*, specifies dramatherapy as "the specific application of theatre structures and drama processes with a declared intention that is therapy."[118] This definition reflects Jennings's theatrical model of dramatherapy, and creates difficulties for facilitators who see dramatherapy as possibly independent from theatrical structures. Many have trouble with the phrase 'theatre structures'.

According to Brenda Meldrum, a co-founder and director of Theatre Therapy Partnership, many professionals who agree that it is difficult to encapsulate the complex processes of dramatherapy specifically within one definition use Read Johnson's explanation:

Dramatherapy, like the other creative arts therapies [art, music and dance], is the application of a creative medium to psychotherapy. Specifically, dramatherapy refers to those activities in which there is an established therapeutic understanding between client and therapist and where the therapeutic goals are primary and not incidental to the ongoing activity.[119]

Still there are more definitions; Dr. Robert Landy, a renowned American dramatherapist states the aims of dramatherapists as:

To reach goals that are essentially dramatic in nature. A general goal might be to help others increase their repertory of roles and their ability to play a single role more effectively. Specific goals are very much dependent upon the nature and needs of the client. Although therapeutic in nature, the goals often bear resemblance to educational and recreational drama goals. Further, drama therapy relates in some ways to many major and psychotherapeutic theories, viewing the client as embodying a confluence of conscious and unconscious processes of mind, body, feeling and intuition.[120]
There is a dilemma to dramatherapy and to the Holistic Arts Therapies. Is dramatherapy drama-based or is dramatherapy a psychotherapy? The debate has proven to be unresolvable. Some want it firmly placed as a therapy based on theatre art; others consider it a form of psychotherapy. John Rowan, a British Psychotherapist states that dramatherapy is a form of psychotherapy.

By a form of psychotherapy, we simply mean that it takes a client from beginning to end of a problem — usually but not always a significant and fairly central life problem — staying with the client through difficulties and hindrances which may arise in the process of psychotherapy itself.[121]

Yet it is possible for therapists who use the arts to be drawn too much into psychological structures and ideology which in the end, Jennings's argues are reductionistic rather than liberating and creative.[122] Therapy implies a prescribed course of treatment with predetermined expected results for a specific course of treatment, while the arts are an exploration, usually personal, with no predetermined expectations.

As Drama Specialists we are taking people through a therapeutic process, using drama as a healing medium. This leads to the absolute necessity of making a distinction between a therapeutic experience and therapy. Eleanor Irwin in her article 'Drama therapy with handicapped' defines a therapeutic experience as "any experience which helps an individual feel a greater sense of competence." She defines therapy as "a specific form of
intervention to bring an intra-psychic, interpersonal and behavioral change."[123] This becomes crucial in deciding what the role of the facilitator is and specifically what the purpose of storytelling and self-narratives play on the psyche. Riane Eisler in her feminist work *The Chalice and the Blade* contends that through history the mark of a healthy and peaceful society has always been the abundance of art and art forms. She uses the example of the Ancient Minoan Civilization on the island of Crete.[124] A people who treasure and self-engage in different forms of art such as drama, music art, and sculpting live in harmony and equality. The arts and society are linked and the health of a society is reflected in the pool of artistic activity the society creates.

To engage in acts of creativity may be seen as a sign of a healthy individual. Unfortunately our technological and patriarchal society has discouraged the healthy focus on the arts and has disconnected individuals from participating in different art forms. Art has been separated from life; society has successfully isolated individuals from artistic creation.

Bernie Warren in his work *Using the Creative Arts In Therapy*, states that everyone has the right to make his or her own 'unique creative thumbprint'.[125] This creative mark reaffirms the self. In a society that has become increasingly dehumanizing and isolating it is not surprising that the arts have come to be seen as therapy. Sue Jennings in *Playtherapy with Children: A*
Practioner's Guide, maintains that the capacity to be 'playful', whether with ideas, with a relationship, or with a crisis, enables us to manage life more appropriately and more creatively. [126] "Reintegration of artistic processes within a social context can help promote the growth of a healthy individual and a healthy society."[127] In the work, Storymaking in Education and Therapy, Alida Gersie argues that our imagination requires stimulation in order for us to experience well-being.[128]

Adam Blatner, in The Art of Play, argues although there are therapeutic benefits involved with play it is not a form of psychotherapy. "Psychological analysis of the events or the roles portrayed is not useful and is counterproductive to a spirit of relaxed playfulness."[129] The problem for the drama facilitator is that s/he must walk a very narrow road. The therapeutic and preventive elements of the arts must not become therapy with the facilitator as central actor, a patriarchal authority figure dispersing advice. Garry L Landreth correctly states 'the best discovery the discoverer makes for himself.'[130]

The definitions are so many and so diverse as to confuse rather than educate. More serious research is needed. Landry states that drama therapy as a 'hybrid' discipline, needs to develop an identity in terms of significant research strategies.[131] Although the artistic 'therapeutic' experience should evolve on a private and personal level for each individual
in the group the group leader does influence what goes on in the
group with his/her mere presence. Anyone engaged in the arts and
working in a social context must first determine the goals of his
work. In the storytelling and self-narrative sessions I do, and
have done I have an agenda.

My interest in storytelling and self-narrative with young
females is to encourage them to develop a stronger sense of self.
My belief system will affect my approach to the group and thus I
impose my own values and goals, however this is not necessarily
detrimental. Storytelling inspires and instructs. My intentions are
to empower young girls to:
1. engage in self-determined decision making.
2. develop a more positive self-image.
3. assume greater self-responsibility.
4. become more self-directing and self-accepting.
5. develop an internal source of evaluation.
6. develop coping skills.
7. cultivate the ability to empathize and encourage others in the
group.

My objective is to respond to these children in ways that
release or facilitate the development of these existing capacities.
As an adult in the group and the obvious leader the members look to
me for guidance and acceptance. What ever my intentions are I am an
influential force in the group. The object is to be a positive and
empowering influence. As such I must project an image that will
liberate them to be expressive and imaginative. What personality
and abilities must I have or develop to create an empowering social
opportunity for growth and development for the group? I believe
this to be a crucial and major concern of anyone who is involved in the arts. If the drama specialist does not identify her or his role correctly, the healing powers of drama and play may be drastically diminished.

Dr. Irvin Yalom argues that underlying all considerations of techniques must be a consistent, positive relationship between the facilitator and each individual in the group. "The basic posture of the therapist to a patient must be one of concern, acceptance, genuineness, empathy. Nothing, no technical consideration, takes precedence over this attitude."[132]

It is important that the therapist communicate the message "I'm here, I hear you, I understand, I care." Garry Landreth, a play therapist states:

The natural response of many adults to children is to question, command, or provide answers, and is the consequence of an attitude that children only need to be told what to do. responded in a way that communicates sensitivity, understanding, and acceptance and conveys freedom and responsibility is for many adults like learning a different language.[133]

The successful facilitator must respect and show acceptance, the ability to empathize, patience, reflective listening, and possess a healthy self-concept with no personal need to be the focus in the group. Virginia Axline in her highly respected work Play Therapy, describes a play therapist's mandate, that can be adapted for anyone using the arts, is to provide therapeutic opportunities for children and adults alike.[134] She argues that
a therapist must totally accept the child for who she or he is. The therapist should establish a feeling of permissiveness so the child can freely express feelings. The two conditions I believe are crucial to the therapeutic experience in storytelling are:

1. The therapist is alert to recognize the feelings the child is expressing and reflects those feelings back to him in such a manner that he gains insight into his behaviour.

2. The therapist maintains a deep respect for the child's ability to solve his own problems if given an opportunity to do so. [135]

To empower children through storytelling and self-narratives the facilitator must exhibit a caring acceptance of each individual in the group. This is crucial to the success of the group. Acceptance grows out of a genuine interest in the children, a sensitivity to their rights and a belief that they can assume responsibility for themselves. However, emotional and social growth may be retarded in a disorganized, chaotic relationship between the facilitator and the children.

Creating an environment of acceptance and respect without the risk of criticism, evaluation, judgment, rejection, disapproval, and censure is the difficult task of a good facilitator. The facilitator's accepting responsiveness enables a child to explore thoughts and feelings further.

When feelings are expressed and accepted by the therapist they are experienced with less intensity by the child, and the child's acceptance of those feelings is facilitated. Focusing on the child's feelings validates the person of the child rather than the importance of the problem. [136]
The facilitator should verbally recognize feelings expressed by the child. What matters is that we respond in a way which conveys our willingness to try to understand. And it must be obvious to the group we are trying all the time. This in itself may provide a therapeutic experience.

One of the greatest difficulties during storytelling and narrative sessions is to refrain from interpreting to the children their own stories, but to create the environment in which children find it out for themselves. In the words of the Prophet Gibran; "No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge."[137]

One of the most important skills a facilitator must have and continually develop is the skill of reflective listening. It takes discipline and practice to make neutral comments.

According to Dr. Irvin Yalom, the three fundamental tasks of a therapist engaged with groups are:

1. creation and maintenance of the group
2. culture building
3. activation and illumination of the here-and-now.[138]

In the holistic arts therapies the purpose is to create the environment to allow the members of the group to go on a voyage of self-discovery and self-healing. This is the major difference between the therapeutic and preventive entities of the arts and therapy. In therapy the therapist assumes the mantle of the expert and becomes the focal point in the group. Psychiatrist Irvin D.
Yalom calls this 'the blurred border between personal growth and therapy.'[139] Dr. Yalom challenges the 'curative' abilities of psychotherapy, preferring to concentrate on the therapeutic effects. He believes that psychotherapy is both an art and science; this explains why as drama or art specialists we are constantly faced with the perplexities of 'therapeutic' experiences and 'therapy' on our day to day dealings.

Yalom in his text, The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy, lists eleven factors he believes are therapeutic in psychotherapy: [140]

1. Instillation of hope.
2. Universality.
3. Imparting of information.
4. Altruism.
5. Corrective recapitulation of the primary family group.
7. Imitative behaviour.
8. Interpersonal learning.
10. Catharsis.
11. Existential factors.

I believe that my storytelling objectives with young girls fit ten of these therapeutic factors. Instillation and maintenance of hope is crucial in all therapies and group situations. Yalom explains, not only is hope required to keep the patient in therapy so that other therapeutic factors may take effect, but faith in a treatment mode can in itself be therapeutically effective.[141] In storytelling sessions the stories, both universal and personal, continuously inspire hope
among the members and the atmosphere in group storytelling has magical properties. It is a happy and inspiring world. And here lies the major difference between therapy and storytelling. In storytelling sessions we do not dwell on stories that cast the teller as victim but like fairytales, no matter what happens the hero or heroine eventually emerges victorious. The message is one of survival and coping.

Yalom's second factor is one of universality; many individuals feel isolated, alone and that they are uniquely afflicted with a particular problem. In storytelling groups and psychotherapy groups the disconfirmation of a person's feelings of isolating distinctiveness is a powerful source of relief. In storytelling the universality of problems and solutions is celebrated through fairytales and myths.

Imparting of information can encompass many different topics from a personal account of improving math skills to didactic instruction such as workshops in self-understanding, where specific information is transferred to the group.

In part explanation and clarification function as effective therapeutic agents in their own right. Human beings have always abhorred uncertainty and through the ages have sought to order the universe by providing explanations, primarily religious or scientific. The explanation of a phenomenon is the first step toward its control.[142]

Frieda Fromm-Reichman studied the role of uncertainty in the production of anxiety. She contends that being aware that one is not one's own helmsman is a source of anxiety.[143] Storytelling
and the self-narrative attempts to alleviate this anxiety and promote feelings of control. Thus didactic instruction, through its provision of structure and explanation, has intrinsic value. It is the responsibility of the facilitator to provide didactic instruction for the group.

The contribution and transference of information among members of the group communicates other therapeutic elements. It implies and conveys mutual interest and caring and has altruistic elements as well: members receive through giving. "In primitive cultures a troubled person is often given the task of preparing a feast or performing some type of service for the community."[144] In storytelling, believing that your story has the power to benefit others is empowering.

The sixth element is 'social learning'. Yalom believes the development of basic social skills is a therapeutic factor that operates in all therapy groups.[145] In storytelling, the stories inspire social skill learning; also role-playing enhances social skills, with the addition of stories that begin with "If I was...".

'Imitative Behaviour' is the seventh element. In a group members may model themselves upon aspects of the other group members as well as the facilitator or group leader. Bandura believes this to be an effective therapeutic force. "This process may have solid therapeutic impact; finding out what we are not is progress toward finding out what we are."[146] During storytelling sessions members have the option of modelling themselves on other
group members or being inspired by the stories, myths and fairytales they hear.

Yalom's next element is that of 'interpersonal learning'. "Without deep, positive, reciprocal interpersonal bonds, neither individual nor species survival would have been possible."[147] Yalom illustrates Dr. Harry Stack Sullivan's interpersonal theory of psychiatry. Sullivan contends that the personality is almost entirely the product of interaction with other significant human beings;

The developing child, in the quest for security, tends to cultivate and to stress those traits and aspects of the self that meet with approval, and will squelch or deny those that meet with disapproval. Eventually the individual develops a concept of the self [self-dynamism] based on these perceived appraisals of significant others.[148] Sullivan's theory is helpful in understanding the group therapeutic process. The need for acceptance by and interaction with others is crucial to well-being and mental health. Humans are social beings who need social interaction. In a group setting Yalom contends that the group will eventually develop into a social microcosm with each member displaying their maladaptive interpersonal behaviour, thus the importance of group therapy as a place to initiate change and self-discovery. During storytelling sessions we see how others see the world and we widen our own frame of reference.
A study of former group psychotherapy patients found that, from the patient's point of view, group cohesiveness was of major therapeutic value. When a drama specialist creates a safe environment where group members trust each other, are supportive and accepting of each other and develop a relationship, than real progress towards self-discovery and self-directiveness becomes possible.

The word 'catharsis' is derived from the Greek root 'to clean'. For centuries people have been purged to cleanse themselves from evil spirits. In great tragic literature the hero always goes through a catharsis that presents itself as an epiphany or awakening. Psychotherapists have found that catharsis alone is not enough to elicit great change. It must be accompanied with some form of cognitive learning, such as learning to express feelings, and learning interpersonal skills such as expressing like or dislike for a member of the group. The self-narrative provides a perfect opportunity for catharsis, while learning positive ways to express these feelings. Self-understanding which is involved in catharsis, is a very important therapeutic factor in a storytelling group. Yalom states:

When we interviewed patients to learn more about the meaning of their choices, we found the most popular item - 48, 'discovering and accepting previously unknown or unacceptable parts of myself'—had a very specific implication to group patients. More often than not, they discovered positive areas of themselves: The ability to care for another, to relate closely to others, to experience compassion.
Abraham Maslow states that uncovering psychotherapy increases love, courage, creativity, and curiosity while it reduces fear and hostility.[152] This statement echoes exactly what I hope to accomplish in my storytelling sessions. When girls start believing that they are strong and capable individuals capable of self-scripting their own lives they experience a powerful sense of empowerment and freedom. Within this frame of mind they are able to accomplish great things for themselves and society.

The last therapeutic factor Yalom describes is Existential factors. Here Yalom is most definitely influenced from the holistic arts therapies and the power of stories. Yalom breaks down existential factors to five items.

1. Recognizing that life is at times unfair and unjust.
2. Recognizing that ultimately there is no escape from some of life's pain or from death.
3. Recognizing that no matter how close I get to other people, I must still face life alone.
4. Facing the basic issues of my life and death, and thus living my life more honestly and being less caught up in trivialities.
5. Learning that I must take ultimate responsibility for the way I live my life no matter how much guidance and support I get from others.[153]

Learning that we are the masters of our destiny is an empowering experience. Through stories we learn how to become responsible for ourselves and self-directive.

Storytelling is an innate phenomenon because humans are myth-making beings. Myths help shape belief systems that structure, energize and give meaning to life. Mills and Crowley assert that it
is therapeutic to develop a shared phenomenological reality by use of metaphor.[154] By identification with the story's characters, the child's feelings of isolation and hopelessness can be replaced by a sense that the problem is shared by others [universality] and is solvable [hope]. We gain strength by identification with a story character who initially had the will to persist and the courage and the strength to prevail. Alida Gersie and Nancy King in their work, *Storymaking in Education*, state:

> Whether the teller intends to purge, console, guide or instruct, the tale itself carries content which is relevant to teller and listener alike. It is possible for one's whole life to be changed by a story told at a crucial time by someone whom we respect and trust.[155]

Metaphors are another way of framing life experience. When a story source is presented with the intention of advising or if a story genuinely affects members of the group then that story becomes for the individual a metaphor. Sheldon Kopp defines metaphor:

> Generally, a metaphor is defined as a way of speaking in which one thing is expressed in terms of another, whereby the bringing together throws new light on the character of what is being described.[156]

In *Therapeutic Metaphors*, David Gordon describes the purpose of therapeutic metaphors:

> The purpose of therapeutic metaphors is to initiate either conscious or unconscious searches which will assist a person in gaining for 'himself' the personal resources and enhanced world models he needs in order to be able to handle the problem with which he is grappling.[157]
Gordon stresses that when dealing with stories the therapist or facilitator should be cautious; although metaphors are tools for better understanding they are also potential, even if unintentional, weapons. Metaphors in the form of fairytales, parables and myths can be used to elicit change and growth in individuals, by telling a story that provides the hope of resolution.

Stories are powerful; words are powerful; groups engaged in discourse together are powerful. However storytelling is a creative endeavour; it is not clinical group therapy. In storytelling imagination and the spirit of play is involved; there is no place for case histories to be reported or analyzed by an expert therapist. "The art of healing is healing into art."[158]

James Hillman, in his work Healing Fiction, states:

Our reality is created through our fictions, to be conscious of these fictions is to gain access to and participation in the poetics or making of our psyche or soul-life; the 'sickness' of our lives has its source in our fictions, our fictions can be "healed" through willing participation.[159]

According to Hillman how individuals perceive their own stories and the self-myths they create can perpetuate an unhealthy frame of reference. Helping people create different resolutions to their stories and seeing things from a different perspective heals the mind. Stories can transpose people into a new paradigm in which they are the ones in control.
Senselessness derives from a breakdown in the thematic motif: it no longer holds events together and gives them sense, it no longer provides the mode of experiencing. The story needs doctoring not the patient.[160]

For Hillman successful therapy is a collaboration between fictions, a revisioning of the individual's story into a more intelligent, more imaginative plot, with empowering resolutions. He attaches great importance in remembering our own lives. Healing begins when we remember our own history, much of it forgotten, denied, repressed and distorted. Storying is a means of separating past actions and events from actuality. By putting it in the past it becomes part of a story and in the control of the teller.

I have found that the person with a sense of story built in from childhood is in better shape than one who has not had stories, who has not heard them, read them, acted them or made them up. And here I mean oral stories, those depending mainly on speech and reading too has an oral aspect even when one reads alone in silence, rather than a story watched on screen..."[161]

Storytelling is one way to revive and exercise the imagination. The oral-tradition of telling stories allows us to restory life. In our patriarchal dominated society it is crucial that we storytell with children; their imagination has not been actively discouraged by society yet. Hillman argues that the healing art is the active imagination.

Active imagination aims not at silence but at speech, not at stillness but at story or theatre or conversation. It emphasizes the importance of the word not the cancellation of the word, and thus the word becomes a way of relating, an instrument of feeling.[162]
Viv's cathartic experience, her ability to put her emotions to words, and the authentic caring of the group provided a therapeutic experience for her. I am thankful for that moment. Until then I had been unaware of how confused I was about my 'role' in storytelling. This event allowed me the opportunity to review the literature and to reflect on the importance of therapeutic storytelling. I see my vocation as facilitator as creating and maintaining a group where thoughts and ideas can be expressed safely. My role is to accept unconditionally the individual and to let him/her know that I care and I believe in his/her own ability and capability to make sense of the world. I can instruct or broaden their frame of reference through my own stories or through existing stories. I am there to help them create a communal magic, using their imagination and stories.

I am not there to interpret their stories for them or force them to tell me their own stories. I am the reflective listener, the friendly resource person - an individual they can trust with their stories.
CHAPTER VI

Interpretation and Discussion

Introduction

When the girls engaged in the self-narrative sessions, specific and significant elements became apparent. These were signs of patriarchal indoctrination, an awareness of the dominant culture's stereotyping and predisposition to males, the evolution and development of verbal skills, indicators of low self-esteem and high self-esteem, effective narrative themes for cultivating positive female self-images and empowerment, and evidence of 'therapeutic' opportunities for healthy development and the beginning of self-direction. The following is a brief summation of my findings.

Patriarchal Indoctrination

The influences of living in a patriarchal society were evident in the storying sessions as the girls' narratives were indicative of the dominant culture's view of the world, men as dominant and women as subordinate.

Patriarchal indoctrination was most conspicuous in the second session, 'How I want my Life', where the girls created their own versions of fairytales. This was not surprising since fairytales do carry the values of the dominant culture and are one of the tools of socialization that results in the preservation of the status quo. The fairy tale's discourse is regressive and inhibiting for females. Out of the five participants only two girls chose to reject the traditional structures of fairy tales by rescuing
themselves. These two girls dealt with domestic concerns and solved their dilemmas by asserting themselves. The rest of the girls duplicated the conventional pattern of the fairy tale, remaining passive and being rescued by men. Viv based her story on *The Paperbag Princess*, a feminist interpretation of a fairy tale; however Vivian influenced by the dominant culture's beliefs altered the story and once again made her character inactive and male-dependant.

The dialogue that followed the session exemplified oppressive and biased reasoning focusing on rich husbands and little self-ambition.

In the first session the girls illustrated the patriarchal silencing of the female voice by their awkwardness in discussing themselves, saying "I don't know" and "I don't remember" when describing their own lives.

In the session on 'Powerful' [session four] all the girls defined power as strength and control. This is a patriarchal definition that maintains the present societal conditions. They also chose men as examples of powerful. Only one girl, Viv, chose her mother as a powerful person. Her choice was patriarchally influenced because it typified a way in which women in patriarchy often obtain what they want; through indirect manipulation.
When discussion about the new school and the need for protection in session five developed the image of male as 'protector' and the female as 'protected' and ultimately subordinate emerged. This indicated the girls ready capitulation to the dominant culture's intended script for women as they grow into adolescence.

All the narratives in session eleven, "My Perfect Life" demonstrated patriarchal influence with an emphasis on rich husbands doing all the work and taking care of their wives. This theme has been so deeply ingrained it was virtually impossible to dispel when it came to the girls' fantasies. In Donna's narrative she stated that she does not want to marry but continued the rest of her story concentrating on her 'future' husband: the kind of car he will have, what will happen if he cheats on her, etc. Inspite of her marital objections she also has been societally conditioned to see 'man' as the center of her universe. Only Tara and Viv displayed some elements of self-determinism by focusing on themselves and taking some responsibility for their own happiness.

Changes in attitude emerged as the sessions evolved and the girls discussed how they interpreted certain key terms such as husband. Initially a 'good' husband was synonymous with a 'rich' husband. This developed to a 'loving' husband in the later session. Another pattern that was altered was their interpretation of women as simply wives married to men who have careers and take care of them to the beginning of seeing themselves as capable of having their own careers and attaining goals outside of marriage.
Although the influence of the dominant culture's values and beliefs was impossible to dispel in only fifteen sessions, a good beginning was made in encouraging and cultivating an awareness of the menace of established societal influences on female self-esteem.

Awareness of Stereotyping

The girls had developed some sense that patriarchy framed them as subordinate to males although they could not easily articulate these concepts. They did voice their perceptions of the polarization of the genders, noting that boys had started to believe themselves superior to them.

In our initial meeting the girls found talking about themselves difficult. When I asked them if they thought boys would find discussing themselves easier they all replied emphatically that they would. Tara exclaimed, "... they can't shut-up about themselves." The connotation being that boys were generally egotistical, this point developed through conversation to the girls' acknowledging that boys thought they were 'better' than girls. Tara stated "They think we're weak and everything. We're considered half as good."

This theme of divergence between the sexes continued into the fifth session [Open Session], where Jane discussed art and the boys' perceptions: "Some boys in the class think that girls can't really draw good..."
The polarization between the genders has commenced for these children. The separation between boys and girls into two distinct camps with females perceived as inferior may play a major role in the loss of female self-esteem in adolescence. Although the girls demonstrated strong opposition to these assumptions the negativity toward them and the firmly entrenched dominant values endanger their belief in themselves. In self-narrative groups they are given the opportunity to dialogue, understand and deconstruct the existing paradigm they find themselves in. Their awareness of these issues was very minimal.

**Verbal Skills**

Initially the verbal skills displayed were poor and the frequency of talk low. This may be symptomatic of inadequate opportunity to apply speech. To motivate eloquent articulation one must have the opportunities to practice and engage in speaking. Overcrowded, underfunded schools and poor socioeconomic backgrounds coupled with biased values that suppress women's voices do not contribute to female fluency.

By the fifth session, "Open Session - Any Story You Want", there was a noticeable improvement in verbal ability and the frequency of talking. When the girls were given the opportunity to discuss whatever they were interested in they became animated and more articulate. This was clearly evident in session seven, when they discussed their problems. Their verbal participation was significantly improved.
Conversely, in sessions nine and ten ['Philosophies'] verbal skills were low. The lack of language fluency displayed may be the result of deficient exposure to more intellectually evolved concepts.

In session eleven ['My Perfect Life'] and session twelve ['Seven Things I Want to Be...'] the girls were extremely articulate. They demonstrated enhanced verbal skills and frequency of talk was high. Simply the chance to talk collectively twice a week contributed to some definite improvement in their verbal competence.

Tara exemplified this progression. In the session on 'Family Stories' [session eight] Tara spoke about her brother's heart transplant in a highly articulate and descriptive manner. Her storytelling skills were amazing. This was in sharp contrast to the second session where she lacked the confidence to recite her fairytale to the group.

There was a marked improvement in verbal competency and frequency of talk as the narrative sessions evolved. The opportunity to dialogue in an encouraging collective group on diverse and empowering themes enhanced verbal proficiency.
Indicators of Poor Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem encourages a subordinate position in society. Occupying a subordinate position in society maintains a state of low self-esteem. Adolescent females lose a great deal of self-confidence and this was detectable in our group as the girls were beginning adolescence. From the first session evidence of high self-esteem and low self-esteem were present. Some insecurity is normal and the first session was indicative of this. All the girls were shy and this trait is often confused with low self-esteem. On the whole the girls displayed positive self-images except for two: Viv and Jane displayed poor self-images and the beginning of insecurity. There was also evidence of how patriarchy perpetuates the loss of self-esteem among females in all the girls' narratives.

In the second session 'Fairytale' an example of how patriarchal conditioning promotes the loss of self-esteem was manifested. The traditional fairytale, part of the established culture, encourages females to adopt passive attitudes to life. Out of five girls who were present at the session three girls gave themselves subordinate status to men in their stories. Tara who usually displayed high self-esteem stated that she would rather scrub floors in the Prince's castle than be an independent vendor. This session illustrated how cultural conditioning initiates loss of self-esteem.
In session fourteen ["Who Am I More Like..."] four out of six girls identified with negative personality traits of their parents. Three stated that they had bad tempers like their moms and dads and one said she was a liar like her dad. Identifying negatively with a parent, who is usually a role model, may be damaging to self-esteem.

My greatest concern was for Viv and Jane's state of confidence. They illustrated the highest incidence of loss of self-esteem and depressed faith in themselves. Contributing factors were poverty, lack of unconditional love, poor role models, and a feeling of powerlessness.

In the third session ["Role Models"] Viv chose her sister as her role model. In a previous session she had said she hated her sister and she also admitted that her sister was constantly in trouble. Her choice of person to emulate suggests a poor self-concept as she attempts to learn from her model what not to do as opposed to imitating positive characteristics. This may indicate that she believes that 'badness' is intrinsic to her nature. Jane chose her parents as role-models and critiqued them severely stating: "My Dad doesn't even know how to spell lightbulb." This negativity continued in other sessions as well. She perceived her parents as poor, uneducated, drinkers and smokers who were on welfare and simultaneously considered them as role models.
Viv displayed ambivalence and confusion in the fifth session ["Open -Any Story You Want"] as she brought in what she purported to be her favourite book but she had not finished reading it. This incertitude may contribute to low self-esteem.

In the sixth session ["Exotic Careers"] Jane is self-disparaging as she states she would like to be an artist but "I'm not very good at it." She also insists that she is overweight. "Yeah, you can't be fat like me." The overly self-critical attitude robs young girls of their confidence at this stage of their development. This session also highlighted the sense of powerlessness all the girls felt in discussing careers and their inability to access appropriate information. Lack of knowledge and access to information result in low self-esteem.

Session seven ["Problems"] emphasized the negative impact poverty and familial problems have on self-esteem. Jane talked about her family being on welfare and the affects of poverty on her family with anger and frustration, assuming a defeatist perspective. When she shared her problem with the group she was incapable of suggesting any solutions to her own predicament, adopting a subservient attitude stating: "What should I do!"

For Viv the familial problems between her grandparents and her mother created significant anxiety and uncertainty. Her grandparents claiming that her mother did not love her contributed to some loss of self-esteem. The importance of unconditional love
on self-esteem was again illustrated in session thirteen ['My Three Wishes'] when Viv acknowledged that she felt unconditional love from only one person: her grandfather. This perceived lack of unconditional love from either her mother or father I believe contributed to low self-esteem.

In the final questionnaire Jane responded that what she found out about herself was: "That I have a bad temper." The constant negativity she directed toward herself resulted in a loss of self-confidence.

From the six girls who participated in the study two had noticeably poor self-esteem. The factors that contributed to this state included patriarchal conditioning, poor role models, poverty, feelings of powerlessness, and lack of unconditional love. Participation in an encouraging, supportive and creative environment may have facilitated some positive change for Viv and Jane.

Evidence of High Self-Esteem

From the first session it was apparent that some of the girls had very healthy self-images. As the sessions continued Angie, Tara, Sammi and Donna all displayed indications of high self-esteem. The emerging factors for high self-esteem were focus on accomplishments, knowledge and pride in cultural background, stable family environment, religious belief, positive attitude towards life and assertiveness.
Both Tara and Angie discussed their accomplishments when they introduced themselves in the first session. They spoke with pride and confidence about their abilities in swimming, bowling and gymnastics.

In the second session ['Fairytales'] all the girls were extremely proud of their stories. This was a positive element for cultivating self-confidence. Donna's fairytale illustrated attitudes to life that maintained her positive self-image. In her story she took matters into her own hands and beat up the wicked foster brother. In reality this boy 'Dwain' is her younger brother who displaced her as the youngest in the family. Her use of the story was therapeutic and illustrated how her assertiveness and belief in herself empowered her.

Sammi chose her mother as role model in the third session because"...I think she's smart." Tara in the fourteenth session stated that she was like both her parents because they all were good at problem solving. She saw her parents as positive role models as did Sammi and Angie. A healthy and mutually respected relationship with parents may nurture a positive self-image.

When the group discussed 'What and Who is Powerful' in the fourth session Sammi stated that "facing your fears is powerful". This belief encourages a positive self-image. In the same session Donna defined power as "mind power": the ability to believe in yourself when others do not. Again this illustrated an empowering self-concept.
The fifth session ["Open"] was effective in enhancing self-esteem because it dealt with issues the girls were interested in. Some of them brought in baby pictures. Having the spotlight on themselves was mutually enjoyable and a confidence booster. Angie talked about her favourite book and her pride in her cultural background. Angie's focus on her culture was a continuous source of self-esteem. Sammi also was proud of her cultural history. When emphasis was on their personal interests the girls displayed a higher level of self-esteem and animated conversation.

In the "Exotic Career" session [number six] Donna illustrated the significant potency of high self-esteem. When she shared her dreams of becoming a Power Ranger, a television character, the other girls laughed. She remained unaffected by their disparaging attitudes toward her career choice. Donna demonstrated strength and strong belief in herself. This was also evident in session seven ["Problems"] when she defended her right to physically retaliate and protect herself from her cousin's attack. Although I tried inappropriately to tell her that she should not resort to violence she persisted and asserted her right to protect herself. Her love of the martial arts, the Power Rangers, and her religious beliefs reinforced her self-confidence.

Tara's story about her brother's heart transplant in Session Eight ["Family Stories"] highlighted her belief that "miracles do happen". This empowering optimistic attitude toward adversity seems to have developed Tara's self-confidence.
These positive elements contributed to a good sense of self. However, the girls showed signs that they are increasingly at risk of losing their self-esteem as they grow older into adolescence and femalehood and encounter the firmly entrenched patriarchal dogma. Their own societal conditioning may work against them, combined with poverty and low self-expectations. The girls have been affected by patriarchy as they focused on males as rescuers and principal breadwinners. These are the perilous omens that compel holistic arts therapists to promote collective self-narrating and storying.

**Empowerment and Effective Themes for Cultivating Positive Self-Images**

The use of the term empowerment in the study indicates a situation where one or more of the girls took control and asserted themselves. It also describes a narrative that had the ability to generate affirmative change [or a situation that was effective in changing their perceptions from passivity and submissiveness to validation of their own identity and self-definition.] It also describes a narrative or session that fostered self-reflection and self-determination.

During the study Sammi, Donna, Tara and Angie demonstrated empowered narratives or speech. In the session on `Fairytales' [Session Two] Donna and Angie's stories were empowering as they cast themselves as heroines taking control of their fate and not
yielding to a male rescuer, thus defying the traditional paradigm of fairytales. Significantly, even though the rest of the girls copied the female passivity of the fairytale genre the session was empowering to all because of the artistic nature of the session. Simply the accomplishment of something artistic and creative was self-affirming. All the girls were delighted with the stories they had created and took great pride in recounting them to the group.

All except Tara. Tara's re-creation was a very patriarchal text with the female preferring subservience to a male over self-determination. Interestingly, she was the only one who did not want to read her story. I read it for her. Something in her story made her feel uneasy. Perhaps it was an awareness of gender imbalance or a perception without true cognizance of the beginning of her own loss of power and loss of voice.

In the third session on `Role Models' Donna chose a female role model, her aunt, a female in a nontraditional role. This may have been empowering to the whole group as they reflected on gender roles.

In this session the profound importance of an exercise I had started with them emerged. In the first session I had asked them to recount each week the three things they had done that they were proud of. The girls loved communicating the positive details of their lives. This activity was empowering throughout the study.
The 'three things I am proud of' was both empowering and critical in the development of self-esteem. Mary Pipher in her work *Reviving Ophelia* explains: "Girls benefit from the limelight...Girls need to see reflections of themselves in all their diversity - as workers, artists and explorers." [163]

In the fourth session, 'Who and What is Powerful', Donna and Sammi gave empowering, and assertive definitions. Sammi perceived power as 'standing up to your fears' and Donna interpreted it as 'mind power': 'believing in yourself when no one else does.'

Several empowering concepts developed over time. In session four the girls detailed times that they had given up. We discussed the importance of not giving up as a precursor to succeeding in life. By session five the girls had assimilated this characteristic as their own, dialoguing on the importance of perseverance.

Another evolving concept was 'husbands'. In the second session 'Fairy tales' the girls had argued that a good husband was a rich husband. In the ninth session, 'Philosophies', Angie described a good husband as a 'loving husband'. With the exception of Jane all the girls agreed that a loving husband was better than a rich one. This transformation highlighted the effectiveness of self-narratives in changing perceptions.
In the Seventh Session, 'Problems', Donna exhibited a high level of confidence. Her solution to her problem was empowering for her even though it was problematic for me. Donna was able to argue successfully and convince me that she had acted appropriately. Donna may have empowered the other girls through their witnessing of this exchange.

Tara's narrative, in the eighth session, 'Family Stories', was an inspirational story describing her brother's heart transplant. She interpreted the moral of her story as 'miracles happen'. This was an empowering philosophy to life for her and may have influenced the girls in adopting a belief that wonderful things could and do happen.

Session eleven 'My Perfect Life', session twelve 'Seven things I want to be when I grew up, Seven things I don't want to be', and session thirteen 'Three Wishes' were significant in empowering them collectively to see themselves as choice-making individuals. By the tenth session the girls had taken an interest in themselves and their verbal skills reflected this. They spoke animatedly, with assurance and a sense of humour. Session twelve was pivotal because the focus was exclusively on their own character development. What did they want to be like, what didn't they want to be like? This precipitated meaningful self-reflection, a primary element of self-determination. It may have also inspired the belief that they had the power to control who they would become. Often subordinates lack the belief that they have power
over their own lives.

The thirteenth session provided an opportunity to think about the future in an unstressed atmosphere and with the knowledge collected from the previous sessions. All the girls concentrated on their own development and their wishes indicated reflection and contemplation of a happy future.

Empowering opportunities were present and explored during this study. The girls were encouraged to dialogue and reflect on empowering and disempowering themes giving them an opportunity to contemplate their future roles in society and to question various firmly-held beliefs.

All the narrative themes promoted positive self-images. Their objective was to provide opportunities for reflection and dialogue. Each one contributed something distinctive to the process. The most effective themes were the ones that required creativity, were open and left to the girls to develop and focused on the self and the self in the future. The last four sessions were the most significant in developing self-esteem. I believe this was consequential to having had the storytelling sessions.

The effects of having had the storytelling sessions were evident in their enhanced verbal skills and the contents of their later narratives where they demonstrated greater assertiveness.
Therapeutic Opportunities

At this point clarification must be made between 'empowerment' and 'therapeutic opportunity'. All the meetings were therapeutic in the holistic arts definition of the term; they were all creative experiences which were intended to help the girls feel a greater sense of competence. This application of 'therapeutic' was dealt with under the heading of 'empowerment'. Here I have chosen to look at situations where the girls had specific problems they were attempting to deal with and how the storytelling experience affected them. Common threads to these problems involved feelings of hurt, anger and powerlessness.

Since storytelling is the foundation of all therapy it is natural that the girls who had serious concerns to deal with would find an opportunity to encounter and confront their distressing issues within the self-narrative framework. "In therapy we seek to understand the stories of our lives with an unusual profundity and focus - in particular, those stories at the centre of our sense of self."[164] What became increasingly obvious as the sessions developed was that serious dilemmas would spontaneously surface in an atmosphere of creativity, trust and dialoguing. Not all the girls had serious issues to consider. One participant did have significant difficulties, Viv, for whom some of the sessions became cathartic experiences and thereby therapeutic.
In the first session Viv described troubling family dynamics; her parents are divorced, her mother is planning to remarry and she hates her sister. After talking she reveals that she is worried for her sister more than anything else. Her sister, a teenager, had been getting into a great deal of trouble and confiding in Viv. Viv's inability to effectively deal with the problems and the stress of listening to them made her respond negatively and fiercely towards her sister. By exclaiming that she hated her sister she provided herself with a cathartic emotional release and an opportunity to discuss the situation and listen to herself. One of the greatest therapies that storytelling provides is the chance to tell our story and have someone listen to it and by doing so the opportunity to listen ourselves.

One of the most obvious is simply the lack of opportunities to engage in story-telling to, and with, others — particularly others who can appreciate them, who come from a comparable context. We need to `find an audience for the untold tales...permission to tell the stories that are our birthright.' Otherwise our situation is like that of the tree falling in the forest. That is, `you can't tell who you are unless someone is listening'.[165]

Verbalizing her frustrations and anger toward her sister extricated Viv from a powerless and inarticulate framework.

In the second session Donna presented herself with a therapeutic opportunity in the classical sense that Bruno Bettelheim discusses in his work, *The Uses of Enchantment*. [166] Her re-creation of the traditional fairy tale has her dealing with
her anger towards her younger brother for displacing her as the youngest in the family. In her fairy tale he is an older foster child who she beats up in an effort to assert herself. The creative method of dealing with her feelings and the sense of humour and fun she brought to the session had healing properties for her.

When Viv's turn came in the sixth session to tell the three things she was proud of she confided that everything had gone wrong for her that week. Tara replies "I have days when I want to cry at the end of them." We talked about things usually looking better in the morning. This may have been therapeutic for Viv as she realized that others had feelings of futility. Feeling that we are not alone and that others endure similar distresses can be therapeutic.

All the girls had therapeutic experiences [except for Angie who said she could not think of a problem] in session Seven, Problems, as they discussed their problems and were listened to, respected and accepted. They participated in their own solutions and by sharing their stories they alleviated some of the anguish of assuming anxieties alone and remaining silent.

For Viv session seven provided an emotional catharsis once again as she discussed her troubling familial situation, her feelings of being caught in the middle between her mother and her grandparents and the fear that her mother may not love her. Was her confession of feeling unloved and tremendously hurt in a public
forum therapeutic? This was the one issue that haunted me throughout my study. After much reflection and research I believe it was. First the group was very encouraging and non-competitive: a safe arena in which to bear one's soul. Secondly she released her pent-up poisonous emotions. By purging them she relieved some of the suffering and the 'initial goal of therapy is the relief of suffering.'[167] She confronted her problems, was given group support and had an opportunity to articulate her emotions into language. Viv's catharsis, her ability to put her emotions to words and the authentic caring of the group provided a therapeutic experience. The girls were learning to develop their coping and empathizing skills in this session.

Viv continued to nurture herself and deal with her issues. In the eighth session 'Family Stories' she chose a very funny narrative. After the severe emotional experience of the previous session she elected to tell a funny story that reminded her that her family knew good times as well. This story gave her hope that happiness could exist in her family. The installation of hope is the most basic and important element of benefit to the self.[168]

Jane also expressed her distresses and anxieties throughout the sessions. One common thread for Jane was criticizing her parents and their life of poverty. Her anger was present in most of our meetings. She vacillated between praising her parents and viciously criticizing them. What concerned me was that she might
interpret her situation as being hopeless, simply her fate, and
deteriorate into a victim with a victim's disempowering attitudes.
I perceived Jane and Viv as seriously at risk for losing self-
esteeem and belief in their own abilities. Hopefully, the experience
of participating in the storytelling sessions was of some benefit
to both of them in constructing their own empowering paradigms.

Besides the empowering opportunities the girls encountered
during the sessions there were also therapeutic opportunities to
confront anxieties and problems. These emerged in the natural
course of telling one's story. To effectively deal with critical
problems the story-telling facilitator must have some background in
drama/art therapy or psychology. This is crucial.
CHAPTER VII

Summary

This study supports the premise that the self-narrative story-telling process can prevent the loss of self-esteem and empower females to self-define and self-script their own identities and destinies. The research also justifies the use of this technique as a way of empowering females to begin to recognise the overwhelming stereotyping imposed by patriarchy. When the girls were engaged in the sessions they demonstrated feelings of growing confidence in themselves and an amelioration of verbal proficiency. The development and evolution of their storying demonstrated a rapid growth in perception and in the realization that they could self-define and self-script their lives. The group discussions illustrated their awareness of gender bias and their stories carried evidence of patriarchal stereotyping. Collective dialoguing encouraged them to begin to understand the imposition of the dominant culture's values and their collusion to their own subordination. This was a beginning in the journey of resistance.

The research demonstrated that established stories such as fairytales are tools of the dominant patriarchal culture intent on preserving the existing social inequality. When the girls engaged in fairy tale re-creations they took on passive and submissive roles.
Telling their own stories gave importance to their lives. Believing their personal stories are significant is crucial to the healthy development of ego in young girls. Stories that concentrated on the self with time for discussion and reflection were self-affirming. Stories they created, even though patriarchally influenced, provided them with feelings of accomplishment. The artistic, creative experience induced self-esteem.

Narratives that dealt with past events gave importance to their personal lives and put past situations into some perspective for them. Tales of the present helped them deal and understand their daily issues. Stories that projected into the future provided an opportunity to reflect on the limitless possibilities available to them; the belief that all is possible if one plans, works hard and resists the cultural stereotyping of female as subservient. In essence the intention of all the stories was to nurture self-esteem and a belief in themselves.

The role of and the relationship with the facilitator was of great significance in this study. The circumstances of having an adult actually and literally listen to their stories provided empowerment.
Educational Implications

This study suggests that the self-narrative storytelling process may halt the significant loss of self-esteem preadolescent females go through in North American society. Female storying can offer validation to young girls and allow them the oral arena to create their own identities that will empower them to avoid cultural stereotyping that encourages passivity and subservience. Ways of preventing female loss of self-esteem and 'loss of voice'[169] are essential to the goal of education. As such self-narrative storytelling may be an effective method to institute in the middle and late primary grades to encourage females to reflect, create and dialogue.

The self-narrative storytelling process can also be effective in improving reading and literature appreciation skills. Research in constructive reading has shown that students who make connections between their lives and literature understand texts at a deeper and more profound level.[170]

In their study of fifty-eight, eighth grade literature classes, Nystand and Gamoran found that students who are personally involved in reading remember texts better and achieve a deeper understanding of their texts.[171]

The concept of storying has clear curricular implications. The stories that students tell help them to recognise and value what they know. Drawing from their own experiences and relating them to school topics enhances academic performances.
Classrooms need to be places where people exchange ideas, where people construct their own meanings in conjunction and disjunction with the meanings of others, and where the particular strengths of the individual are recognised and valued by the group. [172]

Implications for Arts Education

The study is significant for arts education because of its original therapeutic potential for young females. Recent literature has validated storytelling and the self-narrative process as beneficial for entertainment and educational purposes. It has also studied its positive affect on group dynamics.[173] One area, previously unexplored, is how the storytelling process can empower preadolescent females to resist the known patterns of patriarchal 'femininity' and foster a partnership model of society based on cooperation and interdependence.

This study demonstrates that female loss of self can be prevented through the dramatic art of storytelling and it validates the importance of storytelling in schools, at a time when the value of the arts is being questioned in the educational system.

Collective storying has significant implications for individuals in a society of technological advancement and artificial intelligence. It connects individuals emotionally, reminds them of their humanity and ignites the imagination. In other words it preserves hope and purpose. "....the arts have always existed to communicate those things which otherwise cannot be expressed." [174]
Conclusion

There is great potential in the use of the self-narrative storytelling process as a tool to empower young girls to self-define and self-script. This study merely taps the surface of this potential. More research is needed to define the most effective narrative themes. This study was a preliminary investigation into the potential of self-storying. The self-narrative process has proved to be empowering. The process also presented therapeutic opportunities for the girls in need.

A study and comparison in the potential of different narrative themes with attention paid to more dramatically creative themes and intellectual topics and the effectiveness of personal stories is needed. These fifteen sessions were insufficient to determine if one type of narrative theme might be particularly effective. In this study all the sessions offered the girls different possibilities and potentialities. It was a unique opportunity to express themselves in a collective, collaborative and organized forum.

One significant issue that emerged during the research is the role of the facilitator. This study establishes the pivotal part the facilitator plays in the effectiveness of the group dynamic. This person must be an empathic and creative individual well-educated in the holistic arts therapies.
After the completion of this study I have concluded that the most important factor in determining the success of storytelling as a means of female empowerment is the facilitator's ability to create the proper atmosphere and lead the sessions without assuming the central role.

As educators in the Holistic Arts therapies we have an obligation to help girls create their own myths and 'guiding fictions' that will empower them. To do this we must start before the loss of self-esteem begins. We must encourage young girls in grade four and five to form storytelling groups where they can create and think about their own lives. This would be a preventive measure. Female groups would allow an arena to critique each other's thinking and foster a deepening dialogue.

My relationship with these brave young women who trusted me as custodian to their stories lasted far longer than the timeline of this study. I became an honoured participant and audience to their growth. I wish them well...

We are engaged in heroics; these heroics reflect such concepts as ego development, ego strength, and personality identity.[175]
Endnotes


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Appendix A

Consent Form

Dear Parents,

Your daughter has expressed interest to Mx. XXXX in participating in a female storytelling group.

My name is Dina Bednar. I am a graduate student of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, affiliated with the University of Toronto. I am organizing a research study into how all-girl storytelling groups can help girls maintain and build their self-esteem. Many studies show that by mid to late elementary school girls begin to lose a large amount of their self-esteem compared to boys. This may compromise their later academic progress.

Our storytelling sessions will cover a wide range of topics from books and stories they have read, to role models, and their plans and dreams for the future. The group will meet twice a week for half-hour sessions. The sessions will be audio-recorded and the results will be analyzed for academic purposes. You may withdraw your child from this study at any time through written notification to me. Participation is purely voluntary.

If you have any questions, or require more information, I will be happy to meet with you. You may call Mrs. XXXX, the Principal, [tel. XXX-XXXX] to set up a meeting with me.

Thank-you,

Dina Bednar

______________________________
I give my daughter___________ permission to participate in the 'female storytelling group'.

______________________________
signature

I do not give my daughter___________________ permission to participate.

______________________________
signature

I would like more information.______
Appendix B

Questionnaire: Storytelling Group

1. Did you enjoy the storytelling sessions? How did you feel during the sessions? Happy? Anxious? Bored?

2. What kind of stories did you enjoy talking about and sharing with the girls in your group?

3. Did you think that half an hour was enough time. If not how much time is suitable?

4. Did you learn anything new about yourself during the sessions? If so what?

5. Do you think that girls in grade five could benefit by participating in small self-narrative groups? In what way?

6. Can you suggest other topics that would be good for female storytelling sessions?
Appendix C

Eighth Session

Stories about Families

Dina: So who's going to go first? Who remembers what we are doing today?

Voice A: I do.

Voice B: I do.

Sammi: We have to say a happy or a sad story about someone in our family.

Dina: Okay, Viv would you like to go first because it's your birthday tomorrow?

Viv: Okay this is a funny one. When me and my sister were little we use to bathe together and my sister went to the washroom in it and then my Mom came up and my sister told my mom that I wouldn't eat her chocolate.

Dina: Oh, oh. How old were the two of you then?

Viv: I don't really know.

Dina: Does your mother still tell that story sometimes?

Viv: Yeah, she tells everyone else. [laughter]

Voice: Can I go next.

Dina: That's a very funny story. Families have a lot of funny stories that they can share and laugh at together don't they. Of course they can be somewhat embarrassing.

Tara: It wouldn't be a family if it wasn't embarrassing!!

Jane: You know what happened to us.

Dina: Jane would you like to go next?

Jane: Two days together my sister was getting ready for her bath she was naked she went outside and my mother called her, but she picked up dog poo and threw it at my dog.

Dina: She picked up dog poo and threw it at your dog. [laughter] And why did she do that?
Jane: She's only one. [pause] She wanted to go outside I guess.
Dina: But she knew that the dog poo belonged to the dog.
Jane: [shrugs] She picked it up and mushed it with her hands.
Dina: Yes, but I'm saying did she make the connection that the poo came from the dog?
Jane: [laughs]
Dina: Well that's a funny story too. You can tell that story when she gets older. Who wants to go next?
Tara: I'll go after the next person.
Donna: I'll go next.
Dina: Okay Donna.
Donna: My dad always tells me this story. When my brother Dwayne was small he took his poo out of his diapers and started mushing it around in his hands and all around the crib.
Dina: What a mess!
Tara: Both my brothers did that!
Donna: Then he was licking his hands.
Universal uggghh!!!
Dina: And your mother had to clean it up I guess.
Donna: And my Dad.
Angie: When I was small I did the same thing, I had it all around my hands and I smeared it on the wall.
Universal OHhhh!
Jane: When I was little I dropped the phone on my Dad's head. I took it and I dropped it and he had a goosebump.
Dina: Donna do you tell your brother this sometimes. Do you remind him?
Donna: Sometimes I do and I laugh at his face.
Dina: Tara.
Tara: My story is about when my brother got sick. With his heart. It was at seven at night and he was going to bed but before he fell asleep he started to throw up, and throwing up and throwing up. It was almost eight and he was still puking and so we went to the hospital and it took us about an hour just to get in and they took x-rays and everything and they thought he had a lung infection. But then they sent him to Mac and then he didn't have pneumonia it was heart disease. And then so they sent him to London and they said "well we'll put him on the list for a heart cause the ribs are closing in on the heart and he might die." So he had to have the puffers and then one day we were just having dinner and we got a phone call from London and it was the hospital and they said we got a heart so come in as soon as you can. So my parents were scrambling all over the house and I'm sitting on my bed crying because I didn't know what was going to happen to him and my Mom and Dad were running this way and that way, and I was crying what's going on, what's going on...My mother said your brother's going to get a heart, your brother's going to get a heart, and then I just broke out into crying even more. And I went to stay with my friends when they left and they called my aunt and my aunt came and picked me up, and she said do you want to go and get your dad. Because he was at a wedding and I said yeah, and then I went to my grandmas and grandpas. I stayed with my grandma and my grandpa for about a year and then they had a picture of the family on the table. And every time I looked at it I started to cry, it was scary. Cause the doctor said he's too small he might still die, cause he was only two.

Tara: Six.

Tara: I don't know.

Tara: Ten.

Tara: So you must have been six, just a little girl. Probably in kindergarten or grade one.

Tara: I was in grade one and at the school they had a blackboard with a prayer for Brandon and each day we prayed and there was a donation.

Tara: So how long did it take Brandon to recover? Was it about a year?
Tara: Yeah about that.

Dina: So you stayed for a whole year with your grandparents? Did you get to visit with your brother during that time?

Tara: Yeah, I got to visit me when he had just got stitched up and he had all these wires and stuff. I couldn't recognize him much. I don't recognize him now. His teeth use to be rounded and now they're straight, he doesn't look, when he was younger his hair was light, light, light, lighter than Viv's and now its darker than mine. Now he has to take all these pills.

Dina: Is that so his body doesn't reject his heart?

Tara: Yeah, and he has to go to London every year for a check-up. I don't know what it's called but they take a piece of the heart and check it. His body hasn't rejected it.

Dina: That's wonderful. And probably his body won't reject it now. He's already six years old. I'm so happy for him do your family. But he lives far away from you now doesn't he?

Tara: Yeah.

Dina: Do you miss him?

Tara: Yes I miss him a lot.

Dina: Do you talk or write to him often.

Tara: Yeah I talk to him once a week. And I might be going this summer.

Dina: That's great, you'll have a lot of fun. What did that whole experience sort of teach you? Did it teach you anything?

Tara: That miracles happen.

Dina: It is a miraculous thing and yes miracles do happen Tara. It must have been a very stressful time for your whole family.

Tara: I was at my grandma's and grandpa's and the newspeople were all around and we had three or four tapes and one was when he called me and we had a talk.

Dina: Do you know what was wrong with Brandon's heart why he needed a new heart.

Tara: Because his ribs were closing in on it.
Dina: I see, well that's major, major surgery.

Tara: He was dead for eight minutes. And it was scary because my Mom and Dad were standing out there crying. And I saw them crying on t.v.

Dina: That's a really tough thing to get over, but you know time passes and it all worked out well and you got to see that miracles can happen. And miracles do happen. They happen everyday, and they can happen to all of us. In fact you may have already had a miracle in your life.

Angie: Like being born.

Jane: I didn't lose my eye with that knife.

Dina: That's right that was a miracle that you didn't lose your eye.

Jane: And my foot, and my foot.

Sammi: My foot too, my aunt was holding a nail gun and she shot it by accident and the nail went into my foot.

Dina: Oh Sammi that must have been very painful.

Jane: I saw a car fall on a guy's head.

Dina: Was he okay.

Jane: A big white car, the whole car fell on his head. Do you remember that Viv?

Viv: No.

Jane: And that guy was laying there yelling help, help, help me. It was funny, it looked funny cause his head didn't look like it was going to be there. So that was a miracle that he was alive. And he was okay. The car fell on his face and he was okay.

Dina: Thank God. Donna you were going to say something.

Donna: My cousin when she was about six ah, she got a pin stuck in her and when she was sixteen it came out.

Dina: Oh no. My that's a miracle too that it didn't travel to her heart or to another vital organ.

Tara: I once saw a cow being born, actually two, The second one came out backwards.
Donna: I saw a giraffe and a hippopotamus being born.

Dina: Where did you see that Donna.

Donna: On television. I saw how animal babies are born.

Dina: Okay thanks Tara for sharing.

Jane: I saw a baby being born on t.v. and it was scary.

Sammi: I was doing the dishes one night and my mother wanted to get a cleaner from under the sink and my head was there and I was holding a plate and my mother's head came up and wham she hit it on the plate. And I said oh, oh and I was laughing.

Dina; Did your mother see stars?

Sammi: I don't know but she wasn't mad at me.

Jane: I have another funny one.

Donna: Me and my brother use to share a room and we had bunk beds, and he fell behind the crack from the top. And I started to laugh at him but he as screaming help me, help me.

Tara: I saw a movie once where these guys went swimming in this lake and when they came out they were covered in leeches. And one guy had a leech on his penis. [giggling]

Dina; Ouch, I wouldn't swim in a swamp.

Viv: I don't swim even in places that have weeds cause I'm sure they have leeches and I don't like leeches.

Dina; I don't like to swim anywhere where I can't see the bottom.

Jane: What are leeches.

Viv: They suck the blood from you.

Donna: They look like giant potato bugs.

Viv: I use to have a pet leech, cause at my grandmas they rented this cabin and those people they rented boats too and the Chinese men they never missed a Sunday and they poured all the leeches in the water and I swam there, it was just shallow just like that, but a swim there. And I dropped my shoes in there cause you can't swim in there very well without shoes, and so I dropped them in there and there was a leech in the bottom so I kept it. I kept it in a bucket.
Dina: How long did it survive?

Viv: Till we left and then I put him in the lake.

Dina: I've only seen them on t.v. You know they use to use them in hospitals a long time ago.

Angie: Why?

Donna: They have like medicine stuff so if you got a poison in there then they use them to suck it out.

Dina: That's right. Leeches will eat your dead flesh, but they won't touch the healthy part they would put leeches on an infected arm or an infected leg and...

Viv: I had a leech on my arm and the mark is still there.

Dina: And the mark is still there.

Tara: You have to burn them to get them off you.

Jane: This guy went hand gliding and he was like fifty miles an hour and he hit a guide rail and he broke everything. He didn't have any protection. He almost died.

Jane: This guy lost his leg...

Dina: Jane why don't we continue so every one will have a turn to talk. Sammi?

Sammi: When my brother was little he would always play with the lights and we could never get him to stop turning them off and on.

Dina: Who told you that story?

Sammi: My Mom. My brother is older than me.

Dina: Angie would you please come and sit down.

Angie: Okay.

Donna: You can kill leeches with soap and water too.

Jane: You know what happened to my Brother? He fell on a rock. And once he fell into a pond and it scared me.

Dina: Thank god he's okay. Sammi when your mother told you this story you must laugh together. I bet your mother has lots of stories about you guys. Okay Angie its your turn.
Angie: Okay, there was like hmm it happened in April I went to the circus and they had elephants, and they walked around and when they pooped it was this big and there were dogs and horses and all the animals were not listening. And you know it smelled real bad there. There were even chipmunks.

Dina; So lets review the stories you recounted today some of them were funny and one was very inspirational and some of them were near disastrous, and really we see that life has many wonderful things, and if you want to laugh you don't have to switch on the t.v. or go to an expensive show your brother sand your sisters can entertain you or your Mom and Dad can entertain you. we know that miracles can happen and we can overcome terrible things..

Jane: When my mother is drunk she makes a Chinese accent, we were watching a Chinese show and at the end she went bye-bye.

Viv: One night I slept over at Jane's house and she went to a store and we were watching a show about Christians who go preach around the world.

Dina; Missionaries?

Viv: Something like that and we were having to, and her Mom and some of her friends went to a preaching house, and this woman said come and sit down, and the house had no electricity or furniture just that weird lady. And its kinda scary because that's Jane's house now.

Jane: And she was saying God gave us this fridge and God gave this bed... and my mom was laughing. And a man said if you're bad your heart will go black. And when my mother was little she dropped by accident the family bible.

Viv: The one that they had all the names of the family.

Jane: And my mother got very sick because she had lost the bible, like god was punishing her so she went to get the bible and she found it and right away she got better.

Dina: She was so lucky that she was able to find it. Okay now Monday is Victoria day, are you girls looking forward to your long weekend?

Universal yes.

Dina: What I want you to do is to write down five rules or values. What is your outlook or philosophy to life. What are the five things you believe that are important for a happy life.

Jane: Graduate!!
Dina: Well that can be one of your five things, I want to hear all about your attitudes, what do you think is right or wrong and how are you going to live your life. And that's it for today. Have a great weekend and I'll see you all next Wednesday.