MATERNAL SPACE:
A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL READING OF
SHIFTS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF HOLDING AND BEING HELD IN MIND
IN MOTHERS AND INFANTS IN THE FIRST NINE MONTHS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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Abstract

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The experiences of four mothers and their infants were tracked developmentally across four transition points in the first nine months to uncover shifts in the phenomenological experience of holding and being held in mind over this period of rapid growth and change. A phenomenological interview was conducted and a 20-minute observation of each participant dyad videotaped at each meeting, which were later transcribed and analyzed using a hermeneutic phenomenological method. Core themes and dimensions of experience specific to each transition were uncovered, along with a developmental conceptualization of the phenomenon of holding and being held in mind that linked infantile experience to maternal experience on the internal plane. Points of convergence in the developmental progression of mother and infant across the four transitions were found in three key areas: the internal experience of maternal space, defined as the mother’s and infant’s conjoined experience of internal or psychic space, including its emotional shape and its dynamic nature; self-body boundaries, which includes the sense of self definition and the felt nature of the boundary between self and other; and the experience of structure, which pertains here to the grounding link with externality in the face of change.

Maternal holding is portrayed as a cyclical process, involving intermittent re-looping through developmental transitions alongside one’s infant, each with its own conflictual core. The
maternal experience of holding an infant in mind was seen to ignite a potent re-encounter with existential beginnings, inviting an opportunity for psychological growth, with maternal re-visiting re-evoking primitive tensions specific to each transition as an outcome of being continuously and intimately engaged with an infant’s state of mind.

In delineating the evocative impact of the infant’s mental and emotional state on the maternal caregiver, the findings bridge an identified gap in the developmental literature on mutual influence in the earliest holding relationship. Developmental portraits of each relationship, based on selected excerpts from the women’s narratives and the taped observations, are presented both to contextualize the phenomenological analysis and give voice to the experience as ‘lived.’ The social implications of the study and its relevance and contribution to current developmental theory and clinical practice are discussed.
Acknowledgements

When I embarked upon this project I did not anticipate the magnitude of the undertaking, nor the extent of its impact on my personal life and on the lives of those closest to me. I am profoundly grateful for having had the opportunity both to engage life so fully and to step back and think about it, and I especially want to thank those who have encouraged and supported me through it.

My heartfelt gratitude I extend to the four women and their babies who shared their experiences with me over a period of time when every moment is precious.

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Prologue

With the dawn of motherhood, there emerged in me a return of sorts to the ‘space’ of my own infancy, not conceptualized as such at the time, but somehow experienced in the early hours of the morning, baby at breast, darkness, slithers of faint light through a barely-opened doorway, night sounds, breathing. There is something momentous, yet disconcerting about revisiting the place from whence we have come. Although it seems that one is inevitably bound up with a mothering figure from the start [“entangled in night sheets, baby and I”], there is potentially at the beginning of life, an encounter with a vast terrain, an abyss, a “black hole,” out of which one must emerge, if one is to ultimately revisit this place alone at a later point with some sense of security [“Awakening with panic in your cry, I encircle you in my arms, and skin to skin, I shield you from the night”]. Our babies merge with and yet confront us with our own mortality, ultimate aloneness and the ineffable mystery of life. Where we are emotionally as adults and how we sit with this somehow weaves its way into the baby’s inner experience and emerging sense of self and relationship. The human journey involves numerous sojourns from chaos into the mother’s mind over quite an extended period, which, when all goes well, spawns the beginnings of a space for thought in the baby. Through relationship, our inner world gradually takes shape and it is to aspects of its emergence out of relationship with the first significant other in infancy that I believe we return in our various intimate encounters at different points in our lives.

1 Taken from journal to my first-born, 1989.
2 The term, first referred to in British Indian history as the “black hole of Calcutta” (1750), is used by Grotstein (1990) to refer to a sense of catastrophic discontinuity of self, of falling into the void.
3 Reflections, following the birth of my second daughter, 1992.
Chapter One: Introduction

Impetus for Study and Research Focus

The maternal task in the first year is at best seen as one of sheltering the infant from too soon an encounter with the full harshness of reality. Maternal ‘holding,’ from this perspective, is seen as necessary both for the development of security and for the evolution of healthy emotional and mental functioning in the infant. In terms of what an infant needs, this may be taken as a given. What is less well documented is the impact on the primary caregiver of emotionally ‘carrying’ a baby over these first developmental hurdles. Maternal care is idealized, devalued, glorified and undermined by men and women alike, with which comes a watering down of its inherent ambiguity and the extremes of pleasure and pain incurred in its instrumentation. Women have tended to hold themselves up to the current ideal of the “good mother,” while struggling with inevitable feelings of falling short. With the collapse of the accessible extended family in Western culture, the shared provision of nurturing is further depleted and the necessary supportive social structure eclipsed. Parenting books are dangled like carrots, nudging prospective mothers to learn how they can do what’s best for the baby. There are now computer software packages for infants, which promise an intellectual edge in a competitive world and employ marketing strategies which cash in on the parental desire to arm one’s child with whatever it is said will make the world more accessible, less daunting. Very little is documented about the primitive raw-edged emotions of early life and how parents themselves might feel as they immerse themselves in the ‘holding’ process and yet, the fallout of this experience can be seen to readily weave its way back into the relational system. With the birth of a baby, much is reawakened that may previously have been shelved. There is an expectation, even in women themselves, that one should sail through this period of intense change, much as we are told, our mother’s did and their mothers before that (a collective amnesia), but the day to day ride is rarely so smooth and we are not all so well equipped. A lot is at stake developmentally for both parent and child.

The purpose of this study was to capture the essence of shifts in the experience of holding an infant in mind from the perspective of women going through the process in the context of observed shifts in the infant’s own experience of being held. I have attempted to hold up to the light a specific aspect of maternal care--maternal containing--and to view it from various angles that might hitherto have been overlooked, minimized, or felt as threatening. In honing in on the
experience of what it is like to ‘be’ in a primordial relationship, I have tried to honour the contribution of both partners by including the baby’s active role in the shaping of the inner world and documenting where their developmental paths were seen to cross at each of four transition points in the first nine months.

The impetus for this study evolved out of a concern about (a) the way in which society casts the needs of the baby aside, in part, because infants are in the precarious position of being dependent on an adult mind to allay their anxieties for a considerable period, and (b) the generalized dismissal of the deep impact of being in continuous contact with an infant’s state of mind on those who intimately care for infants. Both of these positions narrow the developmental construct of mutual impact in the holding relationship in ways that undermine its extensiveness. Who then, will be left ‘holding’ the baby and what will it mean for society?

The objective of this study was to get at the heart of what an infant brings to and evokes in the earliest relationship and how this resonates in the mother and pulls from her in specific ways. It sought to elucidate the complexity of the task of holding an infant in mind that could potentially make a contribution to child-care policy and practice. This chapter will proceed with a review of the literature pertinent to the study’s focus and will conclude with a summary of how this study set out to expand on what is already known in the field. This will be followed by a brief overview of the conceptual framework and a definition of terms, including a delineation of the research question.

**Contextualizing the Research: Literature Review**

The research on mutual influence in mother-infant relations remains somewhat divided in both methodology and focus. On the one hand, it comprises: 1) experimental interaction studies, which focus on operationally defined classes of behaviour, such as intentionality within communicative contexts (Bretherton, 1991; Harding, 1984; Harding, Kromelow, Stilson, & Touris, 1995), inter-subjective communication (Condon & Sander, 1974; Dunn, 1982; Trevarthan, 1977, 1979, 1980), and mutual regulation (Beebe & Lachmann, 1988; Brazelton, Koslowski, & Main, 1974; Sander, 1977; Stern, 1971; Tronick, 1989; Tronick, Cohn, & Shea, 1986); and 2) naturalistic infant observation studies, which focus on the evolution of the individual infant within relationship (Alvarez & Furgiuele, 1997; Briggs, 1997; Maiello, 1997; Perez-Sanchez, 1990; Piontelli, 1986; Rhode, 1997), including a delineation of the underlying aspects of behaviour. While each is viewed from within a different disciplinary discourse, I present them here as essentially complementary bodies of work, with one broadening out the
findings in the other. While the attachment research has made strides in systematically
documenting the influence of early attachment experiences with the primary care-giver on the
child’s representation of relationships and psychological functioning in later childhood (Main,
Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985), it has generally attended less well to the dynamic and mutually
impactful nature of this relationship. In relying on a quantitative approach, it has focused too
narrowly on single constructs, with attachment ‘categories’ lacking the immediacy and fluidity
necessary for understanding the emotional undercurrents within relationships (Seligman, 1991).
While the infancy research has begun to look at the subjective experience of the baby in the
shaping of the internal world (Zeanah & Osofsky, 1994), it is still from an essentially cognitive
perspective, and as such, the other strand in infant development—the unconscious struggle to
overcome inescapable anxieties and its evocative impact on the mother—has been underplayed.

The maternal experience of being emotionally present to an infant on the other hand, has
tended to be explored from within a discourse separate to that of developmental psychology,
using predominantly qualitative methodologies. An initial computer search of the psychological
literature on mutual influence, maternal holding and maternal experiences in mother-infant
relations from the years 1980-1996 yielded a large body of citations on experimental interaction
studies, few relevant citations on maternal experience, and no relevant citations that combined
observations of the relationship with data on maternal experiences within that relationship in
non-clinical samples. In recently re-searching the PsychINFO and ProQuest Digital Dissertation
Abstracts data base from 1995 to 2000, I extracted from an extensive citation list, only a handful
of developmental studies on mutual influence that were pertinent to the focus of this study and an
even smaller number of studies on the maternal experience, both of which are incorporated into
the literature review below.

Accordingly, the review of the literature pertinent to this study is organized into two
broad categories of study:

1) Mutual influence in mother-infant relations, which is sub-divided into (a) mother
infant interaction studies, focusing on mutual influence in mother-infant interactions
and (b) qualitative naturalistic observations, focusing on individual variability in
dyadic relationship.

2) Maternal experiences of the transition to motherhood, which includes studies
delineating maternity as a developmental opportunity.

This section will conclude with a summary of how the current study sought to fill an
identified gap in the literature on mutual influence in the early holding relationship.
Mutual Influence in Mother-Infant Relations

Mother-Infant Interaction Studies

Developmental infancy research since the 1970’s, based on the close observation of mothers and infants interacting, has elucidated the extent to which the infant’s biologically based capacities for engagement in face-to-face communications enables him/her to initiate and to negotiate intimate encounters with others (Beebe & Lachman, 1988; Beebe & Stern, 1977; Brazelton et al., 1974; Trevarthen, 1977, 1979, 1980). Based on data from the behaviour of the infant and from the speech of the mother as she relates to her infant, infant interaction studies have attested to the complex interpersonal relationship formed between the infant and mother within the first few months after birth (Murray, 1991; Sander, 1977; Trevarthen, 1979). Behaviours recorded in face-to-face interactions between mother and infant were found to closely resemble postural attitudes, facial expression and gestures between conversing adults (Trevarthen, 1977, 1979).

Trevarthen’s (1979) work delineated an innate capacity for intersubjectivity, defined as the capacity both to express and apprehend rudimentary intentions and affects in others. Following an instruction to talk with her baby of between 6 and 12 weeks of age, differences in the style of mutual activity were observed in individual mother-infant pairs, although more generally, the dyad was seen to generate “a pattern of intention together,” as if “participating in a single rhythmical beat,” the pattern of which was normally sustained by the mother following and complementing the infant’s moves (Trevarthen, 1977, p. 241). Trevarthen described this as “mutual intentionality,” a “sharing of mental state,” which he termed “primary intersubjectivity.”

Trevarthen (1977) found that while communication with an infant under six months of age was rich and satisfying, it remained essentially devoid of reference to things outside the bounds of the nursing relationship. Although considered intersubjective, communication at the middle of the first year was seen as still relatively one-sided (Trevarthen, 1980). While initially, the baby was seen to be preoccupied with the intersubjective dance itself, directed at this point by inner phantasy life, it was only later that the process evolved to encompass externality and symbolization proper. Trevarthen (1980) observed in those dyads studied longitudinally, a marked change in the manner of communication, first at 16 to 18 weeks, when direct face-to-face play was rejected more frequently in favour of dealing with things independently (albeit still in the close presence of the mother), and again at 9 months, when highly co-operative interaction of a different quality reflected the coming together of new achievements of manipulation and object perception and the highly personal communicative system created between infant and mother.
Around this time, it was found that the mother herself became an interesting agent, whose own motives incited curiosity. The baby was described as perceiving the mother as more than an amplifier, interested observer, or facilitator of active curiosity and intended actions, but as “a source of personal affection, comfort and triumphant joy” (Trevarthen, 1980, p. 330). By means of a look or gesture, she was actively invited to take the initiative in a joint activity. Trevarthen and his colleagues felt that the change in the mother’s behaviour at this point, for example, her modifying her actions and speech in reference to the baby, originated in a change in the structure of the infant’s motives, a change in curiosity and intention. Trevarthen noted that “an observant mother is automatically capable of complementing this change so that a much more competent level of joint intentionality and cooperative awareness is quickly achieved”¹ (p. 330).

Murray (1991) studied the impact of intimate interpersonal contact on the infant’s growing capacity to distinguish between self and other, and to function in terms of objective reality. Her studies have documented the impact on one to two month olds of disrupting normal maternal communication by means of experimental perturbations (Murray, 1980; Murray & Trevarthen, 1985), which supports the hypothesis that by at least six weeks infants seek interpersonal engagements and demonstrate a striking sensitivity to the form, affect and timing of the partner’s response. She found with eight-week-olds that failure of communication due to lack of response or paradoxical response of the mother sometimes led to expressions of distress, confusion, crying or withdrawal in the infant (Murray, 1991). That is, in instances where the gap between environmental provision and infant expectation or need widened in this age group, the emerging representations of self in relation to the other (or the world at large) remained predominantly subjectively driven and defensive behaviours were observed.

Murray (1991) described “the mother’s adaptation to her infant ... as a potentially hazardous affair, not to be taken as a given” (p. 223). Here, she described a prospective study wherein mother-infant pairs of postpartum depressed (lasting for up to three months only) and non-depressed mothers were compared, in which infants of postpartum depressed women were found at 18 months to show more displacement activities, distress and sleep disturbance. She concluded that “factors that appeared to place the infant at particular risk were those that might be expected to interfere specifically with the mother’s capacity to respond appropriately to the needs of the dependent infant” (p. 228). For example, in cases where mothers themselves were exposed to early childhood vulnerability, in terms of either loss or separation, she found infant

¹ Winnicott (1951) had described how the ‘good-enough’ mother adjusts to the infant’s gesture, instead of substituting her own.
outcome to be particularly poor. Analysis of maternal speech during play with the infant at 2 months demonstrated that depressed mothers were more preoccupied with their own experience and less focused on the infant (less likely to acknowledge the infant's initiative) than were mothers in the control group. This correlated with impaired cognitive functioning in their toddlers on standardized measures. An analysis of their earlier engagement predicted whether the experience of the environment would be predominantly reality-based or whether defensive functioning would predominate.

These studies provide evidence of mutual influence in the holding relationship by demonstrating both the infant's role in the interaction and the importance of the quality of maternal engagement for infant emotional and mental development. This is not to assume however, a unidirectional causal relationship between maternal responsiveness and infant outcome.

Researching into the intergenerational continuity of caregiver-child relationship patterns, Fonagy, Steele and Steele (1991a) sought to elucidate the nature of the transmission link. It has been accepted for some time in the attachment literature that parent's attachment-related experiences are embodied within a working model (Bowlby, as cited in Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Leigh, Kennedy, & Target, 1993), affecting the internal representation of the infant in the parent's mind. This in turn determines maternal functions underlying sensitive responding, determining a particular child's quality of attachment to the parent (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). van Ijzendoorn's (1993) meta analysis of 18 studies, involving 853 parent-child dyads concluded however, that parental sensitivity ratings account for only 7% of the variance in infant security.

Adopting an idiographic approach to their own data in the London Parent-Child Project, Fonagy, Moran, Steele and Steele (1992) found substantial correspondence between aspects of the child's behaviour in the Strange Situation1 and inferences which could be made about the caregiver's typical ways of handling painful attachment experiences, including their inclination to be defensive about their own negative emotional experiences. Fonagy et al. (1993) concluded that the mother's empathic response goes beyond mirroring, in that it reflects an “appreciation of the infant's emotional state, in combination with her adult mastery of it” (p. 5). They asserted further that “her 'mirroring' also implies her capacity not to be overwhelmed by, but to deal with

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1 A procedure devised by Ainsworth and Wittig (1969) for classifying children according to individual differences in the security of attachment.
the distress,” thereby enabling the infant to rely on her, as opposed to relying on predominantly defensive manoeuvres.

Extending Main’s (1991) work on metacognitive monitoring,¹ Fonagy et al. (1993) pinpointed parental reflective capacities as crucial in the transgenerational process. Main (1991) had demonstrated that the absence of metacognitive capacity, that is, the inability to “understand the merely representational nature of their own (and others’) thinking” (as cited in Fonagy et al., 1993, p. 128), makes infants similarly vulnerable to inconsistencies in parental behaviour and leaves them without a means to fully distinguish between their own phantasy life and external reality. Fonagy, Steele, Moran, Steele and Higgitt (1991b) distinguished between a ‘pre-reflective self,’ which is the immediate—or unmediated—experiencer of life and the ‘reflective self,’ the internal observer of mental life, the dialectical complement of the experiencing self, which reflects on mental experience, conscious or unconscious. Cognitive aspects of this developmental process have been extensively explored over the past decade or so by developmentalists such as Baron-Cohen (1992) under the rubric of ‘theory of mind.’ The focus of the present study however, is on the elucidation of the emotional and psychological factors that underpin the very capacity to form symbolic representations.

Curious to know if self-reflective observations about the mental states of others in AAI² narratives could predict infant security, Fonagy et al. (1991b) operationalized the concept by devising a scale, the Reflective Self Scale, for its measurement. It assesses the parent’s quality of understanding an other’s intentionality and consistent with their expectation, reflective self ratings of parents on the AAI provided a good prediction of child attachment classification. “Reflective self function” then, was considered “an intrapsychic and interpersonal developmental achievement which emerges fully only in the context of a secure attachment relationship,” and as such, it was considered “subject to the vicissitudes of conflict and anxiety and consequent defensive disruption” (Fonagy et al., 1993, p. 6). Parents who were rated high in this capacity were found to be three to four times more likely to have securely attached children than were parents with poor reflective capacities. Moreover, they hypothesized that secure attachment may be a key precursor to robust reflective capacity in young children.³

¹ Main (1991) had proposed that differences in attachment organizations during childhood were highly correlated with the quality of metacognition in the parent.
² The Adult Attachment Interview (Main and Goldwyn, 1991) is an interview system for assessing an individual’s state of mind with respect to his/her experience of childhood attachment relationships.
³ Main (1991) provided preliminary data on the correlation between secure attachment in infancy and efficient metacognitive monitoring in 6 - 10 year olds. Similarly, in London, Fonagy and his colleagues continue to explore the association between secure attachment in parents and the early development of a theory of mind in their offspring.
Fonagy et al. (1993) conceptualized reflective capacity as an aspect of a line of development that starts from the affective attunement of the first months, through the empathic sensing and responding to the mood of another, as observed in infants of 8 months, to the understanding of another’s intentions. Its development was found to be dependent on the growth of attachment between infant and (m)other in the first year of life as linked to the parent’s “psychic capacity.” It is based on the assumption that a secure attachment relationship provides a “secure base” for the child to explore the mind of the (m)other. The process was described as intersubjective, the child getting to “know” the caregiver’s mind as the caregiver endeavours to understand and “contain” the mental state of the child. It might also be thought of in terms of accessing another’s reliable thoughtfulness. These researchers concluded that the quality of infant attachment to the mother is intrinsically linked to both the parent’s internal model of relationship and the capacity to reflect on current mental states in the child. While this finding is borne out in the clinical literature, it weighs heavily on the impact of the parental holding function on the mother-infant equation, but does not address the impact on the parent of containing the infant’s state of mind.

In a longitudinal study tracking 25 mother-infant pairs from 3 to 28 months, which investigated the predictors of child empathy, Kershner (1993) found that while parental perceptions were as predictive of child outcome as was maternal sensitivity, internal representations were the most predictive. Also, fathers’ representations were found to be strongly associated with mothers’ sensitivity during infancy at a time when fathers appear to perform a holding function for mothers. Maternal grandmothers’ representations were associated with maternal sensitivity during toddlerhood.

Kershner (1993) noted the existence of few repeated-measure studies of maternal sensitivity over an extended period. Goldsmith and Alansky (1987) had examined the stability of maternal sensitive behaviour over time and found it to be consistent within stage, but discontinuous from infancy to toddlerhood. Belsky, Gilstrap and Rovine (1984) found instability in maternal behaviour toward one to three month old infants, suggesting periods of stability and flux in maternal sensitive behaviour. Given that parenting requires very different skills at different stages and that infant behaviours rapidly take on different meanings, Sroufe (1979, 1982) suggested that what is required is a focus on developmentally salient issues. Cohler and

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1 This has come to mean the mother’s response to the child and comprises perceiving a need, accurately interpreting it, selecting an appropriate response from available options, and implementing the response effectively (in Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991).
Grunbaum (1981) found that as the child progressively works through developmental issues, similar issues from her own infancy and childhood are essentially re-evoked in the mother and those that have not been successfully resolved may present particular difficulty for her in dealing with her infant/child.

In a study of first time mothers’ relationships to their infants and their own mothers, van Dijk (1990) found that the pregnant woman’s possession of a benevolent internal mother was crucial to her developing relationship with her infant. She discovered that in approaching motherhood, there was a revived seeking out of the actual mother in an attempt to reduce ambivalent feelings by making adjustment and improvement in the internal mother. What is significant, she found, is what the mother currently makes of the attachment experience, not what actually happened or how she may have previously constructed it in her mind.

An important finding in Kershner’s (1993) study was that mothers’ sensitive behaviour, while not predicted by their own working models, were predicted by the internal representations and perceptions of their husbands and their own mothers. Fathers working models of their relationship with their own mothers, specifically their sense of being accepted by their mothers, predicted the sensitive behaviour of their wives during early infancy.\(^1\) Kershner inferred that perhaps fathers who have positive memories of their own early relations with their mothers are less threatened by the attention which their wives devote to their child. It might also relate more directly to the fathers’ own experience of having been held in the minds of their mothers, which in turn enabled them to contain maternal anxiety in their wives. Fathers with negative working models of early attachment relationships were more easily threatened by their wives’ nurturing of their babies. Father’s internal representations had little direct impact on child empathy, while mother’s and grandmother’s did. Kershner concluded that the father’s influence in this realm seemed to be primarily through his effect on the mother. Again, the focus is on the impact of the parent’s cumulative experience on infant outcome, although in Kershner’s study, the importance of the third party in emotionally containing the maternal ‘carrier’ is demonstrated.

In a study investigating the impact of prenatal parental and marital individuation on the evolving parent-infant transactions and infant development at six months and at one year, Diamond, Heinicke and Mintz (1996) found that the more individuated the couple collectively before the birth of the child, the higher the infant’s expectation of being cared for and of attaining a sense of separate self at both 6 and 12 months. They found that “in couples who

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\(^1\) Winnicott (1965) wrote of the function of the father in providing a ‘holding environment’ for the mother, which supports her devotion to her infant.
were individuated, the mother at 6 months (was) ... more responsive to the needs of her child, and more encouraging of her child's separation-individuation” (p. 34). Holding the influence of either parent constant statistically, it was found that the mother’s own prenatal individuation anticipated her affection and responsiveness to her infant at 6 months, while the father’s anticipated both his affectionate responsiveness and encouragement of individuation of the infant. Thus, the mother’s encouragement of separation-individuation at 6 months was the result of joint parental influences. This pattern of influence changed by 12 months at which point, the mother's prenatal individuation was the predominant influence on both infant development and both her own and her husband’s interaction with their child. These researchers proposed that early separation-individuation processes result from a complex configuration of triadic mother-father-infant transactions related to prenatal individuation.

Cramer (1987) proposed a more integrative model of clinical infant research that incorporated “observable, objective parameters of interactions together with the meanings that underlie them” (p. 1045) and cited Stern’s (1971) study on the differential interaction between a mother and her twin infants as an example. Using a micro-analytic study of video recordings, Stern had demonstrated a marked difference in the gaze behaviour between the mother and each of her infants: one infant engaged in face gazing five times longer than his sibling, while the other terminated the gaze nine times more often than the mother. This was more evenly distributed in the case of the first sibling and the mother. Cramer cited these findings as providing evidence of a marked difference in how the mother and each infant handled and organized their interaction. A second approach, which entailed a methodological shift from observing the phenomenon to questioning its underlying meaning, was instrumented to understand the meaning of the difference observed. When asked about her differential response, the mother related feeling ambivalent about the second infant in whom she saw “the bad aspects of her husband,” whereas she felt the other infant “represented her own ‘good’ self.” (Stern, as cited in Cramer, 1987, p. 1045). This study, Cramer proposed, elucidated the importance of recording meaning attribution via parental verbal reporting of what they feel or think about the child and the exchange and he suggested that “particular attention needs to be paid to coincidences between the emergence of certain themes in the parent’s report, and the occurrence of corresponding interactions” (p. 1046, italics in original). The present study moves more into this realm.

Investigating mutual emotional regulation in relation to social context, Morgan (1999) explored how mother-infant relationships are shaped by the contributions infants and mothers
make to the relationship, including the context in which the relationship takes place. Participants were 80 adolescent and adult mothers of 12-month-old infants, matched for marital and economic status. Data was collected during a home visit and included an interview, questionnaires, and a 20-minute videotaped free-play session. Mutual emotional regulation was coded from the videotaped interactions to assess both the process (mutual regulation) and quality (emotional availability) of the dyadic relationship. Contextual factors, including the nature of the physical home environment, external support and neighbourhood disadvantage, were not found to be related to mutual emotional regulation, although demographic characteristics were. Specifically, maternal age was found to be correlated with mutual regulation and emotional availability and maternal education was found to be correlated with emotional availability. Dyads with older and more educated mothers were more likely to evidence behaviours characteristic of positive mutual emotional regulation. Morgan concluded that individual-level characteristics may have a greater influence on mutual emotional regulation than contextual factors, but she did not explore why.

Harding, Weissmann, Kromelow and Stilson (1997) employed a qualitative method of case study inquiry to investigate the quality of early communication partnerships in two infant-mother dyads. They proposed that the ways in which the meanings and intentions of one mind are attended to, interpreted, and acted upon by another represent a co-constructive process, requiring both an affective and cognitive “sharing of minds.” Using a series of traditional assessment measures, these researchers investigated different patterns observed in the communicative interactions between the two infants (from the eighth month) and their respective mothers. A similarity across dyads was noted in that both mothers were observed to be competent, well-functioning adults, reporting no communicative or parenting dysfunction and both infants were assessed as developing normally in terms of their cognitive and communication capacities. However, a difference between the dyads in their effectiveness in contributing to the infants’ development as intentional communicators was observed and this was attributed to the way in which each infant and mother “shared minds,” that is, how they differentially engaged in choice co-construction during the communication trials. Assessments of interaffectivity, quality of attachment (Ainsworth’s Strange Situation), cognition, intentional communication, and choice co-construction (2-minute videotaped free-play episode) were conducted with each dyad over a six month period, with three types of choice co-construction behaviours evaluated in each case: (a) shared attention, (b) rituals (behaviours that establish
patterns; expectations), and (c) obligations (rules or implied directives as to the acceptability of behaviours).

The quality of the interaction between B and his mother between 11 and 15 months consistently reflected what the researchers call their “shared minds,” i.e., shared expectations, a high level of communicative behaviours and mutual recognition of acceptable choices. This dyad’s co-construction of choices reflected the infant’s ability to act with intention. B’s strong engagement with his mother seemed to provide him both with clear expectations and available choices. Their ability to share on an interaffective level at 11 months was confirmed by the secure attachment at 14 months and their vivid engagement at 15 months during the choice co-construction task. Similar to B, a high correlation across assessment measures was found in the case of H, but in contrast to B, the relationship between members of this dyad was characterized more by disengagement (e.g., H playing with her back to her mother). The mother’s role also contributed to the observed mismatching. Although she appeared “warm” and “enthusiastic,” she did not structure H’s activities and choices and appeared to miss opportunities to engage her infant. The observers noted a striking lack of eye contact and shared affect in this dyad. H demonstrated a short attention span during the interactions, but independently was able to become quite absorbed in an activity. A consistent dyadic pattern observed across the 6 month observations included an initial spurt of engagement at the beginning of each observation that gradually waned. An insecure attachment was observed at 14 months. Overall, H appeared limited in her expectations and choices within this communication partnership, while the mother appeared limited in her ability to share intentions with her infant. Differences in the way choices were perceived and constructed within each mother-infant communication system were seen to either enhance or inhibit the child’s development of intentional communication by affecting his/her ability to “share minds” with the adult. The communication mismatches, shared expectations and choices provided were seen as providing a structure of meaning-making that guided not only the dyadic interaction but also each partner within the interaction. Harding et al. (1997) concluded that characteristics of early co-constructions influence the way in which the young child begins to act with intention and to interpret self or other as intentional communicative beings. This concept of co-construction elucidates a possible mechanism for dyadic interchange, specifically with respect to intentionality in early mother-infant relations. The present study focused more on describing how one experienced the interchange.
Psychoanalytic Infant Observation Studies

Longitudinal psychoanalytic infant observations (Bick, 1964) have focused on the nature of the emerging relationship as it unfolds within the family in the early years (see Millar, Rustin, Rustin, & Shuttleworth, 1989; Reid, 1997). Developed in large part from psychoanalytic conceptions of infancy, the narrative, holistic approach inherent in this method is linked to a view of the continuity of the developmental process, with infant observation offering a means to explore the intimacy of connection from birth. Through a process of observing an infant in the natural setting of the family on a weekly basis for up to two years, this work has demonstrated the extent to which the baby’s experiences cohere into a developing sense of self and other, in part, through the physical, emotional and mental mediation of caregivers. The main focus of these observations has been “the baby’s identity, internal world, and position in his parents’ minds” (Rustin, 1989, p. 60, italics added). While the Tavistock model was not designed for purposes of research, the more formal research potential of the methodology has more recently been explored and the method adapted for more focused studies of infancy (e.g., Briggs, 1996; Diem-Wille 1997; Tustin 1986). A number of studies have made use of individual observational case studies to track and elucidate the underlying dynamics of early developmental patterns in the context of particular holding environments (Perez-Sanchez, 1990; Piontelli, 1986, 1992).

Below, I will briefly review those most pertinent to the focus on holding and being held in mind. Perez-Sanchez (1990) described the first twelve months of a ‘baby observation,’ with themes derived from both the observation of the particular baby’s behaviour and the core issues that emerged from the ongoing commentary and interactions between the baby and the primary care-givers during each visit. I will describe this study in some detail, referring to the data and emergent themes of the first nine months only. The first month was seen as characterized by a “state of unintegration” in the baby (named Charles), with the observed anxiety in his mother about being able to breast feed this, her fourth child noted as pertinent. Charles’ awareness of how his mother held him was described according to how his expression changed upon being moved. Perez-Sanchez contrasted the baby’s crying reaction to being undressed with the calm that ensued when he was fully dressed and placed lying on his mother’s lap. He described both the baby’s “being held, taken into his mother’s arms” and his “grasping and ‘holding’ himself together using his own devices, as when he grasp(ed) his mother’s medal while feeding” (p. 14). He described how, when Charles felt unprotected in his eighth day, his lips and whole body

1 Perez-Sanchez himself noted that this term is somewhat of a misnomer, since the method entails observing an infant in the context of the intimate relationships within his/her family, which includes observations of the primary family members as they relate to the evolving personality of the child.
shook “like split jelly” (p. 15). At the same time, he described this mother’s ‘depression,’ her intermittent need to detach herself somewhat and make use of her hands, her voice, her breast as part objects in caring for her newborn. He described her relating, in the midst of Charles “feeding calmly and restfully” at her breast, that her milk was “too thin” (p. 15) and how after she had introduced the bottle the night before, he brought it up immediately. He noted her awkwardness in holding the baby while breast-feeding, in contrast to bottle-feeding. He described Charles’ first bath at twenty-five days, during which his whole body, including his lower jaw, began to shiver; how he clenched his fists and brought them to his mouth and how, when replaced into the bath, his crying intensified, at which point the mother noted his “fear of falling.” Once submerged under the water, the crying subsided and Charles relaxed, only to grow restless again with the slightest hint of movement. Even though this mother made intuitive observations about Charles’ state of mind, she tended to put it down to physical discomfort. When breast-fed, Charles enclosed the nipple and pulled away as if sensing that something was “not quite right,” but he persevered nevertheless, his “determined personality and ... strong will to live” directing him “resolutely towards the breast” (p. 26).

“Identity change in the parents” was seen as characterizing the second month. The mother’s overwhelming tiredness was described as she continued to express her doubt about breast-feeding. She expressed not wanting the baby to grow up and yet voiced her decision to wean him. Perez-Sanchez (1990) described the baby’s evolving ambivalent reaction to nursing at the breast, along with his clear preference for the mother’s nipple as opposed to the bottle teat. Charles’ rejecting the bottle at five weeks was described, along with the effect on both mother and baby of this early weaning (breast-feeding was suspended at six weeks). For Charles, Perez-Sanchez saw it as a return to the state of ‘unintegration,’ as evidenced in his more intensified trembling upon being changed. There was an observed choking response to being bottle fed, followed by regurgitation. His cries intensified when he was brought into another room, his reaction similar to his earlier observed reaction upon receiving his first bath. The observer inferred that Charles’ mother felt confident in bathing, but not in feeding him. She continuously interrupted the feed, even when he was sucking well. He described the whole family as “going through the depression caused by the weaning process” (p. 38) and their consequent need to be ‘held,’ and noted just “how complex the mother-baby interaction is and how easy it is for a benign circle of mutual influence to arise or vice versa” (p. 31).

In the third month, the importance of “the presence of the object” was documented, especially in being confronted with the “painful experience of loss” in having his feeds
interrupted (Perez-Sanchez, 1990, p. 47). The baby’s crying when left alone in the room with the observer was described, along with his emerging capacity to calm down in the presence of the more familiar father, until the latter turned to speak to the observer. The mother herself was intermittently described as feeling more secure and Charles more calm and actively interested in his surround in her presence, but this was seen to readily fall apart again when she left the room. By this time, the baby was seen to endure a longer distance between he and his primary caregivers as long as they remained in sight and emotionally present. At the eleven week visit, the mother was described as tired and overwhelmed again with the demands of the family (The other children were ill). When she referred again to the baby’s fear of falling as she lifted him out of the bath, the observer noted that she did not hold him more securely and the same pattern of clenching his fists and tensing his body was observed. The mother again interrupted the feed, despite Charles continuous sucking. Perez-Sanchez described the feeding position as immobilizing the baby, which he took as evidence of the mother’s own need to be ‘contained.’ He noted how the baby responded favourably to the mother’s voice and her relating, as did she to his smile. They were described as reciprocally influencing each other, their positive back and forth exchange at thirteen weeks said to facilitate a “better psychomotor coordination” (p. 65).

What was seen as pertinent at four months, was “progression” and “regression,” and the baby’s developing “real strength.” His mood at this time was described as oscillating in accordance with the availability and absence of his mother. In being left alone with the observer, Charles grew restless, turned his head away and went back to sleep, only to immediately brighten with a smile when his mother returned. Later when left, he looked more favourably at the observer between moments of unease, no longer needing the extreme defence of turning to sleep. Perez-Sanchez (1990) described “a moment of great beauty” in the shared gaze of mother and infant, in which she spoke tenderly to him and his face radiated with joy (p. 70). Following this, he was able to amuse himself and smile at the father and the observer when left lying on the sofa, a kind of ‘refueling’ having taken place. When his mother returned with ‘the bottle,’ his joy in her presence momentarily allowed her to remain available despite her exhaustion. Perez-Sanchez described the mother’s readily slipping back into feeling persecuted by the baby’s refusal of the bottle, and understood this anxiety and her defences against it as moderated by his own presence. He described her needing more time to talk herself on this visit. Each time she left the room, he cried, only to be relieved in “recovering her” upon her return. She described feeling very concerned about the baby’s vomiting and continuous crying, which she feared may have been due to her introducing solids. Perez-Sanchez suggested that it was the introduction of solid foods...
that prompted Charles once again to reject the bottle. At the fourth month visit, the mother was described as calmer and the baby as feeling less helpless or dependent on her. Drinking from the bottle, he looked around him with interest, even though his mother remained tense while feeding.

The **fifth month** was characterized by a process of “integration.” Perez-Sanchez (1990) described Charles’ now making use of “all of his senses” (p. 87), along with his more vivid response to and consideration of his mother. He described how Charles cried more purposefully in order to hook the mother in, becoming distressed until she spoke with him now, and how, when the mother left the room, he directed his gaze to where he last saw her. At the same time, he was seen to utilize his own resources to calm himself down. Less rejecting of the bottle at this point, he remained more calm in the solitary presence of the observer, who in turn, drew the mother’s attention to Charles’ new activity of hiding his face in his pillow whenever she left the room. While she understood this as the baby’s way of avoiding the bright light, the observer understood it as the baby’s trying to recreate her warm presence in order to overcome the experienced loss. He described the baby’s playfulness in the bath as enabling the mother to ignore the telephone when it rang twice. He discovered that his own presence and relationship with the baby influenced the latter’s capacity to integrate the different aspects of maternal care, but considered his most direct impact as related to the attention he paid the whole family. At almost five months, Perez-Sanchez described the mother’s as being very sensitive to her baby’s “positive response to her” (p. 98), the baby’s smile having a reparatory effect on this mother. In having recently begun weaning him onto solid foods, she commented that if the baby grew up fast, she’d have to have another one because she found it difficulty to tolerate opposition.

The **sixth month** was seen as characterized by the baby’s reacting to “change and loss.” The mother noticed (i) his sensitivity to a change of location and his relief in being replaced in his own cot, and (ii) how he was beginning to vehemently reject certain solid foods. Perez-Sanchez (1990) described Charles’ distress in being placed in his cot with his mobile spinning overhead in his mother’s absence; how each time he went to grab a butterfly the mobile spun faster, each movement representing dramatic change. In a later visit, the mother reported having had to remove it on account of Charles’ distress. Charles cringed the moment the bib was put on and spit out food each time it was placed on his tongue, despite the mother’s inserting the pacifier between spoonfuls, Charles already feeling persecuted by the change brought about in being recently weaned from the bottle. When the mother left the room, he described Charles’ fixating his attention on the doorway by which she had exited. By contrast, he described Charles’ expression of relaxation and his mother’s pleasure in the bathing ritual. He noted this mother’s
continued dependence on her baby's emotional state and how, when she was able to experience pleasure in the interaction, she approached the father more favourably. He suggested that the baby's being dressed and undressed seemed to replicate his experience of being born, given rise to claustrophobic fears. Alternately, his coming into open space from an experience of being sheltered gave rise to the sense of exposure and agoraphobic fears. He noted the baby's agitation when the mother engaged in conversation with her husband, which she herself put down to the baby's hunger.

What emerged from the observation data in the seventh month was this baby's adaptability and resilience. Perez-Sanchez (1990) described Charles as an accommodating infant, with an inherent capacity to compromise and fall in with his mother's need to receive stimulation and support from her child. He described Charles' smiling both to deflect her mood and to keep the communication going. The environmental provision was likewise described as positive, the mother essentially remaining present and attentive and the father (and observer) seen as providing a containing presence. He described Charles' habit of placing his finger into the corner of his mouth in his mother's absence as a self-holding behaviour and his avoiding difficult situations his mother couldn't handle. He described the mother's strong identification with her baby and how this baby was not allowed to feel sad. He saw Charles' covering and uncovering his face with a sheet, in a game of peek-a-boo as an enactment of losing and recovering.

In the eighth month, Charles expressed his dependence on his actual mother more directly and it was noted how important the mother's continuous voice became in containing him. When she left the room, Charles alternated between holding the pacifier close to his eyes and withdrawing it from view, recreating the experience of distance and closeness in order to escape the pain of loss via body movements. His physical restlessness in her absence immediately subsided upon being picked up. He described the parents' accommodating to their awareness that a change of scene left their baby feeling anxious.

The ninth month data highlighted the baby's expanding connection with reality. The mother explained that she had to revert to giving Charles the bottle again after having weaned him completely two weeks prior and she noticed her capacity to be more tolerant with the other children. Charles himself was described as more relaxed in observing the interaction between the observer and his parents, either separately or conjointly. Left alone in his cot with the observer, he placed his head on the pillow, latched onto its corner and sucked the pacifier. When the mother left the room, he covered his face with the pillow and stretching his arms toward the observer, indicated his desire to be lifted. When his mother did not reappear, he positioned
himself so as to fall asleep. Later, when abandoned to the father, it was only when the mother 
spoke while passing the doorway that Charles calmed.

I have described this case study in some detail both to delineate the observation process 
and to document the complexity of the holding situation as revealed. The observation studies that 
follow focus on the impact of the holding relationship on development, some of which will be 
referred to again in the analysis and taken up further in the summary chapter.

Piontelli (1986) described in detail the two extremely different environments in which 
two infants she had observed, failed to develop the intimate relationship necessary to foster 
symbol formation. One child, Martin, who came from what Piontelli described as an emotionally 
depriving, though over-stimulating and intrusive “upper class” background, was seen as 
representing a failure in post-natal adjustment, whereas Jack, the second child observed, who had 
a more vigorous constitution, presented as unable to establish a relationship with his ‘warm,’ 
albeit “blank,” unthinking and burnt out “working-class” mother. In the latter case, Piontelli 
described a process of progressive withdrawal in an already vulnerable infant. In the case of the 
former, she described a marked retreat in the baby from the beginning in his closing his eyes to 
the world and his constant obsessive movements. Both infants exhibited symptoms of “non-
autistic infantile psychosis” and progressed along with what Piontelli describes as “a regressive 
move backwards in time to an illusory womb-like state” (p. 11). Struck by the similarities in the 
infants’ non-development, Piontelli traced the development of their separate situations—the 
impact their environments seemed to have on them—and the development of each baby, 
including the mechanisms they each employed to deal with the post-natal world. She inferred 
from her observations that both infants probably experienced the transition at birth as a 
“terrifying ... assault” (p. 114). “The inevitable consequence of Jack’s series of movements,” she 
reported, “was that he spilled out his milk and would then look completely unbound; he would 
then begin trembling all over and become blanker and blanker.” (p. 115). In Martin’s case, she 
reported that “sweat would stream from him while he engaged in constant head-shaking or 
sucking his ever-protruding tongue” (p. 115).

Both constitutionally vulnerable infants were described as encountering an “insufficiently 
facilitating” environment, their first contact with people seeming to have rendered them wary of 
contact. Both mothers were described as “emotionally unreceptive,” albeit to varying degrees, 
either too distant (closed off) to receive the baby’s attempts at communication, as in the case of 
Martin, or too close (fused with the baby), as in the case of Jack, to offer any real opportunity for 
communication. The mothers’ own somewhat encapsulated existence seemed to have kept them
both insulated from receiving their infant's distress, leaving both infants essentially unanchored. While Martin was exposed from the start to “an indiscriminate bombardment of stimuli” (p. 120), Jack was described as “faced with a blank wall” (p. 120). And even though Jack was initially more inclined to seek out his mother’s receptivity through eye contact, he soon gave up crying when his protests were essentially unheard. This study traces the failure of the holding environment in the case of two constitutionally vulnerable (temperamentally passive) infants.

While it deals with dysfunctional family situations, it is cited here as an example of the impact on development of the incapacity of the primary caregiver to hold an infant in mind. It does not document the mother’s experience of the containing process, but attests to the mutual influence of mother and infant on developmental outcome. Piontelli’s research also illustrates how individual parental responses structure an infant’s defensive actions, while at the same time demonstrating how difficult it is to predict how a particular infant will respond in a given situation, since constitutional variables come into play from the start.

Based on a series of observations of a premature infant, born at just 27 weeks’ gestation, Balbernie (1997) saw the smile as pivotal in the emotional interplay between infant and mother and the baby’s smile in particular, as a “major conductor of emotional contact with the mother” (p. 245). His observations, carried out when the baby was between the ages of 17 weeks and 20 months, are characterized as an operational example of Trevarthen’s (1980) ‘primary intersubjectivity,’ and suggest that “the infant is almost immediately able to appreciate when the mother, as a special and separate person, is ready to receive such communication” (Balbernie, p. 245). Balbernie considered how this mother’s physical and mental embrace may have been “altered” by the reliable presence of the observer, which in turn, may have created “the necessary conditions … for her baby to feel that it was then the right time to use the ability to smile, and so become an active initiator of meaningful interaction” (p. 245). The baby’s first smile, which emerged at 21 weeks, in being lifted into his mother’s arms after she brought him for a walk in his stroller during her regular visit to the hospital, was characterized as an “aimed smile,” and seen as a possible rewarding response for the mother’s attention. At 30 weeks, when the baby had been brought home, his smile was characterized as “bait,” i.e., as a means to draw his mother’s attention by repeatedly smiling at her, which tended to ignite a positive response in her. At 38 weeks, the smile was seen more as a “swapping of joy,” characterized by a lot of back and forth exchange between mother and infant. Upon reflection, Balbernie wondered if the observer’s emotional presence, including his receptivity to the mother’s talk about the baby and his efforts to appreciate how it felt for each of them, might have enabled the baby to “go for the
chance to draw them both together,” based on the experience of emotional containment trickling down through the system, offering coherence (p. 252). He described the baby as reaching out to his holding mother just at the point when her holding had slightly changed, as if somehow he had picked up on the quality of emotional containment. He suggested that perhaps this baby was “more contained for the moments when his mother could feel that her own anxieties were being held by someone else” at which point he could reach out to her (p. 252). Balbernie concluded that from the beginning there is an ability to appreciate the presence of the mother as ‘other,’ the smile representing a comfortable distance between the self and a separate, albeit responsive person, whose behaviour remains “open to influence.” He considered the presence of an inherent capacity to experience oneself as an initiator of change, should the right conditions exist, the right conditions consisting of a feeling of safety and the experienced likelihood of success.

In his doctoral research, which sought to elucidate the underlying dynamics and factors impacting the development of infants at potential risk, Briggs (1996) observed on a weekly basis five infants from a range of social and cultural backgrounds in their natural backgrounds from birth to two years. In observing these infants in a range of stressful circumstances, he focused both on the impact on the infants of the mothers’ states of mind, and on the infants’ responses, and noted considerable differences in the infants’ capacities to deal with stressful situations, including the specific adaptive and defensive measures adopted and their individual capacities to sustain an interest in relationships. In exploring the quality of emotional ‘containment’ available to each infant, he described, using images of form, how the parents’ quality of emotional receptivity in interaction with their infants shifted from one characterized as “concave,” in which the baby’s mental state was allowed to register in the parent’s mind and inform the parent’s thoughtful response, to a form of containment characterized as “flat,” wherein the infant’s communication was either missed, ignored or blocked, to one described as “convex,” wherein parental responses actively intruded upon the infant. Such intrusions ranged from emotional intrusions of the parents’ own uncontained experiences to physical intrusions. Briggs demonstrated that both the flat, unresponsive emotional states and the intrusive, convex parental states could precipitate ‘at risk’ situations for the infants in this study. The data generated in this sample of ‘at risk’ infants also illustrated the extent to which the observer provided a containing function both for the infant and the closely related family members. This was a predominant theme in many of the observation studies cited.

Briggs (1997) documented his observation of one of the infants in the study, who presented the greatest difficulty in terms of the observation itself and his capacity to think about
it. This infant, who he names Hashmat, was the ninth boy in a Bengali family, whose cultural custom of delegating parental functions to different family members, posed its own strain on the researcher’s attempt to describe the ‘quality of containment’ for this infant. It also meant that he had to focus on the family members as a unit. In addition, the fact that the infant was often abandoned to the care of the siblings, who in the parents’ absence actively attacked Hashmat, meant that the observer often had to abandon the traditional observer role in order to intervene in situations of risk and to shift readily between the role of ‘auxiliary parent’ and ‘parental container.’ Briggs characterized the mother’s approach primarily as “not thinking, not noticing or passing the baby to someone else (flat)” (p. 210) and the father’s at times, as “convex,” although there were occasions when both demonstrated the capacity to be more emotionally receptive.

From the start, he noted the mutual accommodation to a pattern of no eye contact between mother and infant, which resulted in their turning away from each other during bottle feeding toward an external object, e.g., the television. The mother demonstrated her unavailability and depression through delegating the role of feeding to others. Briggs noted how it became necessary for Hashmat’s survival to withdraw at times from real interaction and how he developed a way of moving between situations of risk and those offering opportunities for building resilience. He described a poignant example of Hashmat regularly using his hand to effect a particular kind of grip in making contact and how, following the birth of another brother when Hashmat turned one, his relationships became characterized by three predominant qualities: the capacity to communicate and demonstrate curiosity, aggressive and sadistic acting out toward the new baby, and a ‘kind of withdrawal.’ Briggs understood Hashmat’s difficulties primarily in terms of “the quality of patterns of containment provided by all the family members” (p. 226) and he saw his own more active role that evolved over the course of this observation as facilitating a link between Hashmat’s different levels of experience, which he suggested has important implications for intervention in the case of at risk families.

Noting the pitfalls in assuming that the more sensitive, contingent and emotionally responsive the mother is, the greater the developmental outcome--as seems to be suggested in some of the developmental literature--Hopkins (1996) followed weekly, the development of an infant, named Louise, from 6 days to 18 months, using the Tavistock observation method. Her observation illustrated how the mother’s ongoing devoted and responsive care actually “deprived” Louise of the development of a sense of agency and of “the possibilities for negotiation, concern and reparation” (p. 407). At the beginning, the observer described feeling impressed by this mother’s sensitive attunement, her not leaving the baby to cry at all, but when
Louise indicated her wish to be put down off her mother's lap at 15 weeks and the mother conceded without showing any change in her attitude, the very possibility of expressing anger or opposition on the part of the infant was effectively eclipsed. At 6 months, Louise demonstrated her refusal to be passive in the interaction, by weaning herself onto the spoon. From about 12 months on, Hopkins compared Louise's development to that of another infant, Janet, whose mother made room for the baby's initiative and whose response to her mother's return was characterized by exhilaration and affectionate reaching out, in contrast to Louise's lack of vigour upon rejoining with her mother. Hopkins interpreted the latter response as related to the mother's not leaving "enough space for Louise to discover her own wish to give" (p. 414). More pertinent, she noted Janet's mother's facial expression as reflecting a wide range of feelings, including anger, in contrast to Louise's mother, whose continued availability was considered to deprive Louise of discovering how to gain and hold her mother's attention. From 12 months on, Louise demonstrated a marked difficulty in integrating aggression and subsequently her own ambivalence, which appeared to make it difficult for her to demonstrate concern. Louise was later described as developing a paranoid orientation and as rejecting the mother after the birth of a sister when she was three years old. This case study, according to Hopkins, questions the more general assertion from attachment theory that "a baby whose mother is maximally and emotionally available, especially at times of her infant's distress, should develop a secure attachment" (p. 419). She cites the developmental research of Tronick et al. (1986) which pinpoints the baby's own capacity for interactive repair—the capacity to re-establish moments of harmony (synchrony) following moments of disruption (dysynchrony) in playful interaction—as contributing to infant security at one year through providing the baby an opportunity to master negative feelings. The timely provision of "space" was identified as key to the development of initiative.

Hill (1996) documented observations of an infant's development over the first year of life to illustrate the baby's capacity for creative humour and play within the context of a very facilitating environment. She described the infant's feeling impressed with his own ability to make himself understood and to tolerate frustration, along with his determination to master his environment as demonstrated through the emergence of an engaging personality. The infant's use of pre-verbal symbols, for example, finger and body movements, and the development of symbolic play and humour as a means of expression were documented, with the emphasis placed on maternal care as leaving room for the baby's initiative and facilitating the unfolding of an innate curiosity.
Some of the observation studies honed in more specifically on core developmental issues in the maternal dyadic relationship in the first year. Lubbe (1996) used extracts from four psychoanalytical infant observations to illustrate how the onset of weaning creates “emotional turbulence” on both sides of the infant-mother dyad, especially when a good nursing relationship has already been established. He described how the premature weaning of an infant, who had been observed nursing and progressing well at five and half weeks, led to his taking a stand against the second breast substitute (the introduction of porridge at 20 weeks, following on the introduction of the bottle at seven and a half weeks); and how the mother’s anxiety and feelings of helplessness and passivity in the face of his stand, was followed by guilt and parental attempts at reconciliation. Lubbe highlighted the specific “mental burden” which weaning places on both mother and infant and on the quality of their relationship, and characterized the “charged emotional atmosphere” of the weaning process as prototypical of the intricate interpersonal dramas that occur in adult relationships. He presented a second observation of a baby named Sarah, whose mother, prior to her birth, had lost a baby through miscarriage at six months. The observer was struck by Sarah’s “stiff, board-like appearance” as she stared at the geometric mobiles her mother had hung over her crib (p. 199); when left to her own devices however, Sarah managed to circle her arms above her head and to cover her eyes. At 11 weeks, she was seen to repeatedly screw her face up while nursing and showed a clear preference for her pacifier over the breast by 13 weeks. When solids were introduced at 19 weeks, Sarah started to become more animated, and began to refuse the breast. When she was successfully weaned onto solids at 21 weeks, she would not take the breast at all. Lubbe presents this case as an example of how a baby might attempt to wean her or himself early under certain circumstances and interpreted Sarah’s withdrawing from the breast as a means to protect her self from her mother’s depression.

The third observation was of a baby named Kate, who lived in a large boarding house with her mother, along with a number of other family groupings, her father having returned to jail after her birth, where he was serving a sentence for a drug offense. From the start, there was very little evidence of any routine in the mother’s evolving relationship with Kate, who was breast-fed on demand and whose sleeping pattern was also irregular. Lubbe (1996) described Kate’s pattern of taking short ‘sips’ from the breast in the early hours of the morning as gradually becoming pervasive. The mother reported feeling tired and unable to finish anything she started and it was felt that her insecurity about the marital relationship had created a similar sense of insecurity in Kate, rendering her more ‘clingy.’ The loose pattern of nursing transferred to the intake of other feeds and it was felt that the mother relied on Kate to give her own life
meaning. The extended use of the breast in this way was thought to give rise to uneven development. In the case of a fourth infant, Ted, his mother found herself drawn into overly identifying with his moods, and "re-experiencing the world through his eyes" (p. 203). The observer was struck by Ted’s beauty and breast-feeding at 10 weeks was described by the mother as ‘blissful.’ Nevertheless, Ted was started on solids at two and a half months, which he initially spewed, but the mother persevered. By 11 weeks, he began to show a preference for one breast and continued to struggle with the ingestion of porridge. The observer described this mother as anticipating her baby’s discomforts and cushioning the impact of change by gradually introducing it in small doses, while remaining ‘split’ between maintaining the nursing relationship and moving her child forward. Simultaneously, Ted began to rely more on his own resources. The mental strain of the weaning process became more self evident at the 22 week visit, as demonstrated in the diminished quality of the dyad’s prior in-tuneness and the new traces of hostility in the mother’s interaction (her removal of the baby’s hat in the sun). On the basis of the above observations, Lubbe concluded that weaning presents a developmental hurdle for mother and infant that taps into deeper fears about survival. He suggested that when the life and death fears induced through the weaning process intersect with the parents’ own conflicts around separation, intense emotional dramas are generated. He added that the baby’s ongoing development rests on “the freedom in the mother’s mind to employ new and different parts of her own personality in order to take things to other levels” (p. 198). The developmental aspects of mothering are implied.

Taking examples both from infant observations and the findings of developmental research, Daws (1997) illustrated that feeding problems in infancy are related to issues of closeness and distance between the baby and his/her primary care-giver, the unmet needs of the parents seen as a crucial factor. Daws found that bereavements and other losses, seen as underlying a parent’s difficulty in separating, could result in the baby being fed “too much” or “too often,” the difficulty often carrying on into the eating of solid foods. She noted that other mothers might feel “rescued by weaning” from an experienced unbearable intimacy of the early feeding situation. The regulation of distance was considered “a crucial way of managing emotional distance” (p. 180) in mother infant relations, particularly around feeding.

In both categories of study thus far reviewed--the developmental infancy research and naturalistic observational case studies--mutual influence in mother-infant relations was viewed predominantly from the perspective of infant need and parental provision and structured in terms
of infant developmental outcome. Below, I will review a second body of knowledge, which focuses primarily on the maternal strand in early mother-infant relations.

**The Maternal Experience: The Impact of Infant on Mother**

There is a paucity of research related to mothers' experiences both in the transition and the response to the rapidly shifting requirements of early mothering. Most of the literature on mutual influence in mother-infant relationships originates in the developmental and infancy research (including psychoanalytic infant observation and clinical studies), taking as its point of entry, infant need. Much of the research on maternal experience in contrast, comes from the feminist, nursing and life span literature, which emphasizes the changes childbirth more generally brings to woman's lives, identities and relationships (Bergum, 1989, 1997; Nicholson, 1998; Oakley, 1979; Parker, 1995; Smith, 1999; Swigart, 1991; Ussher, 1989). Some psychoanalytic thinkers have seen maternity as an integrative phase in women's lives (Domash, 1988; Parker, 1995; ), some linking it more specifically with infant factors (Bibring, Dwyer, Huntington, & Valenstein, 1961; Eagan, 1985; Fraiberg, 1980). Chodorow (1978) asserted that the dynamic process of mothering evokes different stage-specific conflicts in line with the emergence of new conflicts and anxieties in the child, the re-activation of old conflicts impacting the child developmentally. The thrust of most of the women-focused studies however, has not been to anchor women's postpartum experience in the developmental outcome of infancy, nor in the negative aspects of maternity alone, but to take a broader perspective that encompasses the complex and contradictory nature of women's experiences. Accordingly, what is often absent in specific research on women's experiences in the postpartum and early motherhood is an explicit reference to the babies with whom they are in intense relationship.

The emphasis in nursing studies on the postpartum has been to advocate postpartum care which is woman-centred, with attachment theories criticized in this discourse for providing prescriptive agenda for women (Bergum, 1997; Crouch & Manderson, 1995). Reviews of the research on the transition to motherhood (Entwisle & Doering, 1981; Ussher, 1989; Scott & Niven, 1996) indicate that it has largely followed prescriptive or normative paths, stressing the pathological, and has focused on women's 'maladaptation' to mothering. Numerous studies have traced the impact of maternal failure on infant development (Belsky et al., 1984; Crockenberg & Smith, 1982), including the deleterious effects of maternal depression on infants (Guidney; Murray, as cited in Cramer, 1993), but few have focused on the way in which mothers themselves are influenced by their babies (Cramer, 1993). Only recently have studies begun to
focus on the experience of the transition to motherhood for women not suffering major emotional difficulties (Bergum, 1989, 1997; Green & Kafetsios, 1997). Antonucci and Mikus (1988) focused on personality and attitude changes associated with becoming a parent. The transition to motherhood by these accounts, is seen as representing an important transition entailing a number of psychological, social and biological changes in women themselves (Bergum, 1989; Smith, 1999).

While a review of the literature on postnatal "depression" is beyond the scope of this study, this construct has been re-framed by some researchers (Elliot, as cited in Lewis & Nicolson, 1998; Nicholson, 1998; Oakley, 1980) as a normal response along a continuum of responses to the pressing needs of a dependent infant. As such, it is seen as representing both a realistic response to the tasks surrounding motherhood and a necessary stage in the transition. Two recent developmental studies support the view of infant factors triggering specific responses in parents in the vulnerable postpartum period:

Cramer (1993) used epidemiological data, the clinical description of a typical case of postpartum depression and results of a larger study of outcomes in mother-infant psychotherapy to validate his hypothesis that most postpartum depressions are best understood as relational disturbances, induced by the psychological tasks imposed by the baby which in turn affect the mother-baby exchanges, while not necessarily invading all sectors of the parents' psychological functioning. He noted that little attention has been paid to birth as a life event which potentially precipitates psychic disequilibrium and found that the nature of many of the stressors related to events following the birth could be traced to the mother-infant relationship. The main clinical and research evidence drawn upon in his study includes: (a) the finding that maternal depression is often rapidly lifted when psychotherapy is aimed at the mother-infant relationship, and (b) the concentrated incidence of depression in the first few months immediately after the birth, as found in the studies by Cooper, Murray, and Stein; and Campbell, Cohn, Flanagan, Popper, and Meyer (as cited in Cramer, 1993), both of which designate this as a time of specific vulnerability.

In comparing a group of infants between the ages of 1 and 6 months, referred for treatment with their mothers because of persistent crying with an aged-matched community based sample with no crying problem, Papousek and von Hofacker (1998) found high levels of infant distress for extended periods of time, difficulties of sleep-wake regulation, neuromotor immaturity and difficult temperament in the referred group, along with high rates of prenatal stress, and high scores on depression, anxiety, exhaustion, anger, adverse childhood memories and marital distress in the mothers of extreme criers. They also found that mother-infant
relationships were more often distressed or disturbed among referred dyads than among controls and suggested that "factors related to parental care did not cause persistent crying, but functioned as maintaining or exacerbating factors" (p. 396, italics added). Persistent crying in the first three months was characterized as "a potentially benign condition linked to normal adaptational and maturational processes," while the syndrome of persistent crying, in contrast, was defined as "a mixed bag including infants with temperamental difficulty or CNS vulnerability on one side and families with compromised parental functioning on the other" (p. 419). Papousek and von Hofacker concluded that persistent crying itself may present a risk factor both for the developing parent-infant relationships and infant mental health "due to its psychophysiological impact on the mother and the family during a vulnerable period of postpartum adaptation" (p. 419-420).

Concerned with the pathologizing of women's negative responses to mothering, Lewis and Nicolson (1998) combined the data from two studies, one involving repeated in-depth interviews with 24 women over the transition to motherhood from pregnancy to the sixth postnatal month; the other involving interviews with 12 mothers about reflections on their experiences of being mothers, to demonstrate that "women experience and socially construct the tension between motherhood and its contingent problems in the pre-defined context of 'depression' as a clinical disorder, while they themselves experience depression as a 'normal' part of their daily lives" (p. 177). The analysis of the data from both studies, using a grounded theory methodology, revealed that becoming and being a mother was experienced as a series of losses, which the respondents frequently perceived as an "individual pathological reaction," based on the contemporary discourse of motherhood as 'joyous.' The women used the term 'depression' to describe their negative experience retrospectively, only to identify them later as part of an ongoing process of loss and change. While motherhood was seen as involving the emergence of new identities, it was also experienced as entailing a loss of autonomy, identity and independence by many of the participants, although this was not typically considered while one was going through the process. The women in both studies distanced their own experience of negative feelings from the clinical construct in perceiving their own situations as 'not serious enough.' Lewis and Nicolson conceptualized motherhood as a complex process of change, with both positive and negative components and suggested the need for a reconstruction of postnatal depression based on subjective experience which would normalize the experiences that women who identify themselves as depressed endure as part of their daily lives. They concluded that "it is not so much the case that an individual woman may be identified as depressed or not
depressed but that certain aspects of experiences of motherhood may be identified as depressing” (p. 194).

**Mothering as a Developmental Opportunity**

Pregnancy and early mothering has been identified in a number of studies as a normal period of crisis, a turning point in the life of the individual, having either a disorganizing effect or presenting a developmental opportunity (Bibring et al., 1961; Domash, 1988; Osofsky & Osofsky, 1984). Antonucci and Mikus (1988) described it as a time for either regression or an opportunity to grow. In following 15 first time pregnant women over the course of their pregnancy into the first postpartum year, with special attention given to the degree of psychological adjustment, Bibring et al. found that during pregnancy and for a period postpartum, mothers underwent rapid psychological re-organization and change, including a loosening of defenses as compared with other developmental periods. They found that the crisis specific to being pregnant continued on after the delivery, with maturation evolving gradually in accordance with the infant’s development and in line with the growth of the family as a social unit. Individual adjustment and conflict resolution were seen to be correlated with maternal personality factors within the context of the particular family constellation and maternity was characterized as a time when earlier psychological conflicts are revisited, “requiring new and different solutions” (p. 12).

Using both analytic material gathered from analysands in psychoanalysis and her observations of parenting, Benedek (1959, 1970) postulated that women recapitulate their own infancy in motherhood, the growing child’s entry into each new developmental phase posing an adaptive task to the parent and potentially facilitating a mother’s own development. But while infancy was characterized as one of the critical developmental phases, Benedek (1970) did not specify transition points within that early phase. Her work led her to suggest that the reciprocal interaction between mother and infant gave rise to structural change in each, the infant’s frustration mobilizing the mother’s ambivalence, which, she asserted, “interferes with those integrative processes which make motherhood a phase of normal development” (1959, p. 397).

Grounding her work in focused interviews with women about their experience of being mothers and in her clinical work with adults in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, Parker (1995), by contrast, explored the experience of having both loving and hating (contradictory) feelings that exist side by side for one’s child, her thesis being that women, as they progress in motherhood, go through similar developmental change alongside their children. She explored ambivalence
from the perspective of varying maternal states evoked by different needs and desires in the mother, e.g. intimacy, separation, and power in the demanding face of child-care. Rather than seeing ambivalence as something that needs to be phased out, she found that it is the conflict per se—"the troubling co-existence of love and hate" that "spurs mothers on to struggle to understand ... what goes on between herself and her child" (p. 7). At the same time, she found that the pain of ambivalence could also lead to a desire not to know, the outcome determined by one’s capacity to engage with and think about emotional experiences. For some women, she noted, the conflict evoked by motherhood was experienced as unbearable, with the spectrum of ambivalence ranging from creative to destructive impulses. Parker’s work on ambivalence moves into the realm of defining mothers as “autonomous, changing and developing subjects, rather than as their children’s objects” (p. 9). In distinguishing between manageable and unmanageable ambivalence, her work, along with Nicolson’s (1998) validates the negative aspects of women’s experience in maternity. A parallel is found in Swigart (1991), whose work, grounded in interviews with mothers and in literary works on women’s experience, uncovers the deeper issues underlying the experience of child-rearing. Infant development per se has been less often integrated into studies on women’s experience, although some researchers (Eagan, 1985) have drawn parallels between maternal and infant development.

Taking Mahler, Bergman, and Pine’s (1975) scheme of infant development as a developmental baseline, Eagan (1985) interviewed 58 women of mixed ethnicity and background (aged 15 to 43) from pregnancy up to the ninth postpartum month, and noted parallels in the mother’s development over that period. The first postnatal month, classified as “the fog” was characterized by a collapsing of the women’s personal boundaries “inwards to the womb” that was only seen to gradually re-extended itself (p. 14). Eagan described the mother, like her infant peri-natally, as more concerned with the physical sensations in her own body than with her infant. In the best of situations, she found that the mother’s expressed feelings of love for the baby were transient in that they were not overtly reciprocated, and that the mother’s feeling over-stimulated in the early weeks mirrored the baby’s “autistic” feeling of bombardment with stimuli (p. 41), her own efforts to keep stimulation at a minimum resulting in isolation, itself felt as an entrapment. The former contrasts markedly with the findings in the present study, which demonstrated a healthy interactivity from the start. Eagan described the mother in the second month as being “revived” or drawn in by the infant’s smile and focused eye contact, at which point visitors came to be experienced as an intrusion. The third and fourth months were seen as characterized by a state of mutual “undifferentiation,” in which Eagan saw a parallel to the
infant's development in the mother's experience of her baby as still a bodily extension. She described each mother and baby as falling into a rhythm, but that for some mothers this phase was experienced as oppressive, inhibiting the expression of their own individuality. She referred to the fear of losing control in all of her participants, which she understood in terms of the unending needs of a baby assigned solely to the mother. Those more isolated participants started to see themselves as the sole frame of reference for their infant's emerging sense of self and began to seek out meeting their own emotional needs through the child. During the fifth month, a number of developments within the baby were seen to force the mother's attention back onto herself, instigating the process of regaining her own identity, which was seen as a major task of the second half of first year. The infants' exploration however, often induced feelings of restlessness in the mothers. At this time the women's husbands returned to their minds as partners, which Eagan attributed to the pull of the spouse. Scheduling and structure become important, the breakdown of which was experienced as an intrusion. The sixth and seventh months were described as a "coming back to me." Eagan noted a marked increase in the infants' physical activity and an accompanying waning of interest in the breast. The majority of participants, by this time, were seeking something else outside of the relationship or feeling the need to reestablish prior roles and participants who insisted that they wanted nothing more than the relationship with the baby by this point were an exception. Here, the baby was considered more separate. By the ninth month, termed, "together again" the baby's emerging sense of independence was welcomed by some, but felt as a threat by others. Routines were well established and the women regained their ability to analyze. Eagan concluded that new challenges and conflicts that arise with growth disrupt the equilibrium again and again through development. The significance of this study lies in its drawing a parallel between maternal and infant development as it changes over time and pinpointing specific points of challenge.

More interested in studying differences between social classes and the influence of the marital relationship on maternal experiences, Boulton (1983) explored the social experience of 50 mothers of preschoolers in London to obtain detail descriptions of their experience as mothers and found that women found both pleasure and irritation and frustration in the day to day care of their children. She also found that their children provided them with a sense of purpose, which give their lives meaning and made them feel intrinsically valued and needed. Boulton found that the constant presence of children intruded into a mother's own personal space, disrupting her sense of continuity and cohesion. On the basis of her findings, she concluded, "It is largely society which shapes a woman's relationship with her children and influences her experience as
a mother” (p. 16). While this focus limits the scope of the study, an important finding was that mothers who had another adult living with them, especially a grandmother, in contrast to those who reared their children in isolation, tended to be warmer toward their children and more stable emotionally. This was supported cross culturally. In addition, the active participation of fathers in childcare was found to mitigate some of the mothers’ experienced frustration and irritation. The study is cited here mainly for its import in trail blazing mothers’ subjective experience. Reece (1993) examined social support and the early maternal experience in 91 first-time mothers over the age of 35, using the Social Support Questionnaire and other parenting support measures in the last trimester of pregnancy and the first month postpartum and found that social support from spouses and family was associated with both positive self-evaluation in mothering and lower stress postpartum. Both of these studies provide evidence of the ameliorating effect of a containing third party on the mother’s own containing function.

A number of studies have sought to move away from studying maternal experience in role terms, where women are evaluated in terms of their success or failure on care-taking tasks and have focused on women’s self experience that is not child-focused. Siddell (1998) revised traditional conceptualizations of maternal identity and re-framed it as a form of self-definition within a matrix of relationships. Barlow and Cairns (1997) interviewed 11 mothers (aged 27-40 years) who had one or more children under 12 years and developed a grounded theory, representing the processes of mothering by examining the ongoing psychological processes women experience as they proceed through this period. In their study, attention was directed to the psychological impact on women of being mothers rather than the influence of maternal care on infant development. “Expansion of self” was identified as a core theme describing the women’s personal growth processes as they attempted to come to terms with the question, “how will I mother?” Two linear dimensions emerged as sub-categories: “engagement,” pertaining to the first year of mothering and “immersion” (from the first to twelfth year) and predominant psychological processes associated with each dimension were identified. Engagement was defined by the presence of four psychological processes: establishing the intention to mother; encountering the ghosts of mothering received; committing to new life circumstances and engaging in the process of self-socialization, which was characterized by an active striving to adapt to the mothering role. While this study does not detail psychological shifts within the first year, it does document more global shifts and suggests that women’s experience of mothering involves a continuous process of personal re-evaluation, providing opportunities for psychological growth and change, with counseling implications derived.
Adopting a phenomenological methodology, Zimmer (1990) interviewed 10 women of preschoolers (aged 2 to 5 years) about their experiences of nurturing and found the commonly held view of nurturing to be somewhat at odds with the women’s own experience. The study revealed that nurturing was experienced as having both pleasant and unpleasant aspects, involving intense emotional, sensual and physical experiences, with participants often feeling ambivalent in their nurturing, while nevertheless drawn to the experience. The women also identified the necessity of self-nurturing and of dealing with conflict. Two distinct themes, “engagement” and “meeting the self” emerged from the narratives, the former entailing being fully involved with the child, attracted to and held by the power of the relationship. Some of the sub-themes included: the mother being caught up in the mother-child space, intersected by the presence of mother and child, and at times, involving a blurring of boundaries; the experience of living so completely in the moment that the women were able to experience what the child needed; and “being” for the child, which addressed the mother’s “being available” to the child. “Meeting the self” entailed the mother’s self-nurturing in order to sustain her inner resources. One of the co-researchers described it as “a sense of holding and being held: It’s like being held by the tub, and the warm water, holding my baby, and her being held” (p. 64). It also entailed a sense of success in having made a connection with the child that was experienced as helpful, and feelings of displeasure in nurturing, which included the feeling of ambivalence in being so close and so connected with one’s child (although not all co-researchers in the study identified the latter). In cases where a participant did not feel adequately nurtured by her own mother, there was a stronger sense of ambivalence in nurturing her own child and the painful realization of separation created mixed feelings about being truly intimate with the child. For the most part, the women’s experience was described as pleasurable. While this study did not explore women’s experience of nurturing in early infancy, it highlighted some of the issues pertinent to women’s experience of holding a child in mind.

In a heuristic study of 11 first-time mid-life mothers that dealt with the unexpected aspects of being a mother, Smith-Pierce (1994) uncovered the following themes: the enormity of the felt responsibility for human life; the unexpected depth of love and attention for the child; an awakened sense of one’s own mortality and aging; a feeling of conflict between work and child-rearing, including a shift in priorities from work to child; a preference for the child’s gender; diminished interest in sex after childbirth and a shift in the focus of friendships onto people with children. She found that older mothers (over 35 years), unlike first time mothers, felt equally comfortable with closeness and autonomy/separation, and were more likely to nurture
themselves as well as their children, based on their awareness of the importance of not losing themselves in the maternal process. Smith-Pierce concluded that "one of the most difficult aspects of motherhood for mothers of all ages is the balancing of personal needs for space and a sense of self with the emotional demands of an infant or young child" (p. 104).

Focusing on identity and the process of change in maternity, Smith (1999) used an interpretive phenomenological approach to develop a theoretical model of how aspects of a woman’s sense of identity can be transformed during the transition to motherhood. He grounded his model in the detailed case-studies of four women, whose experiences of going through the transition, as captured in interview transcripts, diaries and repertory grids gathered over a period from early pregnancy to some time after the birth, were analyzed. The outcome was a "processual model" of the transition, with key components attending to the women’s evolving perception of their social roles. Smith observed that during pregnancy the women’s focus turned from the public world of work to the more local world of family and friends in a way that contributed to a transformation of their subsequent life plans. The changing view of work during pregnancy, along with the turning toward key others were thought to effect a long-term shift in the women’s perception and priorities. As such, pregnancy was considered to act as a psychological preparation for mothering, involving both a turning inward and a linking with significant others. Both of these factors were seen as instrumental in effecting change in the perception of self in relationship to others. The shifting nature of women’s internal and external relationships were explored in detail in the present study.

In an effort to understand how childbirth transforms woman’s lives, Bergum (1989) explored the lives of six women, with whom she engaged in a series of unstructured conversational interviews about their experience of becoming mothers from mid-pregnancy to some months following the birth. Her book is a recounting of her doctoral dissertation study undertaken three years prior and is also based on Bergum’s more informal conversations with women, some with a very specific focus. In adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, her original study explored how pregnant, childbearing, and mothering women experienced their lived worlds in the transition to motherhood. From these documented ‘conversations’ she constructed a life story for each woman, each containing a fundamental theme of the transformative experience. Using the women’s ‘stories’ as primary data, themes or ‘transformative moments’ in the women’s experience were uncovered, which included the nature of the decision to have child; the carrying and experienced presence of child; the pain of birthing and the attendant separation of mother and child as offering the possibility of integration for
both and the appropriation of responsibility for oneself and the world as one accepts the presence of the child; and the mind-ful-ness to the child that occurs with a child in one’s life. Insights were also gleaned from the larger transcripts, literature, commonly used phrases, etymology and personal experience. Bergum’s research revealed that the shift to mothering is very much tied up with the rhythm of women’s bodies, that in accepting a child into one’s life, women are compelled “to face the world in a new way and to take responsibility for it” (p. 48); that “being with child” is a primordial relationship “peculiar to women who carry within their own bodies the body of another” (p. 53). She reflected on the transformative experience of birthing pain and its role in drawing a mother into the cycle of human life, birth, death, and rebirth, as revealed in the women’s talk. She found that the terror of responsibility led the women to face their own mortality and that to “have a child on one’s mind” forced the issue of how one should live one’s life. Bergum’s thesis is that women’s transformation to mother is central to the development of a philosophy of birth and that women are changed by the experience. She found that the way a woman approaches childbirth affects how she comes to understand herself. Having a child on one’s mind was not seen merely in terms of taking on a role, but as a way of being which becoming a mother entails. Her study detailed the growth-promoting aspects of being a mother.

In 1997, Bergum extended her inquiry into the experience of becoming a mother to include that of the adoptive mother, single teen or of a woman placing her child for adoption, through engaging in further “talk” with women, prompted by the questions: what does mothering do to women? How does one live in the mothering experience? The focus of this research was on discovering what women as mothers could be. While Ruddick (1989) characterized mothering as a functional task prompting maternal thinking, Bergum (1997) conceptualized it as a body/mind experience that is distinct from fathering and is very much gender related and rooted in bodily experience irrespective of whether or not a mother has actually ‘given birth.’ Becoming a mother was seen as a move from one mode of living to another, as triggering feelings of dependence and vulnerability, prompting a re-learning. Bergum honed in more in this research on the evolution of moral responsibility to which having a child on one’s mind gives rise, as linked to what she calls the “moral move from self to other” (p. 23). She considered that relational commitment is ‘learned’ through mothering, which subsequently enlarges life. Bergum’s focus is grounded in bodily experience, the woman’s body seen as the place of the first human encounter, the expanding body of the woman together with the developing fetus creating the space for the baby, such that, by the end of pregnancy a women feels that her body is no longer her own. In focusing on the lived reality of mothering, becoming a mother is seen as “a
mindful (mind-expanding) as well as bodily experience” (p. 165) which is by its very nature, relational. Bergum did not break down the experience of becoming a mother into different phases in either of these accounts; nor did she focus on the infant’s direct evocative impact, but her rich account of the women’s experiences uncovered a number of themes that were confirmed and expanded in the present study.

Wynn’s (1996) phenomenological dissertation on holding and being held in the early mother-infant relationship is similarly rooted in bodily experiences, although hers clearly re-incorporates the infant’s experience into the discourse. Wynn’s phenomenological descriptions characterize the mother-infant relationship as not passive on one side, but as mutually reciprocated and deeply “inter-corporeal,” having its origins in pregnancy, with each partner actively “flexing” and “bending” toward the other. The newborn is described as an active co-participant in this early relationship, intertwined bodily with his mother and the world and the bodily structures are seen as gradually becoming differentiated through this intertwining. She describes mothering as essentially entailing “devoted holding.” The infant, in turn is seen as initiating a further deepening of his mother’s perceptions, skills, thinking and sociality. “The articulation of the lived body of both,” according to Wynn (1997) in a later paper, “arises from the ongoing overlapping and sedimenting of past and current touches, movements, sounds and sightings” (p. 253). Wynn re-conceptualizes Winnicott’s ‘holding relationship’ phenomenologically as a “chiasmic” one in which both partners are seen as simultaneously holding and being held. Her study argues against the common stance that marks birth as the beginning of inter-corporeality and maintains that it is during pregnancy that both mother-to-be and her pre-infant are deepened and modified through their intertwining. Wynn describes both partners as “being taken to the limits of themselves through these early reciprocated experiences” (p. 253). The relationship is seen as an ongoing embodied one, the infant’s holding seen as originating in his experience in the womb, while the mother is seen as bringing to the relationship a whole history of being held. The result is a circling interchange. From her fieldwork, which entailed visiting four mothers of newborns, Wynn (1997) gives an example of an embodied relationship involving a chiasmic bending toward of both mother and infant during nursing and a drawing back of the infant from the breast into sleep, through which the mother felt deepened. Her research provides a phenomenological description of mutual influence at the

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1 A chiasmic relationship is one “in which its members are related to one another ... ‘by means of bending themselves to each other.’ Both sides of a chiasm bend toward each other” (Mallin, as cited in Wynn, 1997, p. 256).
level of corporeal interchange. It does not document shifts in the experience of holding over an extended period.

While these qualitative studies on the maternal experience highlight some of the salient aspects of the maternal containing process for women, they do not (with the exception of Wynn’s, 1996) look at the mutually impactful nature of the relational interchange, nor at shifts in maternal experience as the infant progresses developmentally. In contrast to the focus on the observed impact of maternal containing on infant development in the developmental studies cited above, the present study explores what it is like to contain an infant’s state of mind over this period of rapid developmental growth. The study’s intent was to expand the current view of mutual impact by incorporating into its definition the essence of what it is like to be emotionally available to an infant and how this changes developmentally. The developmental research has largely omitted an account of the maternal experience of containing an infant’s state of mind, while the maternal research has not generally integrated impacting infant factors into its conceptual framework. In honing in on both maternal and infantile experiences in the holding relationship, noting points of developmental convergence, I have attempted to redress this imbalance and bridge this gap in the literature.

The aim of the present study was to explore qualitative shifts in the experience of holding and being held in mind in mothers and infants over the first nine months following the birth. Firstly, it sought to obtain a phenomenological description of the essence of the maternal experience of holding an infant in mind in the context of the experienced evocative impact of the infant’s state of mind on the mother as this was seen to change, and to uncover the meaning of that experience in women’s lives. Secondly, it sought to delineate shifts in the infant’s developmental experience of being in a holding relationship as revealed in his/her interaction with the mother, and to document where their developmental paths crossed. It involved a qualitative tracking of the experience of the containing process using a spatial construct as a guiding metaphor. Certain aspects of infant development were taken as a baseline, as will be delineated in the following section, which outlines the conceptual framework employed.

**Conceptual Framework and Definition of Terms**

The model of mutual impact on which I draw, is based on the concept, “container-contained” that originated in the psychoanalytic work of Bion (1959, 1962a, 1962b). The term “containing” as used here, refers to the process through which a maternal care-giver is able to get in touch with and tolerate her baby’s intense emotional states as they impact on her, and through
her attention and support, facilitate the baby's mental and emotional growth. It is a model in which the mother's mind is thought to act for some time as a 'container' of the baby's more vulnerable psychological state, her containing function essentially a mental/emotional capacity. According to Bion's model (as cited in Britton, 1992), what the baby needs in order to feel integrated is a sense of safety (related to an idea of being inside something trustworthy), "a sense of being held" (Winnicott 1960a), which may also be thought of as a sense of being physically enveloped in a protective skin (Bick, 1968). In addition, the baby seeks meaning, the thinking of an understanding other, in order to provide coherence to his/her inner experience (Bion, 1962b; Fonagy et al., 1991b). The first is provided by "the container" or the "containing" mother, who provides security in the form of 'holding.' The second, a sense of coherence, is "the contained," the mother's unconscious reflections or "reverie," which give meaning to experience, rendering it tolerable to the baby (Bion, 1962b). In the course of development, this repeated experience of being held together and the concomitant experience of being 'held in the mind of an other' becomes the prototype through which the infant can grasp a sense of a 'mental space' within.¹

From an object-relational perspective, the infant is seen as "undergoing constantly changing psychosomatic states, which continually affect his (or her) sense of being more-or-less gathered together/more-or-less fragmented" (Miller et al., 1989, p. 30) and the capacity to attend to the surrounding world. Through her clinical work and observation of young children, Klein (1946, 1955/1975) considered primitive organization an integral and inherent aspect of development from the beginning of life; one that evolves over the course of the first year in its mode of organizing experience, as characterized by specific forms of defense, qualities of anxiety, degrees of subjectivity and forms of relatedness. Her clinical investigations into the mental states of infancy and childhood gave rise to an intensely relational view of the origins of the self, which delineates the way in which the baby depends on the mother not only for his/her physical well being and sense of emotional comfort, but also for the development of his/her sense of identity and mental functions. She saw the infant’s transient fragmented, diffused and often violent states of mind and feelings as gradually becoming integrated through an intimate engagement with a primary mothering figure. This model conceptualizes development not in terms of chronological phases, but in terms of recurring constellations of feelings, involving a transition from states dominated by persecutory, split-off and projected intolerable aspects of

¹ For Winnicott (1960b), this refers to the "psyche indwelling in the soma" (p. 45).
experience to the recognition of the vulnerability of (and concern for) the loved other, and a state of mind where the capacity to bear pain and loss within the self is potentially possible. The process entails continually refining subjective constructions of the ‘other’ in the internal world through a process of confirming or disconfirming unconscious phantasies through intimate interaction. In this study, I have taken as a baseline, Klein’s noted observations of anxiety constellations at 3 to 4 months, and 6 months as potential transition markers with a view to deciphering their evocative impact on mothers.

Bion’s (1959, 1962b, 1965) account drew the mothering figure more vividly into the developmental picture by posing a link between aspects of the mother’s internal world and the baby’s. Beyond her role in nurturing and protecting her infant, he included the mother’s own projections of her internalized object relational system into her infant (Muir, 1992). While the Kleinian view conceptualized the maternal function as primarily one of modulating mental pain, Bion (1970) emphasized confusion and its resolution, along with tolerance of extreme disorder as a means to discover new orders of truth. Bion’s developmental model is concerned not just with psychological defences against anxiety, but with the internal sabotaging of the processes of thinking itself and his view of the world may be conceptualized as “one of the questing mind seeking the absolute truth with inadequate equipment” (Meltzer, 1978, p. 116). In considering ‘Truth’ as having primacy over love in the unconscious mind, Bion focused less on the ongoing internal struggle of coming to terms with dependency and loss, but more on the surmounting of dis-integration and catastrophe. The developmental positions, as espoused by Klein (1940, 1946) and used as a baseline in this study, may be understood in this context, as filters that help mediate pain and terror by rescuing the infant from chaos (Grotstein, 1996), the reflective parent serving for a time as the essential emotional/mental scaffold.

The infant, as described in the psychoanalytic (Object Relational) literature is both competent and dependent and the developmental task construed as dealing with various degrees of ‘absence’ and loss, the subjective meaning of which shifts in the course of development. The ‘capacity to be alone’ is only considered possible after the child has had the opportunity, through the experience of being alone in the (m)other’s presence to build up a belief in a benign environment (Winnicott, 1958) and it is the dependency (secure base) internalized that is thought to free the infant to venture outward beyond the world of the mother. Only gradually is the infant

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1 Collectively referred to by Klein (1946) as the “paranoid-schizoid position” and thought to dominate the psychic life of the infant up to 4 months.

2 Termed collectively, the “depressive position” and thought to first emerge in the infant somewhere between the fourth and sixth month (Klein, 1940).
able to deal with the fact of his own separateness from his primary source of dependence. It is the maternal capacity to stay in touch with the baby’s pain and thoughtfully reflect it back that is thought to bring the baby into contact with the human capacity for bearing pain through thinking. This process is based on the infant’s inherent capacity to communicate his or her own internal state to the mother and to evoke similar experiences in her. This model of infant development is taken as a point of departure, and the overall framework of mutual impact used as a conceptual tool in the interpretive analysis.

**The Construct of Internal ‘Space’**

While the ‘container’ concept invites a spatial metaphor, Bion himself did not seem to link it with the concept of mental space. Given how we are inclined to experience our minds however, I find the concept of inner ‘space’ useful phenomenologically (as did Segal, 1991 and Britton, 1989), in facilitating an understanding of the complexity of the dynamic interchange between a mother and baby, whereby mutual projections for example, may be seen as being batted back and forth on the intrapsychic plane, as entering and exiting a revolving door, the extent and speed of which may be controlled by either member of the dyad. It also provides us with a fairly concrete construct with which to explore a mother’s experience of ‘holding her baby in mind.’ People talk and think in ways that indicate their having a concept of inner space that is differentiated from external space. I have found that it is something that women in particular, who tend to experience enclosure in their relationships, can usually relate to. It is especially ripe for a mother who has physically carried her baby inside, but is not confined to having had that experience.

The ‘space’ container of the mind concept employed in this study is not the space between mother and baby, but an internal mental or psychic space which has the capacity to bear intense emotion and find meaning in the baby’s evocations through a process of reflection. It evolves in the baby from a taking in of the (m)other’s capacity to make meaning in this way. In that respect, it is more apt, as Bion (1962b) had suggested, to think of it as an active container that holds onto anxiety through thinking, rather than a bounded space. While I am differentiating the space between from the space within, one can conceivably be incorporated into the other, in that the capacity to gradually allow the baby more physical space over the course of the first year may be seen as a manifestation of a caregiver’s containing function.

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1 He chose to write about the functions of the “container mother.”

2 This refers to Winnicott’s (1971) concept of “potential space,” in which “transitional” phenomena develop and eventually become the cultural space.
The Research Question

This study focuses on the containing process from the perspective of the mother in the context of being present to her infant. It is guided by the following research question which is twofold: What is the essence of the maternal experience of holding an infant in mind and how is this seen to change across four transition points in the first nine months? What is the infant’s experience of being so held at each juncture? The former is defined in terms of the mother’s experience of containing her infant’s state of mind across developmental transitions in infancy and includes her experience of inner space as it is felt to change in terms of her baby’s location in it. The latter is defined in terms of the infant’s experience of being in a specific holding relationship, as inferred from his behaviour in the interactions. It includes observations of how the baby directs and responds to the various issues that arise in interaction with his mother and how they together negotiate developmental changes. The focus is on the experience of being in a holding relationship, and not the observed developmental outcome. Chapter two outlines the broad methodological framework and delineates the specific method employed.
Chapter Two: Methodology

“*You who take the moon in a sieve, and sift
Her flake by flake, and spread her meaning out;*”

*D. H. Lawrence*

**Outline**

In this chapter the individual strands of the research design are discussed and situated within the broader methodological framework to provide a rationale for the method employed. This is discussed under Methods of Preparation. It includes a background to the method and is followed by an outline of the specific procedures of data generation, organization and analysis. Generating the data was not as separate a stage as is generally the case in experimental research, but entailed an evolving process of continually trying to come closer to the best way of capturing the experience that was constantly revised. The later interpretive work was also in actuality, more interwoven than the following discussion may imply.

**Methods of Preparation**

**Orientation**

I approached this study with a specific view on how we make meaning of our lives and its origin in the earliest relationship of the baby with a thinking (m)other. Rooted in an object relational perspective, which views human nature as essentially revolving around the construction of subjective internal worlds through relationship, it explores the relationship between reality--actual relations with others--and internal representations of relationships as developed over time, and is consistent with the phenomenological view that we are always acting upon or being acted upon.

In focusing on the maternal experience of ‘containing’ an infant’s state of mind through an exploration of shifts in the experience of ‘internal space’ over this intense period in development, my intent was to flesh out the theory and create a picture less from the perspective of the ‘expert’ but more from the heart of those going through the process. The theory provided a lens through which to explore developmental shifts in the experience of holding and being held in mind. The quest was less a search after objective truth in the empirical sense, but an exploration of internal or subjective truth that emerges out of and weaves its way into relationship. The general method of inquiry adopted was qualitative, the specific methodology, hermeneutic phenomenological.
**Epistemological Roots**

With the infiltration of the Cartesian rational deductive method into the philosophy of science, the experimental method became the methodological ideal and ‘detached’ observation and objectivity, the order of the day in reaching after the ideal of unbiased knowledge. Subsequently, the controlling mechanistic metaphor for logical empiricist inquiry came to encompass diverse psychological approaches, ranging from radical Behaviourism to computer simulation and information processing models of learning.¹ In this tradition, contradictions were eschewed and the dialectics of language, subjectivity and interpretation deemed unnecessary, if not a hindrance to achieving ‘objective’ knowledge. The emphasis on unilateral relations between researcher and researched was not considered ethically problematic until the 1960’s.

**Phenomenology**

Emerging as a reaction to an investigative science that failed to take into account the experiencing person and the connections between human consciousness and that which exists in the material world, Husserl’s (1931, 1965) phenomenology claimed to seek a different kind of knowledge than one apprehended through distancing oneself from the object of study. In emphasizing subjectivity and the uncovering of the essences of experience, it provided a systematic and disciplined method for deriving knowledge that entailed intuitively becoming one with the subject through identification (Harmon, 1991). By bringing the person into focus as the necessary source for explicating experience and deriving meaning, this method adhered to what could be derived through reflection. It entailed a process through which the stream of consciousness could be grasped and analyzed in the light of its own evidence, rendering explicit the universal presupposition at the core of human life. That which was inwardly experienced was taken as the point of departure, with observations recorded only with reference to the perceiving subject. This merging of objective and subjective thinking harkens back to the Cartesian belief that the only root to absolute doubtless knowledge lies in the self as a thinking/perceiving subject, with all scientific knowledge resting on inner evidence. As such, phenomenology alone, in focusing on perception rather than interpretation, had its limitations as a method of exploring the present phenomenon.

¹ See Newell and Simon (1961) for an overview.
**Hermeneutic Strand**

Gadamer (1975) outlined a rationale for Hermeneutics,\(^1\) whereby meaning came to be seen as ambiguous, as a challenge, inviting interpretation. The hermeneutic method proceeds within a communication system based on dialogue, wherein not only is the author of text open to scrutiny, but so too, the interpreter. Intersubjectively-shared understandings come to replace publicly shared objective knowledge, the interpreter's preconceptions and prejudices entering the picture on a similar footing to that of the subject, i.e., the investigator is brought into the circle of interpretation, with all the attendant ramifications.

From a hermeneutic perspective, the metaphor for reflection is personal, the process dialogical.\(^2\) A 'rigorous' human science, in contrast to the rigours of quantitative science, according to van Manen (1990), must be prepared to be "soft," "soulful," "subtle," and "sensitive" in order to bring the range of meanings of life's phenomena to our reflective awareness. One reaches understanding as the interpreter’s own prejudices are brought to consciousness through the process of attending to the text: "What I see is woven with how I see it" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59, italics added). The interpretative process is dialectic in that it involves both observing the text and logically and critically examining its otherness. In the hermeneutic circle pre-judgments are corrected in the light of what emerges through reflective understanding.

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology comprises complementary philosophical traditions that together, go beyond the processes of description and reflection in seeking to determine underlying structures through a process of interpreting originally given descriptions of experience (Giorgi, Knowles, & Smith, 1979). Whereas phenomenology offers a way of understanding the essential nature of a phenomenon by focusing on subjective perception, hermeneutics provides a means to focus on the intersubjective through interpretation. Both have been retrieved as valuable approaches to understanding thoughts, feelings and behaviours from within, rather than from an external reference point (van Manen 1990). Moustakas (1994) considered reflective interpretation as integral to the achievement of “a fuller, more meaningful understanding” (p. 10) and asserted further, that the correlation of “outer and inner experiences and meanings is infinite, endless, eternal” (p. 65).

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\(^1\) Hermeneutics was originally based on scholarship into the study of meaning of texts, arrived at via a circular dialectical process called the "hermeneutical circle" (See Gadamer, "Truth and Method," 1975).

\(^2\) Refers to a back and forth movement between interpreter and text in the process of uncovering meaning.
Within the realm of human science, there is some justification for questioning the premise of a philosophical tradition—the phenomenology strand—that employs subjectivity as a means to obtain universal or ‘absolute’ knowledge. In fact, it might even be considered as reductive as the very method it claimed to supersede. In adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, I set out not to elucidate absolute unbiased knowledge, but to undertake a hermeneutic unveiling of levels of experience down to their experiential and pre-reflective (structural) roots, as conceived through extensive reflection and interpretation, and contextualized primarily in the language and structures of psychoanalysis, itself grounded in human experience, though admittedly never fully within our consensual grasp.

We remain satisfied at different times with various levels of truth and sometimes go out of our way to conceal the truth of our very existence (Bion, 1970). The task of hermeneutic phenomenological research, according to van Manen (1984), is to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a specific human experience. It is a philosophy of the personal that respects the uniqueness of subjective perception, interpreted against an intersubjective backdrop (van Manen, 1990). The experience of holding a baby in mind is multi-layered and it is its very complexity and inherent ambiguity that I have attempted to penetrate and bring to the fore.

**Psychoanalysis**

Similarly, in the history of psychoanalysis, we see a gradual closing of the space between analyst and analysand and out of this narrowing gap, there emerges a view of the spaces within—the internal world\(^1\)—which continually weaves a personal life script that becomes entangled with the inner worlds of others. This phenomenological fleshing out of theory has been driven in part, by current concerns about technique. Joseph (1990) recognized that effective clinical work is attainable only by addressing the ongoing emotional transactions of the analytic session, the unconscious feeling stirred up in the analyst by the analysand currently considered to be at the heart of the analytic process.

Psychoanalytic history, according to Young (1994), has been fraught with the tension between visual representation on the one hand, and personal, evocative narrative accounts on the other. Freud (1895) himself, who initially strove to make psychology a natural science, always accepted the close kinship between psychoanalysis and literature, presenting his case studies in narrative form. In addition to the mechanistic accounts of human nature, reflective of the

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\(^1\) The concept evolved out of Melanie Klein’s analytic work with children, which demonstrated how the baby constructs an internal world of aspects of self and others, within which unconscious phantasies shape the meaning and emotional significance of experience (See Meltzer, 1978).
positivistic era, we see in Freud, the narrator, who sketched a picture of human life every bit as compelling as that of the world’s great writers. How he actually worked with his patients demonstrates the narrator in him, as opposed to the physiologist working with the brain. Nevertheless, while his case studies are filled out phenomenologically, he remained attached theoretically to a mechanistic approach, his idea of the ‘truth’ continuing to refer to the knowledge of external reality, which may, according to Meltzer (1978), be a consequence of his never having fully conceptualized a ‘space in the mind’ peopled by figures of continuous existence.

Young (1994) contrasted the traditional psychoanalytic approach, represented by an image of a knowing subject on one end of an investigative instrument with the more current phenomenological or dialectical account, in which in the interaction “things get batted back and forth” (p. 62). The relationship between analyst and analysand (mother and infant) is more mutually impactful than was originally acknowledged. Dialectically, according to Young:

_There are many layers and reverberations. I am here and there at once as you are. You are in me. I can expel a part of myself. You can take it in and re-expel it, and I can experience it as you, while, in another part of my mind, knowing where that part came from._ (p. 62)

This implicit paradigm shift in the clinical realm could not have been achieved without psychoanalysts’ willingness to expose themselves to experiences of extreme disturbance and disorientation. In his later work, Bion (1970) gave priority to the process of making sense of chaotic mental and emotional phenomena over reference to ordered theories and models. It is not that the known model is discarded, but pushed somewhat further into the background, as the emphasis in more recent clinical work is on the process of discovering patterns as they emerge in the analytic relationship, and on tolerating, both parties alike, extreme disorder in order to discover meaning. This is in the spirit of what potentially confronts a mother as she ‘sits with’ her baby. Bion’s evolving ideas and understanding of human nature culminated in his view of mental development as the growth of the capacity for thinking about emotional experiences, which are essentially painful and remain beyond our consensual grasp. This could be rendered a postmodern revision of the picture of the fundamental nature of the unconscious (Rustin, 1991). Meanings rather than causes become the central point of reference and phenomenological relatedness the point of entry. According to Young (1994):

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1 In contrast to Freud’s causal explanatory model of the mind, Klein’s is a descriptive geography of phantasy life in which a workspace for generating meaning is found to exist ‘inside’ the mind.
The way we really learn is from the Other’s response to what we convey. We learn by evoking and provoking ... not by imparting but by re-experiencing what we have projected and has then been passed through another human being (though that person may be held in imagination). We learn by putting something out and finding out what comes back. Our relationship with the world is phenomenological ‘I-thou’, not a scientistic ‘I-it.’ It is evocative knowledge. (p. 70)

Husserl (1977) had described the relationship to other in terms of ‘co-presence,’ an awareness that another body co-exists with one’s own. Through what he called “pairing” the other is within the self and the self within the other, that is, there is within the self, a realm of virtually infinite access to others, self perception including, by analogy, perception of the other.

A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach: Overview

Phenomenology, as seen by Heidegger (as cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 12), is a “ministering of thoughtfulness”; a minding, caring attunement; a “heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life.” van Manen (1990) described the hermeneutic phenomenological method more as “a carefully cultivated thoughtfulness than a technique” (p. 131), involving a rigorous exploration of the phenomenon. To explore the nature of “containing” as meaningfully experienced by mothers and infants, called for a kind of layered reflectivity, involving a ‘mindful’ reflection on the mother (and mother and baby unit) as she sat with the task of holding her infant in mind, including her own reflecting on that experience.

Phenomenology attempts to bring to light the nature or essence of a phenomenon, the word originating in “the Greek phaenesthai, to flare up, to show itself, to appear” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). The phenomenological method seeks descriptions, which retain the original texture of a phenomenon, keeping it alive, not explaining it away. It forces a confrontation with one’s inner core (Peshkin and Jansen, 1992) and requires “employment of a self-reflective process that enables the researcher increasingly to know him or herself within the experience being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47). Like the demand made on the infant’s primary caregiver, it is this that the study set out to explore and make provision for. It called for an openness to being emotionally receptive in the presence of the mothering couple to facilitate a taking in of their different states of mind, as proposed by Rustin (1989). In opening myself to the possibility of experiencing the impact of a baby on his or her mother, I became a participant observer.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned both with a sensitive orientation toward experience and the meanings individuals attribute to it (van Manen, 1990). The current focus on the here and now in psychoanalysis does not obliterate the fact that there is an underlying
dimension of mental life which gives form to subjective and phenomenological experience.¹ Human experience is layered, meaning-bound, bottomless. According to Moustakas (1994): “No experience is ever ... exhausted. New and fresh meanings are forever in the world and in us” (p. 65). To engage in hermeneutic phenomenological research, according to van Manen, is “to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal” (p. 18).

The method is explicit in employing specifically practiced modes of questioning, reflecting, focusing and intuiting in an attempt to articulate, through the content and form of text, the structures of meaning embedded in lived experience, and inter-subjective, in requiring an audience to develop a dialogic relation with the phenomenon in order to validate it. The present study is both phenomenological and hermeneutic in that it is both a descriptive look at a specific lived aspect of maternal experience through an exploration of its meaningfulness in the mother’s narrative, and an interpretive study of the expressions and observations of the experience in an attempt to determine the meaning embodied in them.

This method, in uncovering the unspoken, bridges the voiced with the unvoiced. Bergum (1989) had described it as moving from life experience toward thought, a moving forward in explicating meaning. I see it as a transformation of life experience in the thinking about that experience, which potentially impacts the lives of those involved in the project. The methodological objective to create a phenomenological text goes beyond the relaying of information by promoting a wondering about the relation between experience as lived and its underlying meaning (van Manen, 1990). Operating in the tension between particularity and universality, experience and the thinking about that experience, it simultaneously pulls one in and prompts reflectivity (van Manen). Part of the difficulty I encountered in the analysis was representing what is essentially a pre-verbal experience in words that could do it justice. Essences are essentially pre-verbal.

**Research Design**

The first step in the process of gathering data entailed obtaining detailed descriptive accounts of the women’s experience of holding a baby in mind, along with textural descriptive account of the infants’ role in being held. The mother’s talk, as captured in narrative form, provided a window into the maternal experience. Direct observation was the primary means to

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¹ This aspect of psychoanalysis is no less prominent in the writings of the later hermeneutically inclined school of post-Kleinians than it was in Freud’s own work.
obtain insight into the infant’s experience. This data was obtained through successive interviewing of each participant, and through observing each infant-mother dyad across four transition points in the baby’s first nine months. The method combined an exploration of experience as lived with experience as observed, using the researcher as live instrument.

Background to the Development of the Research Instruments

The Interview

The intent of the unstructured, open-ended interview method is to capture how interviewees think, feel about, and make sense of aspects of their experience with the purpose of understanding it and the meaning they attribute to it (Seidman, 1991). I set out to understand in greater depth, shifts in the maternal experience of holding an infant in mind, as it pertains to given developmental changes in the infant that pull for a specific response.

The form of in-depth interviewing that I adopted was informed by the literature on interviewing in qualitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Seidman, 1991), including that of phenomenological and hermeneutic phenomenological interviewing from the works of Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (1984, 1990). The interview format was continuously revised over the course of the study. A list of questions and prompts devised at the outset was used mainly as a guide and was modified according to what was gleaned from each subsequent interview. Both my psychotherapy training and what I had learned from the pilot interviews, undertaken in the preliminary phases of the research, informed and strongly influenced the direction.

While Seidman (1991) had suggested using a series of three open-ended interviews, each with a pre-determined focus, with each interview serving as a building block to the next, the format used here, was designed to elicit the participant’s evocations in the presence of the baby for the purpose of tracking change over time. The hermeneutic phenomenological interview serves as a means to gather descriptive accounts of experience, from which a deeper understanding of a human phenomenon may be derived. Bergum (1989) had used the term “conversation” instead of interview to highlight what took place in her study on the transformation from women to mother. I saw my role more as one of providing the context for thought and reflection. In our dialoging, a forum emerged for the mutual wondering about the participant’s experience of holding a baby in mind and it was often my silence, my holding onto my own thoughts and feelings that enabled the participant to reflect on hers. The means of data generation then, served as an occasion to reflect with the participant.
The phenomenological interview—informal and essentially non-structured—is disciplined by the researcher’s keeping the interviewee oriented to the phenomenon being explored, by using the implicit research question as a focal point. To stay on track, according to Tesch (1987), one continually asks oneself: “What is the existential question to which this story is an answer?” (p. 238), the focus in this study being, the mother’s experience of holding her baby in mind. It included how this evolved in line with the baby’s development and how the women felt impacted by such developmental shifts.

Before each phenomenological interview, the phenomenon is ‘bracketed’, that is, cleared of ordinary thought and witnessed as if seen for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). Not unlike Bion’s (1970) wariness of being clogged by loyalty to theories at the expense of noticing inconvenient new facts, what is doubted in the phenomenological approach is “the knowing of things in advance, from an external base rather than from internal reflection and meaning” (Moustakas, p. 85). This attempt to set aside presuppositions that could potentially bias the direction of the interview entails engaging in the phenomenological process of *Epoche*. From the Greek meaning ‘to abstain,’ entailing a conscious effort to see what is there, rather than what one is inclined to see, it involves openly entering an internal space, ready to embrace what transpires (Moustakas). For Bion, it involved a commitment on the part of the analyst to open oneself fully to journey with the other. For Rustin (1989), speaking to the task of psychoanalytic infant-mother observation, it required one to “have in mind a range of conceptions and latent expectations, by which coherence and shape (could) be given to the experience, hand in hand with an open-mindedness and receptivity to the particular dyadic relationship” (p. 57). Inclining one toward receptivity, it requires one to stay in the moment, to focus and concentrate, leaving the researcher open to hear what is being said. The aim is not to take a position, but to actively search, while at the same time, remaining open to what might emerge. The researcher must be ready to examine her own reactions and needs in the face of engaging with the data, from the collection through to analysis stage. At times, I found it quite a challenge to sustain this position.

Participants are invited at the beginning, to take some time to focus on moments of particular impact of a specific experience before describing it more extensively (Moustakas, 1994). A broad opening statement is given, which hones in on the phenomenon, while encouraging extensive thinking. Questions are asked spontaneously throughout the interview, both for clarification and elaboration purposes and the interview guide set aside as the participant spontaneously shares his or her experience of the phenomenon in a rounded way. The bracketed
subject for contemplation in this study pertained to the experience of ‘holding an infant in mind,’ including the women’s shifting experience of ‘internal space’ and their baby’s location in it.

**Mother-Infant Observation**

The purpose of creating the space for a brief uninterrupted interaction between mother and infant during each meeting was twofold: 1) to obtain a descriptive account of moments of impact in the relationship and the baby’s role in it; and 2) to provide a concrete point of reference for the women’s reflectivity. The method of observation that I devised combined aspects drawn from three sources: 1) a micro-analytic interview technique devised by Bennett, Lefcourt, Haft, Nachman and Stern (1994); 2) a non-directive form of parent-infant psychotherapy (Johnson, Dowling, & Wesner, 1980; Muir, 1992); and 3) the psychoanalytic infant observation method developed by Bick (1964) for child psychotherapy training at the Tavistock Clinic, England, all of which are outlined below:

1) Using a micro-analytic interview technique, attempts have been made to understand subjective experiences of parents as they emerge, through a scrutiny of the in-the-moment process of activation of a representation (Bennett et al., 1994). The technique is based on a seminal idea from the work of Fraiberg (1980) and Fraiberg, Adelson and Shapiro (1975) which espouses that the baby’s actual presence elicits parental memories and associations that trigger thoughts and feelings that would not otherwise emerge in more traditional retrospective recounting. Through a series of probes, the interviewer repeatedly guides the mother between her concrete observations of a segment of her child’s behaviour and the subjective responses it evokes in her, with the objective of accessing her inner experience as it unfolds.

Upon observing their child for 15 minutes, parents in the original study were asked to describe in detail what occurred. As each mother gave her account, the interviewer read it back verbatim, asking for corrections. She was then asked to note which event stood out for her, when it began and when it ended. She had to divide the observation into scenes and to describe what happened inside her for each, later commenting on what she was thinking, feeling, remembering or anticipating within each segment.

This form of interviewing differs from the structured or psychoanalytic interview in that “the subject is directed repeatedly to the relation between the observed event and the subjective experience” (Bennett et al., 1994, p. 339). Rather than tracking a trail of associations, the intent is

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1 See Miller et al. (1989).
to remain focused on the subjective experience evoked. It goes beyond introspection proper in being interview-prompted, triggering the unfolding of uniquely personal representations. The technique is considered to offer "an experienced-based window into the everyday 'how-it-works' of core themes and conflictual issues" (p. 342), the emerging themes, considered "a narrative co-construction between mother and interviewer" (p. 339). In the present context, the derivation of themes was not confined to the interaction segment, but extended to the larger interview.

This technique has been used primarily with mentally healthy parents in a singular interview, although shades of the lived moment have been highlighted in the work of Fraiberg (1980) with more disturbed families. Bennett et al. (1994) suggested that activated subjective experience may in turn, determine maternal behaviour, the past and the future converging in the lived moment, which they interpret through the language of cognitive science. I understand this in terms of an unconscious linking brought about through the 'holding' aspect of the method. Their findings suggest that the mother's representational world is neither singular nor concrete, but is constantly revised. Stern's (1994) 'protonarrative moment,' in organizing itself around a particular motive, is said to take on a narrative structure, which Bennett et al. (1994) understand in terms of "the mind (giving) meaning to its experience by organizing it into stories" (p. 345). I view this in terms of a pulling together of threads of experience, which give cohesive definition to a life as lived. The construct 'story,' which evokes the notion of a beginning and an ending, was too confining a descriptor to account for the phenomenon under study. Lived experiences, albeit patterned, are considerably more fluid. I understand the narrative approach as being linked rather, to a view of developmental continuity, wherein beginnings and endings run into one another and are carried on through the generations sometimes with incredible permeability. What I think can be 'lifted' from such directed interviewing, are uniquely personal, detailed and texturally-loaded narratives of individual life patterns, interweaved in the mind to give form to experience. While not linear, such evolving patterns preserve a sense of continuity. What I borrowed from this approach was the phenomenological technique of honing in on an aspect of maternal experience. In asking participants to reflect in the moment on what stood out for them in a piece of interactive behaviour, I attempted to capture the essence of a specific maternal experience, including a mother's reflective capacity in flux, which will be seen to both change and remain the same.

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1 Titchner's (1912) metaphysical psychologizing from the standpoint of descriptive psychology involved paying attention to phenomena from an objective perspective through taking a record.

2 Defined as the combined experience of what is perceived with what is evoked.
2) In designing the observation technique, I also drew on certain aspects of a form of parent-infant psychotherapy that uncovers intergenerational patterns in infant-mother interactions (Muir, 1992). It is through activity or the noticeable lack thereof, Muir asserted that the infant reveals himself. In the clinical realm it is via “a deceptively simple set of instructions to the mother, to become a non-intrusive observer of her infant and only interact at the infant’s initiative” that the infant is permitted to “potentially change a relational system” (Muir, p. 319). In working with this model clinically, both with mothers and infant/toddlers, and with a mother and her nine year old son with PDD, I have witnessed pathological relational patterns turn around in a relatively brief period, the main therapeutic action occur “in the play space between infant and mother” (p. 320). During the interaction, the clinician does not intrude; nor are interpretations offered in the discussion following. After the parent has had the opportunity to follow the infant’s lead without directing the activity in any way, s/he is asked to speak about what s/he observed and noticed and how s/he felt, and is then asked to make links with her/his own experience of being parented. It is the clinician’s ‘containing’ function in providing an emotionally safe holding space that frees the mother to explore her feelings and aspects of her past that get potentially evoked in remaining present to her baby, thereby creating the space for the mother’s own emotional linking of thoughts and feelings.

In the context of this study, I adopted the role of ‘watching, waiting and wondering,’ while immersing myself in the process and remaining open to the possibilities of what emerged. Given that this is a method used primarily with infants who are essentially mobile or on the verge of it (beyond six months), the instructions to ‘follow the infant’s lead’ were introduced from the third meeting onward, for the purpose of creating an opportunity to observe the participant’s response to being asked to create a space for the baby’s initiative (capacity to contain) and to provide a context for reflection on the immediate experience of holding a baby in mind. It provided a means to observe the infant’s natural inclination and how mother and infant together negotiated their individual needs. In the present context, participants were not asked to forge links with their past, nor were interpretations offered. The space of time between sessions would not in any case, permit the change that is anticipated in the clinical realm. The technique was used here as a phenomenological point of entry into the infant’s natural inclination and as a means to capture both through the mother’s words and in the space created between them, the unfolding dynamic of mutual impact. The focus in the after dialogue was on the women’s’ experience of ‘following’ the baby in the context of the interaction.
3) The third body of knowledge drawn upon was the Tavistock method of psychoanalytic infant observation. Bick saw the infant observer as “a privileged and therefore grateful participant observer” (as cited in Harris, 1987, p. 241). Required to situate oneself in the family in such a way as to open oneself up to being impacted by the experience, and yet to refrain from giving advice or reacting to the demands felt, the observer is required to find a position that both draws one in and yet, creates an appropriate distancing from the situation. Trainees are typically asked to follow an infant weekly in the context of the family over the course of one to two years, in order to track personal experience in a way that facilitates it being “thought about in terms of its emotional significance” (Rustin, 1989, p. 52). The objective is to identify in a natural setting recurrent patterns in the development of the relationship of mother and baby and subsequently the individual character of the baby. The process was designed to bring observers very close to the evolving life-situation of mothers and babies.

This method evolved directly out of the clinical method of psychoanalysis,\(^1\) the central tool of which is intimate personal contact, wherein transactions are carefully and continuously reflected upon (Rustin, 1989). What is most compelling about the psychoanalytic approach is its distinctive focus on *emotional* dimensions of experience. What is most fitting in the present context, is its current shift in a phenomenological direction, based on a growing preference for models rooted in subjective meaning and coherence in contrast to models of direct causality.

Trainees initially study the interaction of mother and baby as a unit, and refrain from abstracting and approaching it from a pre-defined point of view. It requires preparing oneself to reflect upon experiences that at first may not make conceptual sense. In focusing loosely on the nature of a baby’s relationship with the mother as it develops over time, close attention is paid to discernible shifts in functioning and need and its meaning for both mothers and babies. Observations are recorded in everyday language, culminating in a descriptive narrative account of the details of the baby’s activity with respect to the care given, including a description of the feelings of family members (and the observer’s) during the time of the observation. The gathering of data and the making of theoretical inferences are initially kept fairly distinct and it is only at a later point that observers are asked to integrate the process to which they have been exposed, incorporating the group’s reflection on the experience. Comparing this method to more experimental modes of infant research, Rustin (1989) considered its strength to lie in its

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\(^1\) While the general aim of the observation method began as a means to explore the application of certain conceptions derived from psychoanalysis to the direct understanding of infant development, infant observation has since expanded the scope of such theories.
applicability for investigating in fine-grained ways social processes and mechanisms whose existence may be inferred from large-scale statistical studies, which demonstrate causal connections without offering much explanatory account of them” (p. 56). He asserted that the evolving relationship could only be apprehended by a method involving an element of subjectivity, its strength lying in its depth and not its quantitative breadth.

van Manen (1990) had described “close observation” as another alternative to the written or interview approach. In contrast to experimental or behavioural forms of observation, which aim to break the distance between researcher and researched, the researcher becomes engaged by entering the lifeworld, which involves “an attitude of assuming a relation that is as close as possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to situations that allows us to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of those situations” (p. 69). In the context of this study, I adopted the position of participant observer, maintaining an orientation of reflectivity and engagement. I incorporated into the observation method, the psychoanalytic infant observation approach of qualitatively tracking the relational dynamics between infant and mother over time, with view to obtaining a descriptive account of the interaction, detailing both the infant’s and mother’s behaviour as it unfolded. In honing in on the maternal experience of holding an infant in mind, paying particular attention to moments of felt connectedness and separateness and tracking it across transition points, whose significance relate to developmental shifts in infancy as marked by the handling of different forms of anxiety, I departed from the weekly tracking of the infant in his/her natural surround. In order to closely observe the infants’ changing states of mind and their impact on maternal containing and the emotional shape of each relationship over time, I worked with video-taped fragments of interactions tracked across the specified transition points. Descriptive narrative portrayals of relationship were obtained from observing and describing the videotaped interactions at a later point in time, the method of analysis adhering closely to the Tavistock method of documenting relationships in flux.

**Researcher as Instrument**

Adopting this close observation approach brought me into intimate emotional contact with each unfolding relationship, providing a means to understand the phenomenon. In qualitative research, the researcher is considered an invaluable instrument in apprehending meaning (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Psychoanalytic infant observation studies had informed us that the process of observing the unfolding intimate relationship of an infant in the context of its family evokes intense feelings in the observer, providing the context for reflection in the moment. To use the
self as instrument in this way requires a strong commitment to remain open to being moved by what is witnessed and to engage in an ongoing self-reflective process as a means to understanding.

The rationale for using the researcher as instrument in the present study originated in the clinical work of psychoanalysis, wherein one makes use of one’s own feelings as a source of information about what the analysand is going through (O’Shaughnessy, 1983). Sometimes, as Bion (1962b) suggested, there are simply no derivatives in the analysand’s verbal material of the intense emotion evoked in the analyst. Not confined to the clinical realm, emotional evocation is an infant’s first means of communication, with language and verbal thought evolving out of the experience of emotional containment (Bion). As researcher, I sought to remain open to the strong emotion evoked in me and having dwelt on the experience in order to derive meaning from it, sometimes necessarily at some distance, I found myself at times, fighting the inclination within myself to respond.

Emotional ‘resonance’ is an aspect of containment, which Sorensen (1995) describes as, “a deep and unconscious sympathetic (in the sense of corresponding) vibration within the inner world” (p. 10), an experience of being open to primitive communication of the other. It entails allowing another’s experience to resonate fully within, and may require the capacity to hold in mind what is for the moment, emotionally overwhelming for another. She suggests that the capacity to deeply reflect on experience in this way entails a struggle that likely comes from the creative effort involved in pulling together what is sensed and felt with its potential meaning.

Bick (1964) described observing as inseparable from thinking, and noted how difficult it is to gather facts free from interpretation, given that even words are value-laden. She emphasized the need for consecutive observations for confirmation purposes, not just in relation to what was witnessed, but also in relation to it’s evolving impact on the observer, including the actual time necessary to learn how to observe non-judgmentally. She promoted the idea of learning to watch and feel before jumping in with theories and advised her trainees to learn to tolerate and appreciate how mothers care for their babies and find their own solutions, without assuming that there is a right or wrong way of handling various aspects of infant care. The tendency is to struggle to understand what is observed rather than tolerating one’s own feelings and reactions. The latter risks enacting, while the reflected experience leads to deeper understanding. We have grown so removed from our bodily experience that we forget just how wholly interrelated are mind and body in the process of communication. So easily are we misled by words, when the
mood and context of a communication are often more pertinent. This is rarely more prevalent than in the mother‐infant relationship.

I am in agreement with Bick (1964) and Rustin (1989) that premature sizing up of the situation is an intellectual defense on the part of the observer. The task here, was to subject such defensiveness to scrutiny. Brenman‐Pick’s (1985) stipulation that we must cope with feelings and subject them to thought is pertinent. Throughout the process I documented my impressions along with my emotional reactions to the participants, making a commitment to reflect on the ways my own personal biases, assumptions, and subjective experiences impacted the interpretive process. I endeavoured to remain open to what presented itself to me and to accept new ways of understanding, which is reflected I believe, in the manner in which I approached the data in the analysis phase, as will be outlined below.

Procedures undertaken in the Generation of Data

Selecting Participants and Negotiating Participation

Four mother‐infant pairs participated in the study. The task of finding participants who voluntarily chose to participate with their babies over a nine month period following the birth, began with my contacting local midwives and childbirth educators with a view to presenting an overview of the study to a number of pre‐natal groups. The midwives, having themselves reviewed a brief outline of the study to consider its potential benefit to their clients, passed on information sheets to those they felt might be interested. This resulted in my receiving the names of three potential participants, one of whom was selected to participate in the study, while the due dates of the other two women did not coincide with the project’s time line.

Following my contacting two Lamaze childbirth educators, I presented an overview of the study to three groups of women in their last trimester of pregnancy and their partners. The process of finding participants was itself informative about the nature of the mental and emotional space of women approaching the final phase of pregnancy. Disinclined at this point to dwell on the prospective relationship, the women’s focus was for the most part, on safety and the immediacy of the birth, framed practically in their minds. These presentations resulted in two women contacting me about a week later; one early one morning, when she was feeling anxious about the pending birth; the other feeling that some of what I’d said resonated with her own contradictory feelings in approaching delivery. A third woman contacted me a couple of weeks following the presentation when her baby was already a week old. Another route to accessing participants was through a public health department research committee, whereupon, through submitting a detailed
proposal, I was permitted to present the study to a prenatal group of women from mixed socioeconomic backgrounds.

Participants were chosen both on the basis of their ability to reflect and dialogue on inner processes, and an interest in thinking and communicating about the evolving relationship with their babies over an extended period. Those selected, were women from different familial situations, ranging in age from 29 to 38 with varying socio-economical backgrounds, all of the women having a college or university education. Three were first time mothers; one, a mother of two. Two of the women had their maternal extended families accessible to them and two did not, one because of geographical distance, the other by intent, for emotional reasons. My intent was not to get a representative sample, but to highlight the extent to which different familial situations potentially impact maternal experience. I did not actively pursue women with views that coincided with my own, but chose to explore the experience of those with a range of maternal values and practices. The process of pursuing contacts, presenting the study and finding suitable participants took the best part of six months.

The women participated in the study for different reasons, either attracted by the opportunity to explore an aspect of living to which they now felt identified, drawn perhaps by the idea of having a record or hopeful that the involvement itself might prove personally supportive. One of the women looked forward to sharing the documented past with her grown daughter when she would be at the point of giving birth. Another was drawn by the opportunity of giving voice to issues of relevance to women’s lives; to partake in something meaningful that might also prove beneficial. There was a general curiosity about the experience of maternal holding and maternal space on the part of the women.

During the presentations, those interested were invited to call to obtain more information about the study. In the telephone contact more pertinent details about participation were provided and the women’s specific questions addressed, following which a meeting was scheduled prior to the birth of the baby to establish rapport and secure informed consent.

**Establishing the Research Relationship**

Integral to the qualitative method in general and to interviewing in particular, is the establishment of a good working relationship. In the present context it involved making provision for establishing the kind of trust that would enable the women to reveal intimacies that might otherwise have remained unvoiced. The intent was to create a supportive context in which

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1 This was assessed on the basis of combined annual family income, which ranged from $50,000 to $132,000.
thinking about various aspects of the maternal relationship could be tolerated and expressed with view to both enabling the women to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their babies and generating a narrative that reflected their experience.

It is no longer considered ethically viable or sufficient to engage in research in order to expand knowledge or understanding. Human research, according to Lather (1986) must also strive to be socially responsible, to improve the human condition, and to somehow enrich the lives of participants. While every effort was made to minimize risk and maximize the potential benefit of participation, as recommended by Yow (1994), I focused on providing a potential transformative function for both the participants themselves and a prospective audience. I designed the study not just to obtain a phenomenological look at a specific aspect of maternal experience in the encounter between mother and baby, but as a means to somehow enhance the relationships of those involved in the project. Build into the design was a form of emotional containment based on the principles of the non-directive form of parent-infant psychotherapy outlined above (Muir, 1992). Referring to the infant observation studies carried out at the Tavistock, Rustin (1989) had noted that “tacit emotional use made of observers by some mothers both reveals how important this need is for the mothers of infants, and also to a small degree may help to provide it” (p. 62). In the first telephone contact, it entailed my leaving a space in the conversation for the women to raise what they needed to address at the time. In the first interview, it included a process of following where the participants needed to go either in their talk or in their attending to the baby. Subsequently, it entailed staying close to the women’s experience during the interview and inviting feedback regarding their involvement in the study.

The method was collaborative in keeping the women informed about each step of the process and engaging them in the emergent design from the start. I adopted the role of emotional ‘container’ of the mother as she reflected upon her baby and her maternal experience at successive transition points. The intent was to initiate a pause, to create an emotional thinking space, within which each participant would have an opportunity to feel the baby’s emotions as they resonated within her in a way that normally evades mothers by virtue of being continually carried along by the baby’s practical and emotional demands. This role differed from the role of psychotherapist in a number of important respects: It was not set up with specific “wonderings” (or concerns) in mind; nor was there any attempt on my part to make interpretations based on clinical understanding. The intent was not to reach towards change, but to observe with openness and to reflect upon the dyadic experience as it unfolded.
The semi-observer position removed the active role that adults often expect in the presence of an infant, leaving a space in which the infant's emotional state could have more direct impact (Rustin, 1989). Even though there were times when I felt I was up against my own trust in a mother's capacity to hold the baby in mind and perhaps my own omnipotent phantasy of knowing what was right in the moment, I persisted in trying to provide a supportive context for the mother to reflect on her experience. I did not raise my own personal thoughts or feelings during the meetings. The narratives rather, comprise the women's words about their experience, uncontaminated by my views, experience or knowledge and only later in the writing do my reflections and interpretation of their experience enter the discourse. While I remained open to respond to any curiosity participants may have had about my own experience of mothering or my understanding of infancy and maternal care, the women actually remained quite engaged in speaking about their own experience.

The participants were seen throughout the research process as active constructors of meaning. The process of responding to a baby's needs over an extended period is a fairly fluid one, where boundaries temporarily get blurred and intense relational issues potentially arise, sometimes for the first time in a significant way. The study attempted to capture the mother's experience as it evolved. I did not ask participants to reflect on the past but to sit with the present. They were asked less to account for, than to elucidate their current experience. As such, the method adopted differs from a narrative investigation, as described by Polkinghorne (1988), in moving in the later writing and analysis into the phenomenological and beyond in the interpretation to the hermeneutic. There is a risk in being captivated by the content of the narrative, rather than its evocative nature.

The Participant Release Agreement

The nature of the researcher-participant relationship was imparted more through practice than explanation. Roles were negotiated through a process of explicating from the beginning, the parameters of the study, including participation requirements and an outline of the potential benefit and risks of participation, culminating in the written contract. Participants were encouraged to think about their reason for participating and were informed both in person and in written form—as incorporated into the participant release agreement that they were asked to co-sign—that confidentiality would be insured and that they could withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendixes A and B). Participants were also assured that they would be given pseudonyms in all documentation from the start and that these would be used subsequently in the
transcripts. Where it was raised as a concern, participants were assured that raw data, including the audio and audio-visual tapes and the transcripts, would be stored in locked files, to which only the primary researcher and members of the research committee had access. Participants were told that throughout the data collection stage, they would receive transcripts to review and approve between meetings, which would provide them with an opportunity to disguise anything in the data which they felt might potentially encroach upon their anonymity. The invitation to voice any concerns they had about their involvement in the research process raised in the first meeting was reiterated at successive meetings. Their feedback about the process was encouraged and incorporated into the emergent design where appropriate. The participants were given time to question and think about the participant release agreement before signing and relevant changes were made, where necessary. The written consent was obtained in the first meeting with each participant before proceeding with the audio and audio-visual taping of the interview.

**Ethical Issues: Minimizing Risk**

The risk of revealing one’s intimate experiences and what might emerge therefrom was considered along with the potential benefit of personal reflection. I do not believe it is enough to merely point out potential risks at the start by giving permission to withdraw from the project at any time, but feel it is important to think about how such risks can be minimized at every juncture. I shared this responsibility with the participants where possible, by giving a copy of the transcripts for perusal between meetings, and also by setting the pace which allowed for thoughtful disclosure. Assuming full responsibility potentially robs the participant of autonomy. On the other hand, power relations can and do enter the interview process and encouraging the participant to spiral down and lurk in murky waters by virtue of the questions asked or comments made, is tantamount to throwing her into a deep sea not knowing for sure whether or not she can swim.

I took it as my responsibility as researcher to track the emotional impact of participants’ personal disclosure. Given that it is always an open question as to how the birth of a baby will impact a mother, provision was made from the outset to make available an appropriate referral for psychotherapy or other suitable intervention in the event of observed adverse effects of either delving into emotional material or indeed the experience of becoming a parent. Participants were invited to call me at any time either in relation to concerns they had about their participation in

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1 One of the participants, concerned about her anonymity, requested a re-wording of a section of the agreement with reference to the videotaped portion of the data and this was written into the signed agreement.
the study or the impact of reviewing the transcript between meetings. I believe it is the researcher’s responsibility to monitor each participant’s reactions throughout the study and to know when to suspend with deeper investigation of the material. There were times when I felt it necessary to modify the approach somewhat, in terms of containing anxiety as opposed to uncovering experience. None of the women in this study reacted adversely to their participation in the study.

Meeting with Participants

The Interviews

I met with four mothers and their babies four times over a period of nine months. The meetings took on average, anywhere from one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half hours and were scheduled to accommodate the baby’s routine and to coincide with at least a portion of his or her alert time where possible. Since this was not always easy to predict especially in the early months, the meetings were sometimes arranged ad hoc, replicating in the research design the process of following the baby. The meetings were spaced at two to three month intervals, the first taking place within the first five weeks of infant life, the second around the beginning of the third month, the third around the sixth month, and the fourth around the ninth month. The baby’s presence both acted as a strong catalyst for the mother’s thinking at each transition point, and provided a means to observe his or her role in the relationship.

The interviews and observations took place in the participants’ homes. The option of meeting in the researcher’s office had been given, but the women preferred to be in their own space with their infants during the nine month tracking period. The extent to which the baby’s needs determined the agenda and flow of the meetings was reflected in the scheduling of meetings, the timing of interviews and videotaping. In two of the cases, the pre-natal preliminary interviews got postponed on account of the infants’ early arrival and were subsequently conducted by phone. In a situation where the baby slept solidly throughout the first visit, a second was scheduled shortly thereafter. In another, the baby’s sleeping necessitated my prolonging the interview with the mother for the duration of the baby’s nap. The women typically welcomed this time to speak about their experience uninterrupted. I allowed more than the originally estimated 90 minute time frame for each meeting to accommodate to the reality of the situation in which parents find themselves with their young infants.

Each meeting proceeded with an opening statement that was revised over the course of the project to incorporate insights that later emerged. It was sometimes necessary to start with the
videotaped observation because of the baby's narrow window of wakefulness, even though I had anticipated at the outset that the women would have an opportunity to speak more generally before being asked to hone in on specific aspects of the relationship. Open-ended comments and questions, as compiled in the interview guide (see Appendix C), were raised where necessary with view to clarifying or obtaining a more detailed description of the experience, and set aside whenever the participant shared an extensive account of the bracketed experience under study.

Participants were asked to give concrete descriptions in speaking directly to their specific experience. If a silence was prolonged, often it was enough to repeat the last sentence or thought with an inflected tone to enable the participant to continue. When participants began to generalize, I left them to follow their own inclination for a while, and then brought them back to the point. Participants were asked to think of a specific instance or to focus on what stood out for its vividness in a particular experience. They were encouraged to attend to bodily feeling, how things impacted them and felt from the inside. Causal explanations or abstract interpretations were not sought. In situations where their account did not tap into the experience qualitatively with sufficient depth, I reflected back the felt emotion and asked more questions to facilitate the expression of richer substantive description of the experience. It was at times, a struggle to remain oriented to the question in the face of following the baby, especially in the early months, where I found myself being drawn into the dyadic space. Rustin (1989) had pointed out how infant observers potentially become identified with the infant and mother and how their own infantile (or maternal) self can be stimulated upon observing a mother-baby couple. There was a point in one of the first meeting where I felt that my presence, albeit silent at the time and despite the mother's warmth and receptivity towards me, was an intrusion into their shared space. In retrospect, I believe it was the extent of this mother's attentiveness and warmth toward her baby that evoked in me the impulse to turn my head, a poignant experience which I held onto as 'food for thought' in understanding their relationship.

It was sometimes difficult in the questioning, to stay close to the experience as lived. There was a tendency in the participants to jump backwards and forwards in time. Silence was sometimes important in prompting the participants to gather thoughts, and proceed. It was at times, necessary to hold onto some of a participant's anxiety, to enable her to reflect--either then or at a later point--on some of the more painful or negative feelings evoked in her. It was necessary in one instance to suspend with the research agenda of gathering a participant's experiential account in order to contain her anxiety, when it was felt that further exploration of the specific issue could not be adequately dealt with within the parametres of the research.
relationship. Accordingly, I reflected back her feelings instead of encouraging a deeper reflectivity at that time.

There were times too, when I had to fight my own tendency to draw conclusions on the basis of what I observed. Through the process I learned to catch myself making assumptions. Attempting to 'clear my mind' before each meeting helped me to remain open to what transpired. I made a mental note whenever I found myself making links and wrote out my observations following the meeting. Noting both what I’d observed and its impact on me, I paid particular attention to those times where I felt sure I knew what was happening and generally followed up on those, either in the current or at a later meeting, by asking the participant to elaborate on the particular experience. I might ask a mother for example, to describe how she felt a particular experience changed over time in an attempt not to foreclose further reflection on her part about a specific issue that felt ‘known’ to me.

Participants were given a copy of the transcript to review between sessions, which served as a catalyst for reflection and potential interpretive insight. Having respite from immersion in the process enabled participants to stand back and witness change in their experience over time. They were asked to comment both on what stood out in the transcripts between meetings, and what they noticed about the qualitative shifts in their experience of holding a baby in mind. Their reviewing the transcripts also served as a validity check. Toward the close of each meeting, participants were asked what it was like to talk about their experience and interact with their baby in this forum and how they felt the process might be improved to make it more beneficial to them personally. All of the interviews were recorded on audio-tape and transcribed.

The Observations

Subtleties in the baby’s behaviour, as they pertained to the relationship of holding, were traced through videotaping a 15 to 20 minute interaction in each session. In the first session, the camera ran alongside a portion of the interview at a time that felt appropriate to the mother in order to obtain the least intrusive record of the mother-infant relationship in action at that point.

In the second interview, each mother was asked to “be with her baby in a way that she felt was comfortable to them both,” following which she was asked to explore with the researcher what stood out for her in the interaction (see Appendix D). I had intended to introduce it midway through the second interview (at which point the babies were over three months old), after the mother had been given an opportunity to talk about her current experiences of being there for her baby. Once engaged in the process however, it became clear that the baby’s need and state of
mind would determine the agenda, much as it naturally does in the life of a family. The interaction component became a natural part of the interview, occurring whenever a mother felt, or indeed the baby prompted, their turning toward one another.

In the third and fourth meetings, when the babies were close to six and nine months respectively, each participant was asked to “follow her baby’s lead” during the interaction as long as this felt comfortable, following which she was asked to reflect both on what stood out for her and what it was like for her to ‘follow’ the baby’s initiative.¹ This served as a concrete point of focus.

After each meeting, I noted my observations and impressions, including how I felt in the presence of each participant dyad, with view to getting a feel for the ‘shape’ of their relationship. The videotaped interactions were viewed at a later point and transcribed in descriptive narrative form. The interviews and observations took in all a year to complete.

**Method of Organizing and Analyzing the Data**

I documented my impressions following the first encounter with each participant dyad and following each subsequent meeting thereafter. While I originally intended the interpretive analysis to run concurrent with the collection of data, as espoused by van Manen (1990), I did not formally begin analyzing the content of the transcripts until I had completed at least three interviews with each participant. Prior to each meeting, I found myself reading the verbatim transcript and not my written impressions of the previous interview, in an effort to hold onto the experiential quality of the previous meeting. And while this may have foreclosed an opportunity to check the validity of speculative interpretations, it enabled me to witness the evolving experience more from the participants’ angle, as opposed to my own analytic lens. In forestalling the analysis proper, I inadvertently mirrored something of the natural inclination to follow the baby in the moment and consequently, felt more in tune with what was presenting itself to me. Once engaged in this process, I became quite reluctant to stand back and observe from the outside—to formally dialogue with the text—until I felt the women themselves had regained that capacity. The writing up of the analysis reflects this inclination and is in keeping with the psychoanalytic infant observation approach.

¹ These instructions were borrowed from the parent-infant psychotherapy technique, Watch, Wait, and Wonder (see Muir, 1992). Elizabeth Muir suggested that I incorporate this component into the study at this point in the baby’s development when I originally consulted with her about the project.
Two-tiered Analysis

The data were organized on two levels. The first entailed crafting individual 'portraits' of each evolving relationship from selected excerpts of both the transcribed interviews and descriptive narratives of the interaction for each participant dyad in order to highlight in narrative form, what stood out both in the mother's experience and in the observed interaction. These provide the reader with a window into the pre-reflective experience that forms the basis of the later analysis. The steps involved in arriving at individual portraits are outlined below. The second level, which follows the methods and procedures of hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, adapted largely from the work of van Manen (1984, 1990) and Moustakas (1994), entailed organizing the cumulative data across transitions to derive a phenomenological description of shifts in the maternal experience of holding a baby in mind and the related infantile experience of being held, along with a hermeneutic interpretation of that experience, including the structures underlying it.

Arriving at Individual Portraits

Individual descriptive portrayals of each mother-infant relationship were constructed from selected excerpts from both the interview and interaction transcripts, as informed by the evocative impact of being a participant observer. In transcribing the interviews, I noted insights as they struck me and found myself attending to aspects of the interview that had escaped me during the actual meeting, for example, the pacing, the points of emphasis, the gaps etc. I noted my own reaction to what participants said and how they said it and included in the verbatim transcripts any interjections, including the baby's utterances, cries, etc. All of the interviews were transcribed close to the time of the interview, which gave me a second run at tracking my own response to the experience. The videotaped interactions were transcribed at a later point, when almost all of the interviews were completed and entailed descriptively detailing subtle shifts in behaviour of both mother and infant. The process of reviewing the videotapes was evocative, enabling more detailed impressions to form in my mind.

Grouping together the four interview transcripts for each participant, I condensed the body of each by first removing my own words. Then, by immersing myself in the women's words, I read over the condensed versions many times, highlighting what stood out in terms of how the women revealed themselves with respect to the study's focus. Redundancies omitted, the

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1 Each individual interview took 6 to 8 hours to transcribe. Verbatim transcripts of the four interviews yielded anywhere from 90 to 150 pages of one-and-a-half spaced typed text for each participant.
2 35 to 60 pages of typed double-spaced text were obtained for each interaction.
chronological order was preserved with the intent of presenting shifts in the experience across the four transitions. Similarly, in reading the four interaction transcripts for each participant dyad, I highlighted both those portions that stood out as most revealing of the baby’s inclinations, and those that converged either positively or negatively with the mother’s verbal account. The interview and observation narratives were at this point, loosely organized around implicit themes that emerged out of a close reading of the texts.

Compiling then, the condensed individual interview and interaction transcripts for each participant dyad into one document, preserving the chronology, I included highlighted aspects of experience that converged in the women’s dialogue and in the observed interaction to create portraits of the relational dynamic of each couple. This required further sorting and editing of the data, while preserving the text’s natural continuity. I refrained here from interpreting the relational dynamics and presented the portraits in the women’s own words, leaving the reader to make his or her own interpretation at this point. What I did superimpose on the data at this point, was my own sense of the ‘feel’ or ‘shape’ of each relationship, that is, what stood out for me as unique to each and the data were organized accordingly. It is reflected in the order in which the material is presented, and in the overarching theme that can be seen to run through each dyadic portrayal, as captured in the chosen metaphor that heads each portrait. The women were invited to read and comment on these portraits as etched.

While van Manen’s (1990) approach is concerned less with representing how individual participants view something from their own perspective, and more with representing what it is that makes the phenomenon an essentially human experience, this analysis included both aspects. In an effort to capture both the individual stamp of relatedness and the essential underlying structures of the phenomenological experience, I set out both to highlight the shape and feel of maternal space as dynamically created between each mother and infant, and to uncover the essence of the experience of holding and being held in mind. The phenomenological analysis includes numerous examples of variability in how core themes and conflicts were experienced. The descriptive portraits serve both to present on an experiential level, points of convergence between a baby’s inclinations and initiatives and a mother’s account of core themes and conflicts as they evolve through the experience of holding a baby in mind, and provide the reader with excerpts of the raw data used in the later analysis. To portray is to represent or depict in words. I

1 The idea of presenting vignettes of participants’ experience in the words of participants themselves originated in the work of Studs Terkel (1972). Bergum (1989) also presented “stories” in the words of her participants, which were crafted from excerpts of transcribed interviews according to what she considered central to the women’s lives.
used the term ‘portrait,’ defined as “a vivid verbal description” (Webster’s Dictionary, 1987, p. 783), to depict the process of portraying what it is in the moment, that a particular dyad with its own unique rhythm conveys, through word and action (or inaction), about the ‘shape’ of the internal space they co-inhabit. It is essentially a fluid descriptive rendering. The four portraits of relationship are presented in Chapter three. Further reflecting on the texts, indwelling and interpreting took the analysis to another level.

Working with the Data Phenomenologically

Through working interpretatively with the textural elements of experience as presented in the interview narratives and interaction observations, the phenomenological text gradually came to reveal the inherent structure of the phenomenon in descriptive narrative form, the objective of the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis being, to uncover the essence of the experience through the dialogic process of constructing the text. Here, it was through the process of writing, which itself prompted a deeper reflectivity, that the underlying meanings were revealed. The interpretive analysis proceeded in accordance with the ‘hermeneutic circle,’ as described by Kockelmans (1972), whereby meaning is constructed as elemental aspects of the text are considered in relationship to the whole. Like creating a patchwork quilt, one works piece by piece, constantly moving back and forth between the intricate parts and the overall design. It is difficult to envisage at the outset how the finished piece will look.

My goal was not to make an empirical generalization, but to reveal in the writing what is inherently pre-linguistic about the experience of holding and being held in mind; to provide a bridge between this particular aspect of maternal experience and its underlying structures; to uncover certain truths about it, while retaining its inherent ambiguity, for interpretation, descriptively etched, serves as “a concrete counterweight to theory” (van Manen, 1990, p. 121), whose aim is, to personally evoke the reader to think further. The current project was designed to promote wondering in the reader, researcher and the participants alike. The subjectivity of the women’s experience became the object of reflective awareness, with meaning residing in the act of experience and not in the object.

In order to describe the method of analysis adopted in this study and to delineate how the philosophical method and the ‘object’ of study phenomenologically cohere, I will digress here, to draw a parallel between Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenological process of arriving at the meaning or essence of a phenomenon through engaging in reflective dialogue with the phenomenon as experienced and the process through which the infant acquires meaning and the
capacity for thinking about experience through the mother’s reflectivity. It provides a rationale for that strand of the present analytic process that I have termed ‘layered reflectivity.’

Borrowing the terms from Husserl, Moustakas (1994) describes every intentionality as comprising noema, “the experiencing or act of experiencing” (p. 69), the ‘what’ of experience, and noesis, the ‘way’ in which the what is experienced (Ihde, as cited in Moustakas). The methodological challenge is to combine both of these by constantly looking and reflecting to obtain a descriptive account of the pre-reflective experience and in the noetic phase, to further reflect on the experience to uncover its hidden meaning. We might say then that the noesis refers to the psychical (or structural), that is, to the act of thinking, reflecting, feeling, remembering and judging, in contrast to the noematic sensory (textural) aspects of experience.

It is not a conceptual or intellectual analysis that is sought. Meanings are embedded, layered and the researcher’s level of receptivity to emotional impact profoundly affects what will be uncovered. This constant back and forth between the experience as described (appearance) and the reflective analysis (interpretation) rests on an internal frame of reference as opposed to some external abstraction (Moustakas, 1994).

Similarly, in the mother infant relationship, uncomfortable experiences, which in the infant might be described as near-sensory and somatic— which Bion (1962b) termed beta elements— (so named so as not to overly define them) are projected to arouse feeling in the mother, which may then be transformed through her unconscious reflectivity (reverie or alpha function) into mental, alpha elements that are capable of being used for thought. This is not an intellectual reflectivity, but entails the mother’s receiving and holding onto the infant’s raw emotion. If she can be receptive to the infant’s state of mind and allow it to register within herself, she can process it in such a way that it enables her to identify with and attend to it in the infant. Unprocessed elements of experience by contrast, remain on the boundary of somatic and psychic (mental) experience, and cannot be held in mind in the way thought can (on either a conscious or unconscious level) to facilitate the act of understanding or thinking about experience.

Meaning and the capacity for thinking about experience in the baby then, is born of the (m)other’s receptivity to and unconscious processing of the infant’s raw experience. As such, I am posing a link here, between Husserl’s (1931) noema and Bion’s (1962b) beta elements as the raw (textural) and as yet, unprocessed data of experience on the one hand, and between the

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1 In Bion’s (1962b) container-contained model of early development, which highlights the specific function of the actual caregiver, the beta element is the raw emotion or sensation as yet ‘indigestible’ by the infant, given that he/she still lacks the apparatus for making sense of it.
concepts of noesis and the mother’s alpha function, as the reflective processes needed to uncover underlying meaning (or structure) that remains implicit on the other. In both cases, a genuine looking and ‘being with’ precedes reflectivity. The researcher and the women participants alike were required to engage in this process, albeit to different ends.

**Procedures of the Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Analysis**

**Synopsis:** The underlying structures of experience were determined by interpreting the originally given descriptions of the experience, through a process of returning to the original data in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provided the basis for a reflective interpretive structural analysis. In short, this required first, regarding every statement in the narrative relevant to the topic as having equal value, from which, ‘meaning units’ were listed and clustered into common ‘themes,’ excluding redundant statements. The themes were then reflected upon to develop coherent ‘textural descriptions’ of the experience, from which, through further reflection and interpretation, ‘structural descriptions’ were derived. The final step involved integrating the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the meanings and essences of the experience of ‘holding a baby in mind’ against the backdrop of the baby’s observed experience of being so held at each transition. The interpretive process involved going back and forth between the original descriptions and possible structures, using an object relational lens in the search for meaning. It included tracing etymological sources and consulting related phenomenological and poetic works. The steps of the analytic process are outlined below:

**Thematic Analysis**

Descriptions of both the lived experience of holding a baby in mind and from the infant’s perspective, the behavioural correlates of being so held, as contained in the transcribed narratives, comprised the “data” of this analysis. The initial task was to uncover broad themes from the experience as described, with themes understood as hermeneutic focal points, in contrast to conceptual formulations or categorical statements. In viewing themes as “identifiable aspects of (the) experience that interact together” (p. 13), Bergum (1989) chose to use the term ‘moment’ to demonstrate the exigencies of the experience, thematic moments representing further interpretive work with the texts. In this study, the thematic analysis entailed extracting themes embodied in the evolving meanings and imagery of the text as a means to get at the under-side of experience.

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1 In methodological language this refers to a fragment of data, a descriptor; in experiential language it represents an impression, an aspect of experience.
Tesch (1987) saw the process as involving a spiraling motion, a flow. It required my fully immersing myself in the data as a whole, by initially entering the entire transcript, reading and re-reading and dwelling on the data before focusing attention on anything in particular. I then condensed the narratives by binding segments,1 that is, by dividing the data into smaller “meaning units” and capturing these in lose thematic statements. I articulated the meaning of these bounded segments by expanding the statements into textural descriptions.

In isolating thematic aspects, I used the two approaches that Tesch (1987) called *panning* and *surveying*. The first entailed looking for “precious elements,” descriptive expressions considered central to the experience, with all other aspects sifted out. van Manen (1984) called this the holistic or ‘sententious’ approach. It required a selective reading and *highlighting* of the statements or phrases that seemed particularly revealing about the experience. These were extracted and compiled in a separate document. The second approach, *surveying* or what van Manen termed the ‘line-by-line’ approach, involved a more detailed reading and considering of each sentence separately in an effort to discern its meaning. It was prompted by my asking what a particular sentence (or group of sentences) revealed about the experience being described. The task here, was to grasp themes by lifting appropriate phrases or conveying in a single statement their main thrust or meaning. The latter approach is more in line with Moustakas’ (1994) phenomenological ‘horizonalization,’ whereby every statement is given equal value and considered for its relevance to the question. Those considered to have some relevance to the phenomenon were extracted and compiled separately. Accordingly, the whole area was ‘surveyed’ in an effort to capture what was there to be seen, with nothing important overlooked. It is generally considered more systematic to adopt both of these approaches (van Manen). For those passages or isolated sentences that did not clearly lend themselves to thematic grouping, I wrote a brief memorandum, as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in an effort to discover their significance.

This process resulted in a list of themes—some more tentatively formulated than others—which I expressed in a few cryptic statements, the task being to ever refine the phrasing of the themes and to confirm their relevance. When I noticed certain experiential themes recurring, I held onto these by lifting the relevant phrases and/or summarizing their meaning. Once identified, themes became the object of further reflection. Incidental themes were differentiated from

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1 Seidman (1991) described the procedures of *sorting* and *culling*, which involves organizing excerpts from transcripts into categories and searching for patterns and connections among them. His method entails labeling tentatively at first the passages that stand out as interesting and later sifting out those that are more compelling. The procedure used in a phenomenological analysis is more systematic.
essential themes, their significance discerned by returning to the original phenomenological question and asking if the descriptions accounted for what the experience was really like. The process required returning again and again to the original narrative in order to check their relevance and validity. Not all themes turned out to be unique to the experience.

From the preliminary analysis of the individual transcripts, I turned to compare themes across transcripts, demarcating according to transition points, in order to find thematic invariants across participants. It initially entailed sorting themes into loose categories, although given their tendency to blur and readily overlap, I found it more useful, like Bateson (1979), to think of them as "patterns that connect" (p. 8) and just as easily come apart, should the overall meaning require it.

Textural Descriptions

Having identified and verified themes, the thematic statements or phrases were captured in more phenomenologically sensitive paragraphs, comprising thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas or situations that portrayed what comprised an experience (the sculpting of the piece through the writing). I found that no sooner had a formulation been rendered, than its inability to capture the whole of the experience was magnified, which led to a process of ever refining each thematic portrayal. Confirmation was sought through repeatedly returning to the raw ‘data’ and reflecting on how it fit with the drafted description. In looking and reflecting, feelings and images were evoked that impacted the interpretive process, deepening my thinking. What I found myself focusing on—whether an aspect of the experience itself or something particular to me that propelled my curiosity—was itself revealing and helped form the structure of the analysis.

Through the process of immersing myself in the text, various angles of the phenomenon presented themselves, each forming what Moustakas (1994) calls a horizon. Each time a new dimension came to the fore, the overall meaning shifted somewhat. I explored each thematic phrase or statement first in its singularity and then proceeded to unify the parts to form a more complete textural description. When the back and forth looking and noticing came to a natural close—when no new insights were emerging—I engaged in a more intense reflective process, aimed at grasping the full nature of the phenomenon. I linked non-repetitive constituents of the experience thematically until a full description was derived, the constant checking back with the source, bringing about more accurate and complete layers of meaning and more clearly defined

1 Horizons are the constituents of a complete textural description of the experience.
groupings. Thematic constituents in general, were difficult to pigeonhole as they constantly overlapped.

**Structural Descriptions**

As I moved toward capturing in linguistic form the phenomenon’s pre-linguistic basis—its structural premise—the thematic organization of the data shifted yet again, the thematic constituents requiring not just a re-shuffling at this point, but a deeper reflection, the aim being to uncover the underlying and precipitating factors that might account for what was experienced on a deeper level. Through focusing on the phenomenon in its manifold dimensions and returning to the text again and again, the blurred vision gradually came into sharper focus. As the reflectivity grew more intense, the focus naturally shifted from texture to structure, from percept to concept, from what was immediate to a host of possible meanings. This constituted the sculpting of the piece in a movement toward ideas.

I incorporated concrete illustrations, e.g., excerpts from the descriptive narratives, into the interpretation in order to retain a link with the original experience and to bring the narrative to life, although as is typical of a phenomenological study, the individual participants receded further into the background as the structural aspects of the experience came more to the fore. There were times however, when it was important to articulate the way in which inherent structures manifested differently in the four mother infant dyads by virtue of their unique linkage. The apparent and the hidden converged to create a more rounded understanding of the essence of the experience, although their relatedness did not preclude individual focus on either.

Tesch (1987) had distinguished between *individual themes*, “brief statements that describe the content of the individual units of data,” and *metathemes*, “the major dimensions of the phenomenon” (p. 231), that is, its more abstracted entities or its fundamental essence. Individual themes are not merely subsumed under a metatheme, but determine its nature. “Structures underlie textures and are inherent in them” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79). They are in continual relationship. The metathemes emerged intuitively from the larger picture in a less defined way and required sharper elucidation. The process involved a constant shifting back and forth from figure to ground, from part (individual experiential descriptions) to whole (larger narrative), culminating in what is described as ‘distilled meaning.’ It entailed a continual process of immersing myself in the data and standing back to reflect on it. The metathemes did not stand out clearly from the surround, earmarked, but emerged only through both a singling out of constituents and a connecting of themes. Like a photograph emerging from its negative, what first
emerged were dim outlines of what became sharply etched entities. Simultaneously attending to
detail and holding onto seemingly disparate attributes brought the phenomenon more into the
light. I am reminded of painting with watercolour, where in working close up, I can attend to very
minute details and yet, when I stand back, the image in its fullness evokes something new. This
form of analysis, according to Tesch, requires both discipline in creating order and structure--
organizing the descriptive data into meaningful units and arranging these in a disciplined way--
and trust in using knowledge that comes from a deeper source within. I both immersed myself in
the data, while trying to maintain some distance from it and found, as Tesch suggested, that when
my engagement was deep enough, a part of me remained in touch with it. Marshall (1981) had
advised that phenomenological researchers must be able to “tolerate anxiety and ambiguity” (p.
397). There were many times when I had to examine my own reactions in the face of engaging the
data.

With the loosely compiled themes in hand, I entered a reflective phase of elucidating
meanings through a process of altering the frames of reference, including looking to the underside
of experience, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives. Structural
descriptions of the phenomenon were derived from imaginatively reflecting on aspects of textural
descriptions, using a variety of lenses and considering universal structures that might precipitate
feelings and thought with reference to the experience. I searched for examples to vividly portray
the invariant structural themes. Bergum (1989) had organized her phenomenological descriptions
existentially, weaving her phenomenological description against the existentials of temporality,
spatiality, corporeality, and sociality. I mainly worked the text analytically and with the textural
data in hand, referred back to psychoanalytic object relations theory—the original conceptual
framework (as outlined in Chapter one)—as an interpretive structure, now superimposed in this
phase of the analysis to uncover the underlying structure of the experience of holding and being
held in mind. I extrapolated themes and qualities that might account for how feelings and
thoughts connected with the phenomenon arise. It was a struggle to capture the fullness of the
maternal experience in linguistic form, given that the women themselves, particularly in the
earlier months, struggled to capture in words their immediate experience.

I searched etymological sources of key words that emerged in the analysis, e.g., ‘contain;’
‘wean;’ ‘realize,’ in an attempt to re-locate the basis of maternal experience in its experiential
roots. van Manen (1984) had traced the word ‘parenting’ to it’s origin in “providing spaces that
rear children ... spaces where children live and exist as children,” and “to make available space
and ground for being” (p. 53). I referred back to the literature on maternal holding, relating what
was emerging in the analysis with more positivistic accounts, and consulted the related phenomenological literature on smiling, crying, mothering. I returned to poetic readings, which might be considered the quintessential embodiment of lived experience, in order to find distilled verse that captured what I came to understand as the essential nature of the phenomenological experience, poetry itself epitomizing the reflected life. For Rilke (1993) poems “are experiences” based on “blood-remembering” (p. 93), that is, they require experiential remembering, re-living, forgetting and waiting with patience for memory to come round again. Of ‘lived’ memories of experience, he writes, “Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves” can verse arise from within (p. 94). Phenomenological research requires a similar indwelling, the outcome being an integration of the perceptual and conceptual in disclosing the underlying meaning of the experience. Through the continuity of the writing, I worked toward integrating the underlying dynamics with the immediacy of the experience, making links between the phenomenon as experienced and its inherent structure. The process was much more interweaved than the current discussion implies.

Synthesis

The final phase of the reflective analysis involved integrating the textural and structural descriptions into a unified synthesis of the essence of the experience of holding and being held in mind. I portrayed this synthesis thematically across transition points, in accordance with the metathemes that emerged in the analysis in chapters four through six. Chapter six comprises metathemes derived from the sixth month data, in addition to metathemes that were common to both the sixth and ninth month levels. A developmental overview of the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, which documents change over the nine month period is presented in chapter seven, and includes a schematic representation of the developmental process.

‘Essence’ according to Husserl (1931), refers to that which is common or universal to an experience, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is. It is never totally exhausted, but rather the final word on the topic for the present time from the particular vantage point of the researcher. It should be borne in mind that the way the women in this study described their experience of ‘being there’ for their babies is situated in a particular culture at a particular moment in history and it is from this that the essence of the phenomenon was derived.

The construct ‘maternal space’ was used in this study (a) phenomenologically, to elucidate the women’s evolving phenomenological experience of having a space inside in which to contain an infant, in the face of the observed pull of a baby and (b) dynamically, to elucidate potential
movement within inner psychic space for both mother and infant. The hermeneutic phenomenological method facilitated an exploration and portrayal of both facets.

The method, on some level, mirrored the phenomenological experience. As the women spoke to their struggle in feeling “pulled” in different ways, “split,” and “torn” in their attempts to “balance” contradictory aspects of experience, I also felt throughout the process, a strong pull at times to hold onto disjointed elements of experience. The whole analytic process of discovering themes and metathemes is in fact, according to Tesch (1987), fraught with paradox: one must remain both informed and naive, engaged and distant, focused and open (flexible), forthright and patient. The ongoing process of going from the raw experiential data to their structural essences as a means to revive the pre-linguistic basis of the experience, involved competing acts of engagement and reflection, immersion and abstraction. As researcher, I brought to the task an analytic approach, an openness to being moved by the experience, and a willingness to immerse myself in and reflect on the material. Letting go of my preconceived notions was enormously more difficult for me, but is perhaps where the greatest learning took place.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, ‘validity’ of the data is generally discussed in terms of the trustworthiness of the research in representing the reality of the participants’ experience, so renamed, since the term ‘validity’ fails to take into account the notion of multiple constructions of reality. It is generally assessed according to credibility, confirmability and transferability of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The first, *credibility*, refers to truth-value: the extent to which the experience of the participants is accurately represented. It was maximized here, through prolonged engagement with participants, multiple observations and triangulation of methods, the ongoing engagement with participants over time lending credibility to the data.

*Confirmability* was enhanced by repeatedly returning to the original data, that is, the interview and observation transcripts, in order to re-locate and check the accuracy of the primary constituents, e.g., themes and metathemes as derived in the analysis. Confirmability (verification) was further enhanced by building into the analysis a return to the source in order “to examine the extent to which the emergent analysis fit the phenomenon as described and as observed” (Patton, 1989, p. 47). It entailed returning again and again to the participants throughout the data collection and analysis phases with the transcripts, the portraits and later with the phenomenological description to confirm their accuracy.
The term, *transferability* replaces that of *generalizability* in qualitative research, the former resting on the development of rich or "thick" contextualized descriptions of the experience under study, so developed, to promote resonance in the reader, in contrast to the concept of generalizability in more positivistic studies, which does not usually pay heed to context (Merriam, 1988). Here, the description of the phenomenon in experience-rich language provided a means of comparison across situations.

I sought to enhance the trustworthiness of the data by: 1) employing triangulation of methods; 2) working collaboratively with the participants from the initial contact through to the analysis phase; and 3) explicating the interpretive process, which included monitoring my subjective experience throughout the life of the project, as suggested by Glesne and Peshkin (1992), Lather (1986), and Merriam (1988):

1) Triangulation of methods, which generally entails corroborating the descriptive information through varied sources, here entailed synthesizing the data gathered through descriptive accounts of the experience, observations of the infant mother dyads and ongoing personal reflections with respect to being a participant observer. I employed these different data collection methods not just for confirmation purposes, but as means to obtain an understanding of the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives. The structure of the interviews themselves provided an opportunity to follow up on experiences communicated verbally and non-verbally over time and to check the internal consistency of comments made at different times.

2) Actively involving participants both in the emergent design and aspects of the interpretive process insured that their perspective was considered and represented throughout the study. In keeping with the collaborative nature of the research design, participants received transcripts of the interviews between meetings, which they were invited to review and edit for errors or misrepresentations. This served as a member check to confirm the dependability of the original narrative accounts. Participants were further invited to review the textural portraits to check their accuracy in representing their experience and were given a copy of the final creative synthesis for their commentary to insure that the final representation was sufficiently comprehensive and representative of their experience. Finally, participants were asked at the end of each meeting how they directly experienced the research process itself, and their feedback was incorporated both into the structure of subsequent meetings where relevant, and into the main body of the analysis.

3) The hermeneutic phenomenological method employed has been rigorously outlined, with the systematic documentation of each phase leaving it open for scrutiny by others. Through
constant self reflection, which included documenting my subjective reactions as a participant observer, my own understandings, misunderstandings, assumptions, biases and capacity to distort the information were continually monitored and evaluated. I monitored my analytic perceptions by constantly asking myself if the emergence of a theme for example, fit with the participant’s experience as opposed to being a preconceived notion of my own. This required both keeping in check my own subjective responses to what was observed, and drawing them out as a valuable source of information, the researcher’s subjectivity here serving as a valuable means toward enhancing understanding and bringing forth insight.
Chapter Three: Portraits of Relationship

In this chapter, the four women and their infants are introduced. Selected excerpts of their individual experiences of holding a baby in mind across the four transitions are presented in the women’s own words for the purpose of providing a window into the raw pre-reflective experience and contextualizing the phenomenological analysis. Excerpts of the observed interactions are integrated into each portrait to give voice to the infants’ experience and to provide a descriptive account of the relational dynamic in flux. Interpretation of the underlying meaning of the experience is not given here, although the way in which the material in each portrait is pieced together reflects what stood out for the researcher as pertinent to each relationship, with editorial elision in the quoted passages indicated by three dots. Brief biographical facts are included prior to the presentation of each portrait with personal names and place names changed in accordance with preserving participant anonymity.

Corin and Kyle: ‘Knowing that staves off uncertainty’

Corin was with her partner ten months before she conceived. The pregnancy was planned and they were both in their mid-thirties when Kyle was born. Corin’s immediate family live nearby. Both parents, second generation Canadians, have a post graduate education, live in the city and their combined earning is approximately $132,000.

At four and a half weeks

There was a baby in me from the moment the stick turned blue. From the day I got pregnant I remember thinking, “Hold the hand rail,” as I run down the stairs. “I’ve got a baby now!” It wasn’t a huge transition. I was just mentally ready to be here for him. I knew just what to expect. In my life ... I spent a lot of energy reflecting about myself, in terms of who I was and how I’d want to be as a parent. I know I have what it takes. I mean, mostly he just wants the food and he’s comforted by hearing me breathe and being close to me and he seems to know my body sounds. He doesn’t like when I put him down. I think that’s just it, the soothing, the comfort, the ... my voice, my sound, he ... the security more than the food, because the food is only one piece of it. Being born was a big enough trauma and coming out! A big piece too, is that he’s feeling the security from me. I really am happy that he’s identifying me as his comfort person, but I feel bad for his dad.
My mom's been ... sort of stressing me about, "You gotta cook too!" and ... I'd be telling her what I needed from her to come and cook for me. My friend's baby is six days older, and they started off a pound in the difference, but her kid is just a butter ball ... and I'm feeling, "Am I not able to nourish him enough?" Company helps a lot, 'cause I feel there's another set of hands. I can either pass him off and do stuff or take a nap. I like to have ... some semblance of organization and that doesn't happen a lot now, which is okay.

It's hard for me to feel I can't get up and go ... but he's sort of stuffed and I haven't felt like it. He started pyoooking and not just the regular spitting up, but dripping out of the mouth and ... I was in a panic one night not knowing what that was ... like, this isn't normal! The most that chills me out is sleep. When I'm very tired and need a break or no one's around, something sort of plays around in my head ... like my friend's baby's thriving and I'm not sure if mine is. We've been to the doctor a lot! [laughs] It was puzzling me that her kid had gained so much in the same time. I start thinking that maybe there's something wrong with the milk! The amount of feeling I have for him overwhelms me. Last night I woke up sort of surprised. He was lying on my chest and we fell asleep together and I've been nervous that I might fall asleep and let go of him and he'd just roll out of my arms. As long as I can get a couple of hours I'm fine, but if I'm really over-tired, then my patience is less. I'm still very patient, but my tolerance is less. Like I'm doing what I have to do, but I'm sort of like, "Oh my God, I'm going to need to leave here!" I've got some stress about when I'm at my wits end and I want to be able to let Vince sleep because he has to get up to work, but there are times when I'm barely getting sleep and want to be able to say, "Your turn!" Kyle was so fussy last night that Vince came out and slept on the couch and I was like, "Oh God, it's heading for disaster already!" I don't really want him starting on the couch. We both are committed to us having our space, so in my spare seconds today I'll be trying to read up.

If he gets upset 'cause he's hungry, I can resolve that for him in a couple of minutes. [Kyle cries an uncomfortable cry as he writhes in the sleeper and Corin strokes his back.] Did you have a bad dream? ... a coming out of the world dream? Oh, you hungry? Shush! [kisses him]. If it's tired crying, I'm now starting to let him do a little bit more and he usually stops, but I don't want him to be upset. The worst crying ... is in the car seat, when he's really screaming ... and he just can't be consoled, not until I pick him up. Last week, I had been with a friend for lunch and ... he was fussing the whole time in the restaurant, so I had to hold him ... and when he fell asleep I thought, "I gotta go now ... I know my nerves are frayed enough today, that to hear him scream the whole way home in the car, I wouldn't be able to do." I think its also just
hormonal at this point too. Some days I feel real emotional and mushy ... and some days it's gone and then I start crying again over nothing. It's happy crying too. It's not even that I need time on my own. I just need sleep.

I'm not really doing much with him and it's coming to my mind that maybe I should. If he's awake, I'll put him in the crib and he'll look at his mobile until he gets bored. When he's looking at me, it's much more like I'm interacting and talking with him, 'cause he's interacting back. I want to provide for him in some ways similar to my analyst, I guess. I've often felt that I could take whatever into that relationship and yeah, it would be okay. I don't feel hung up on doing the right things as much as I thought I would, but what's coming naturally to me. My first priority is to be a parent. Work is ... not my life. When I saw him first it was pretty unbelievable. I don't know how to articulate it. I just balled and held him and couldn't believe it. I still sometimes can't [tearful]. Sometimes I'm just so, wow! did I really have this baby, and he's fine and I've been through all of that? I feel an enormous kind of overwhelming ... unconditional sort or love ... for him. He likes to be near me. I let go of life and he lets go and he knows ... he can express when he's uncomfortable and be taken care of. It's not that I feel I know the answers, 'cause I don't. He's been in our bed the last three nights now. I don't want this to be a habit. I value the private relationship that my husband and I have. It's neat to have someone who feels the same way about this guy as I do, who can relate to some of that feeling.

Sometimes, just when I think I've got him figured out—this was something I didn't know—he changes the rules. I thought we could count on him sleeping three hours and then he switches it to an hour and a half. It's the only thing that people have said to me that I have found that helpful. What I've learned is, there's nothing written in stone right now. There's this bit of stress about, "Oh my God, one month has already flown by!" There's things I'm anticipating doing, but I can't get anything done these days, but probably in a couple of weeks that will change. Things are changing all the time. I expected that though.

With Kyle sleeping on his side on Corin's lap, she places her open palm over his hand and gently strokes it between her fore-finger and thumb, massaging his back with her other hand. Slowly she inches her thumb into his half-closed fist and stretches her forefinger up along the length of his fore-arm, her little finger spanning the width of his chest. Kyle remains calm, his mouth widening as she watches his expression. As she goes to remove a spit up cloth away form his face, his body twitches and his arm jerks upward, reflex-like, touching his head. Now comes a facial grimace, a short-lived body wiggle akin to a shiver, although there is no indication that he is cold. His right leg jerks as he brings one hand down over his face again, the other ascending
to meet it. Loose-fisted, his hands flutter nimbly and remain in contact for just a moment. His fists open (crossed over now as his extended fingers shudder), then freeze fan-like. Corin visually follows his moves, her left arm hugging his lower back. She touches his joined hands, then withdraws, to clasp her own above her head. Yawning with a mellowed expression, she rolls her head downward onto her right shoulder and laughs silently. It makes her belly quiver and rocks Kyle gently, although his expression remains fixed. Placing her finger into his half-closed palm, she strokes his hand with her index finger. His hand opens and she immediately withdraws. He twitches. She touches his fingers again and comments dreamily: "I won't disturb him!" Momentarily, she withdraws her hand, then lightly re-stimulates his whole hand with one finger. Silence. Touching his now curled fingers one by one, the tip of her middle finger meets his. She raises and re-places his right arm, then touching it more pointedly, withdraws her hand. "Now we'll get some stretching!" Kyle writhes, snorts, closes his fist and extends his left arm and fingers. His fingers quiver, his right leg flexes and he jerks his head back and re-settles. As she lifts his limp hand, his other opens in a flutter, then closes. She fingers his open palm. "We used to swaddle him very tightly, but now he'll push--[Corin raises his hand with her thumb inside his fist.]--the covers off!" Kyle remains still as she touches his fingers. She strokes his little finger between her thumb and fore-finger, then burrows her finger into his fist, placing her fore-finger on top. Lying upright on her chest now, Kyle raises his head a couple of times, bopping against her chin, his hand open. "He loves to feel my skin up here!" Supporting his neck and rounded torso, she gently draws him back toward her, cupping his head in her palm. He nuzzles under her chin and as he raises his head again, she leans back to create a comfortable gap for him to fall into. When he raises his head again, she cradles it in her palm, and draws him closer. Facing downward, his fingers extend as he makes a groaning sound. Smiling, Corin embraces his mid-back with her forearm and protectively holds him close.

**Eleven days later**

Lying supine in his crib, wide-eyed, his mobile turning overhead, his hands open and legs loosely kicking, Kyle focuses on a toy opposite to where Corin is peering down. She gently taps his stomach with her finger. "Hi! Sweetie pie!" [high pitched tone] "Are you going to smile?" A second tap. "You getting bored?" Kyle moves his head to centre. Corin squeezes the elephant's ear and his head jerks back in delight. With his tongue protruding, he contentedly rocks his head side to side, waves his arms and re-settles to face his right. Visually following the mobile, his body remains still. Corin touches his stomach again and he yawns as he watches the mobile now from the corner of his eye, his expression fading. Corin touches his forearm, but he persists in
looking the other way. Slowly, he turns toward the mobile figures as they move through his line of vision, his expression growing serious. As his arm touches the elephant’s ear, he smiles, swallows, and rocks his head from left to right. He re-focuses on the toys to his right, then looks straight above him. “Where’s the smile?” Corin touches his stomach again and his arm flails. Touching the elephant’s ear, he waves his arms excitedly, emits a half yawn, stretches and kicks both legs downward, bending them at the knees. Squealing, he smiles and begins to move his head indirectly toward her voice. Corin shakes the elephant’s nose in his line of vision and Kyle opens his mouth as if going to enclose its attached bell.

Lifted up from under the arms, Kyle groans as one of the mobile figures brushes across his face. Corin pulls him close and kisses him as they make contact. She holds him suspended face to face for a couple of seconds and tells him not to cry. Pulled closer, his arms flail. Placed lying on the change table, he looks away with a serious expression. Corin pulls on the musical. “Does Mommy get a smile?” She rubs his stomach and he looks in the other direction, yawning. “Oh, it’s like, leave me alone!” Leaning over to dress him, she greets him again. Kyle gurgles and for the first time his eyes meet hers. He breathes excitedly and her voice elevates animatedly as she rubs his stomach with her flat palm. He enthusiastically shakes his head in response to her smiling. She speaks. He gurgles. She focuses on his eyes. He mooches, his expression growing serious as he holds her glance. She swiftly puts him into his overalls and he looks up at her with a serene expression, their eyes meeting. ——— Captivated by her voice, he focuses on her face as she snaps closed the fasteners and strokes diagonally with her palms down his middle. Turned sideways, he wiggles his feet and waves his arms in the air, keeping her in view. Corin pushes her finger into his fist and raises his arm and he smiles, holding her gaze. She kisses his hand, her finger still enclosed. “My boy!” Moving closer, she cradles his face in her hands and he turns away—“Hi!”—and looks toward her again with a big smile. Holding onto his wrist, she kisses his hand again and snuggles close, kissing his head and caressing his chin gently with her forefingers. He smiles profusely with pleasure and stares into her eyes as she strokes his cheek. Corin thrusts her finger into his closed palm yet again and opening it out fan-like, kisses his fingers. She imitates his sounds and he looks away, more serious now. She tickles lightly under his chin and he shudders. Shrugging her off, he begins to cry. She lifts him up, cradles his head in her palm and he looks up at her, yawning. Meeting her glance, he arches his body and pulls away. Whooshed upwards, his eyes close drowsily, his head resting on her hand. She kisses him and draws him close. Raising his arms, he arches his body away from her embrace. Corin rocks him some more and he rests his head on her shoulder, his eyes closing. She carries him
diagonally across her chest, his head cradled in her palm, and backs herself into an armchair, carefully slipping into a recline, pregnant-like, with the ball of the baby on her front. And patting his rounded body in a protective embrace, trying not to disturb his sleep, she looks down at his expression, puts her feet up, picks another piece of fluff from his hair, kisses his face and rubs her cheek against his endearingly.

**At thirteen and a half weeks**

*He likes to be held, but that was much stronger the last time, like anybody could comfort him. I’m now much more clearly the one that can comfort him. There’s nothing in the world like him smiling and talking. He’s got his needs of when he does all this stuff, but I could ... sit and listen to it all day. I can see when he starts to do it more, I won’t get anything done. I just love to see him excited and squeal and giggle ... and he’s talking. It probably makes me feel some sense of reward. He’s definitely enjoying playing and looking around. He’s developing fine and he’s happy and excited by seeing me. [As Corin goes to lift Kyle out of the swing, he lets out a cry.] Listen to these noises! I love them! He can’t decide whether to laugh or cry. [Kyle nurses] He’s always snuggling in. I love when he nurses, when I don’t have my shirt on at night he has his little hand on me and sort of strokes very very light like a feather. That’s why I don’t want to give up breast feeding. The physical part has been very hard, but the emotional part I don’t want to give up at all. When I put him to sleep at night, he lets his head fall back so I get to nuzzle in his little neck here. [demonstrates] That’s a very favourite spot. I love the giving him life sort of stuff, that I’m the one who’s nurturing him and he looks good and he’s healthy and gaining weight and it’s me and I’m feeding my baby! There’s something very rewarding in being the one to sustain him. Sometimes while he’s eating he stops to smile and take a break and say, “Hi mom, I still love ye!” He can’t decide sometimes whether to eat or to play.

One of the things I had in mind at 8 weeks was my nipples would stop being sore. I decided to take him off that boob. It was the first time since he was born that I saw light at the end of that tunnel. After about a week, it started to hurt again and I was very discouraged. The lactation consultant did have a couple of ideas that I was thinking myself, so it’s been more tolerable again for the last few days. It’s a puzzle. I’m not as optimistic I’m going to make it for a year, but I’m going to keep pushing myself to keep going and tolerate the pain. I think still sleep is a nice challenge. It was Valentine’s day that he went into his crib. I was wanting it to happen by the time he was three months. My mom was baby-sitting (She sort of tries to prove me wrong!) ... so she was sort of, “I’ll try it and we’ll see if it works!” So by the time we got home ...
she had put him down ... She said maybe he was restless because we were moving around. He was very close to me and could smell my milk. [Addresses Kyle, who is grinning] You little flirty boy you! He's been in the crib ever since at night and hasn't really roused. We have a ritual. We shut all the lights and make sure he knows it's night time and I sit ... with him and he falls asleep basically on my shoulder. When I put him down ... I can hear him rustling, but I walk right out and he puts himself to sleep more solidly. I wanted him to know his environment so that when he wakes up in the night, he feels he can soothe himself back to sleep.

I'd like a little more flexibility in the day ... so he's not always in my arms. I'm working on it. Actually, it's a double edged sword, 'cause I'm not really working on it. I enjoy snuggling him and I enjoy him lying and sleeping on me ... 'cause he won't sleep very long out of my arms in the day time. I'm doing it for me as much as, if not more than for him. If I trained him ... he might even be happier, but ... he's very calm in my arms when he's sleeping, so for now it feels right. Some days, though, I wish I had the choice. I just sort of cope with being a little less organized in my life and a little more tired. I'm not ready to give it up.

He definitely doesn't like to be bored for very long. He needs more stimulation. He likes to play and interact. He loves to giggle with me now and make noises and talk and look around, so I am always trying to find him something interesting to keep his attention. As he's getting more interactive I'm really enjoying it, not as much entertaining him with objects, but ... me making him smile and laugh and playing with him. And then I like to be able to put him down in front of the activity centre and relax for a few minutes while I'm trying to get something done. Sometimes I'm overwhelmed about how to do small things with him, like the grocery shopping. Yesterday I took a cart and put his car seat in it and there's no room for groceries! I spend time looking out the window, thinking, checking, have they shoveled the sidewalks yet and sort of stressing a bit about things that used to be easy. There's just so much energy that goes into plan[ning]? That kind of stuff I find, invades me in a stressful way [but] they're just sorta transitional things.

I'm trying to figure out his routine and starting to feel a little bit itchy to have some more structure in my life right now. The less structure I have the more tired I feel. I want to start going to the Y one of these days and maybe gymboree. I think he's getting there. He sleeps better at night when he's been out and about and we're in and out of the car and stroller ... and I enjoy those days more too when I'm busy, running around. I'm in the transition, because I'm starting to feel like I'm getting a little bit too lazy and I don't feel like going out. Yet that doesn't feel so good for me--I never quite feel that I'm awake and out--but some days it does! I'm not used to
having that in my life, so there's a novelty for me in it too. The times that I feel better about myself are the times that I'm running around like a maniac, doing different things. I don't like to be bored. [Addresses Kyle] Do you want to play while we're sitting here?

My husband is also in my mind all day in a way, but it's different because that's more of a want, and with Kyle it's more of a need. Like I have to, whether I want to or not, consider him in everything I do. I can't get my hair cut without my mother or Vince, because Kyle needs to be held. I anticipated before he was born having more naps, but I didn't anticipate that he doesn't want to go out of my arms and then I didn't want him going out of my arms! The night we went to the hospital ... I was really worried that he was going to die ... like they reacted so quickly and we jumped the queue. They didn't know what was going on. I checked it out with the nurse right away ... and she said, “We'll fix him!” and I ... realized I was in the best place. [Addressing Kyle] You almost done? This is Mommy's sore one. No whipping it off! I can just sort of sense his head's about to whip me out of his mouth. Oh, here goes! Whip it out and watch Mommy squeal! I can tell that he's fidgety and sort of wanting to get food over with, so he can get on and play. He's more interested in what else is around him, I guess.

Lying half-dressed on the change table, hand in mouth, Kyle thrashes his legs about, gurgling as he watches Corin's face. "What a story! What else do you have to tell me?" Corin leans over, takes hold of his feet and strokes them with her finger. He hollers to her and she kisses his toes, to which he beams and flings out his arms—"My boy!"—and smiles profusely. Corin draws closer, making vocal clicking sounds and holds onto his hands as she pulls him forward. Spotting something colourful on the wall, Kyle turns his face to one side. "Tell me some more!" Corin kisses his exposed cheek and places him back down. He kicks his legs, waves his outstretched arms and opens his mouth as Corin opens his diaper. He watches her expression closely as she leans over. Pulling his shirt up, she brings her mouth over his belly button and makes a rasping sound. He brings his hand up to his mouth and gurgles as he watches her and sucks his fingers. ~~~ Still gnawing on his fingers, suspended by the ankles, he looks straight above him. As he is wiped, he looks at her, opens his mouth and eyes wide, and gurgles with his tongue protruding, his arms flailing, with one leg outstretched. He squeals when wiped with a wet cotton ball. "What you got to tell me?" He nods his head and waves his arms as he watches her, smiling.

Kyle's expression turns serious. He sucks his hands. "Oh those hands are tasty today!" Corin draws closer and his smile widens. Fingers in mouth, he averts his gaze. "You tell Mommy a story!" He returns her glance and as she leans more directly over him, he makes a loud
gurgling sound, takes his hands out of his mouth, and looks directly at her. “What happens next?” He vocalizes and she imitates. He repeats the sound while laughing with his chin in the air and a lengthy vocal dance ensues as they remain locked in each other’s gaze: K: Hee ah! C: Yeah! K: Eh ya! C: Eh ya! Kyle makes a clicking sound. She imitates. He gurgles, his chin in the air, and then gazes back at her. K: Ooh! C: Ooooh! K: Ah heeeeee! Corin makes clicking sounds. K: Gee hee ha! C: Yeah! K: Ah! C: Ye heh heh! Oh, are you Mommy’s happy boy? Kyle watches her with arms outstretched.

As Corin ducks from view to fetch his clothes, Kyle looks upward, covered only with a cloth diaper, his arms and leg movements slowing down as he visually follows her moves. She makes another rasping sound on his belly and he brings his fingers into his mouth again. “Your hands are so tasty today ... Are you getting tired of talking?” Corin pulls the musical string and places the ring on Kyle’s right wrist, to which he kicks his legs, not taking his eyes off her. Growing still again, his arm reaches out. “Where’s mommy’s smile?” He draws his hands closer to his chest and smiles in response to her sounds. “Mommy loves your smiling. Mommy loves everything about you!” He watches her face, his arm flailing. She kisses his toes as he watches closely, his leg shooting up into the air. Corin makes rasping sounds on his toes, then slowly kisses them individually as she watches his expression. He looks on with a relaxed smile. “Mmm, delicious toes!” As she kisses his big toe, he gurgles from the back of this throat, emitting a pleasurable squeal that grows more invigorated with each kiss. “Delicious you! Yes!!” Kyle squeals and kicks his legs out flat. She kisses his belly button as he watches attentively. And again. A gurgling smile appears as he stretches his body and flexes his legs. “Are you ready for French lessons?”

Placed in his outfit, Kyle watches his mother with lips semi-pursed. “Ah, you’re looking at me - very intensely!” [translated from French]. Sucking his fingers profusely, he watches her expression. “Is that all?” [translation] Corin catches a hold of his hands and he gurgles as he looks into her face. Drawn a little closer, they vocalize back and forth. “What a beautiful story you’re telling me!” She kisses his hand “Then what?” Silence. She kisses his hand again and he turns slightly away, placing his free hand back in his mouth. She kisses his held hand and he passes a glance. [Again in French.] “Yes, you’re tired again, I think!” Drawn closer, he turns his head sideways, his arm growing limp. Pulled upright, he falls back a little and taken by surprise, his expression grows serious and he turns pale. Corin rocks him side to side, his face growing flushed as she makes a rasping sound near his ear. He opens his mouth and incorporates his fingers. Corin kisses his hands. “Hello little butter ball!” He feels her face with one hand, and
visually explores her expression. Placing more fingers in his mouth, he turns away and she kisses his chin. "No barfing up all mommy's good milk that she made for you!" Lifted out of his depth an uncomfortable look washes over his face. He grimaces and turns pale. Corin slides him down her front, facing outwards. Holding him diagonally, she makes rasping sounds on his cheek. Kyle takes an exciting gulp and takes a swipe at his own reflection in the mirror. Kissed again, his body writhes, a frown forming. Drawn close into a nursing position on the feeding cushion on her lap, he kicks his legs, still fussing and only when he gets a hold of the nipple in his mouth, does the crying subside. Making lapping sounds, he nuzzles in, and placing his hand over her breast, looks up at the picture on the wall. "Are you lookin' at Granma's picture?" Sucking frantically, Kyle makes a lot of noise as Corin watches him settle into the feed.

What stands out for me is just how much I love to interact and play with him. I just sort of could eat him up. I love him to death. I'm moved by his smiling, his laughing, his giggling, his talking, his gazing into my eyes. [Kisses him] It warms me inside. The part where we're talking and interacting (is) all relatively new. He's just started talking up a storm. I want to make sure I'm there when he needs me there or wants me, but also to recognize that ... he's happy to play by himself right now. I like him to have that independence from me and to enjoy his alone time too. He wants both. He enjoys our times together and he enjoys sitting in the chair looking around and exploring his environment and kinda checking things out. It gives me a little break. Right now, he ... doesn't want for really anything ... and I think he's bright and everything and I'm not doing anything, just trying to speak French to him a bit everyday. When (Vince) gets home from work ... I pass him off. I want to re-charge. I keep bedtime very routine. I'm thinking, life doesn't have to stop because he's going to bed. Like I wanted his routine at bedtime (but) I didn't make that transition for him. I don't want to disturb it.

**At twenty three weeks**

Lying on his back on the floor, directly facing a suspended activity centre, Kyle sucks his fingers and makes gurgling sounds to the music, while Corin sits on the floor beside him. He rolls slightly away from her towards an abacus frame, returns to centre, extends his arms and legs and starts kicking excitedly at the activity centre. As it rattles, he shakes his extended arms intently and squeals with delight. Corin remains watchful, silent. Holding onto his foot with one hand, he shakes a rattle vigorously with the other. Singing along, Corin leans over and Kyle turns and whacks the abacus frame with the rattle. "Are you playing music Sweetie?" Still prone, he looks the other way, his expression turning serious. When he returns to centre, Corin's face
brightens and she leans over and gives him a squeaky kiss on the nose. He doesn’t stir. Singing enthusiastically, she leans over and places her palm over his and shakes the rattle. He shakes it independently and transfers it to the other hand. Placing his two feet on the suspended activity centre, he manipulates the sound board with the ball of each foot. Handed another toy, he discards it and reaches for Corin’s finger, grasps it and yawns. Corin plants a kiss on his forehead and as she withdraws, he watches her with outstretched arms. As she draws closer again, he laughs and resumes kicking, more concentrated now. Hitting the sound maker, he kicks harder, more trial and error, his expression growing more intense as he kicks with extended legs.

I manoeuvre the abacus toy that is obstructing my view and he glances over, then returns to kicking. With arms outstretched and fingers flailing, he focuses on his feet. A fleeting glance over to his mother brings forth an excited squeal; he briefly glances my way, and resumes kicking. “Who are you looking at?” Corin asks. With arms and legs outstretched, he returns to face centre, fingers excitedly half opening and closing and mouth ajar. Another fleeting glance to his mother spurs him on. When Corin leans over to manipulate the sound activities and label the colours, his enthusiasm wanes. His body turning flaccid, he looks to his side and reaches for a ball. Corin inches a toy over to him. He latches onto a cloth rattle and hurling it, regains his smile and resumes kicking.

“What you want to do now, my Sweetie?” He curls up his body and rolls sideways to face his mother diagonally, then yanks his head back out of her line of vision, his eyes spanning the room. Reaching out his arms, he rolls onto his stomach, his legs kicking behind him and pulls himself up onto his elbows. Corin shakes a rattle already within his reach. He grasps it and transfers it to his other hand and whacks it up and down on the rug. “Beautiful music!” As Corin draws closer, Kyle closes his eyes and turns his head to face the other way. She kisses the top of his head. Lying on his stomach, hand in his mouth, his back stroked, Kyle stares ahead. As he looks at the camera, his feet dancing in the air, an uncomfortable expression washes over Corin’s face: “You’re just doin’ nothin’ Sweetie! You’re just thinkin’ about everything!” [laugh]. She lies diagonally within his line of vision and strokes his head. He averts his gaze, explores the cavity of his mouth with his thumb and looks toward the camera again. “Are you thinkin’ about the world?” He shifts his attention back and forth between his mother and the observer, while vigorously sucking his thumb and rhythmically kicking his legs. As Corin tries to catch his attention, Kyle reaches for a shaker and glares at the camera seductively. Placing her hand on his, she gestures animatedly, encouraging him to sing, but he proceeds to play with the rattle, and lowering his head, forms a frown. ——
Seated upright, Corin lets Kyle go as he sits balanced, feet outstretched, holding onto his toes. “Who are you lookin’ at?” she asks, as he looks in my direction again. Looking down, he leans forward. “Go for it Sweetie!” Kyle persists in reaching after something on the playmat. Corin releases her hold and pulling him back by the waist, he sits unsupported. Embraced, his eyes glance sideways for a split second, to which Corin rests her head against his upper arm and whispers: “Oh, what did I miss that you heard?” He twitches and as he leans forward, Corin yanks him back to upright position. Letting him go for a second, she almost immediately curves her body around his to catch his expression. Pulled back, he squeals. Placed standing in front of the activity centre, he reaches for the handle and losing his balance, topples backwards in a gentle fall onto the play mat, Corin’s grasp breaking the fall. Smiling upon coming to a landing, he struggles to pull himself up. He looks from side to side, then shifts his gaze between Corin and the observer. As Corin walks toward the kitchen, he follows her visually, smiles and kicks his feet to the music from a position of lying on his belly. He looks around, his legs moving to the music, and gurgles up at the observer behind the camera. Making swimming movements with his legs, he puts his thumb in his mouth, lowers his head and looks back and forth between the observer and the soft rattle in his hand. As he squeals with delight, his leg movements squishing up the play mat, Corin calls over: “Is that lady making you giggle?” She returns with her lunch to sit close by him and his expression grows a little serious again. He looks up at me, kicks his legs behind him and makes fish-like shapes with his mouth. He notices a crinkle circle that is attached to the play mat. From the sideline, Corin sings. He looks up at her, laughing. She mimics his sounds. He follows her visually, as she slides in closer now to meet him face to face. Leaning up on his elbows, he giggles as she touches his face endearingly. He puts his thumb in his mouth and turns away and back again. Corin mimics his sounds and pulling him more upright to face the camera, she supports him from behind and lets him go. He smiles and looks ahead with a concentrated expression. She bends over to kiss his cheek and swaying him to the music, he smiles and moves freely. As he looks down, she swoops him up in the air, curls him horizontally across her chest, nuzzles in, kisses his cheek, and returns him to standing. ~~~

I sort of think my kid’s so advanced. He’s interested in that toy that I think is for a much older kid. He plays nice by himself and he plays with mommy. I like watching him motor around. He was very serious in his facial expression. He played for a few minutes, but then stopped and sort of checked you out. I thought he was recognizing there was a new situation. He was trying to be normal, but realizing that there was something different going on. I’m projecting on a six month old!! I tried to lay back and let him play ... then I realized about half way through, I’m
supposed to be playing with him. I don't usually spend that much time with him sitting there. I sort of come, play a few minutes and get up and do something and talk to him from another room and he'll sort of look up at me from in there. I feel I'm always sort of in his space—with him in physical contact all the time—but sometimes at a bit more of a distance. I take it as an opportunity to do something that I need to do. He loves just to ... explore and he checks out where I am. Emotionally, I love being in his space all the time. It's fulfilling. It's a happy place. We dance. We sing. Our space in the day sort of blends. The whole day is very intermingled. It's our joint space. It's easier when he's taking a nap or when someone else is attending to his needs. Then I have my space to be separate from his. I haven't reclaimed everything I need to reclaim, but I definitely do what I need to do, which sometimes is just relax. I'm trying really hard to keep his mornings sacred. He seems to need that time and a good two-hour chunk is very nice for me, but there's a couple of things that I'm starting to feel that the structure's getting in the way of. There's times I want to be able to pick up and go.

His needs are more external from me in a way now—to learn about the world or to meet his own developmental challenge—and some of my needs are just to have my own space. I'd like to create some structure for my life. I'd always been at work or school where the structure is imposed, whereas now ... I make my own and that's a new concept that I've been struggling with. Just this staying home in the mornings and having him take his nap here already feels a lot better for me. The most challenging thing is, just trying to coincide ... the routine and his need.

The other night a cousin baby-sit and he turned his whole body right around to watch me as I walked away and he started to cry. I didn't relax. It was just a matter of, he's not gonna take too well to going to sleep without his routine and I have such a beautiful routine with him! We don't really have a system for a stranger. Usually if he wakes up after an hour and 15 minutes I just hold him closely and make this certain sound, “Aahh!” and rock him. I hold him tight and snuggle my cheek next to his and he'll scream for 5 minutes and he'll usually chant and I'll follow. It's not even a cry, just a mantra. It's a weird sort of chant that I started doing since he was born and he has picked up. It's his going to sleep noise.

I'm starting to feel maybe we should get out more. There were feelings that somehow he was going to feel abandoned by me. I have a hard time with the line between him being frustrated and feeling abandoned. Him feeling frustrated doesn't upset me, but the idea that he feels mummy's—where is she?—that upsets me. I just feel like he's going to wonder what's going on in this world, 'cause we've got a pretty solid routine that he's used to. We're in a phase of feeding this last month. At the beginning it was difficult 'cause it felt like I was being displaced ...
replaced, like I was no longer his sole provider. It evoked some feeling of loss of the intimacy between us or the uniqueness of our relationship together. I’m still nursing, but if I wasn’t around, anyone could feed him cereal and he could be satisfied. There’s a bit of a loss of that oneness of just us, just him getting more independent and stuff, but I don’t feel that way anymore because he squeals with delight... while he’s eating. As a matter of fact... it’s an opportunity for me to have more space and freedom; not that I want more! On Saturday night, I took out three bottles so they wouldn’t be left high and dry and he drank maybe an ounce and the rest was garbage. It breaks my heart. God, I spent hours getting that amount of milk out of me! My supply is depleting. I have only got so much in my freezer!

In some ways he needs me even more emotionally because he definitely knows who I am now and definitely is comforted by me more. He needs me to be here when he wants me. I think he now trusts that I’m here, I’m going to meet his needs. He does light up when he sees me, but it’s more to laugh with me or smile at me. It’s a lot of responsibility and it does create some conflict in me. When I went out Saturday night it wasn’t leaving him. The issue was someone else putting him to bed which no-one’s done, including Vince. These routines are good for him, good for us, but you have to figure out how to be more flexible.

Sometimes I want a bit of change. I’m sort of struggling with the whole routine and structure versus not-structure kind of things. At home in the crib, it’s his space. I think it’s just, “Okay I’m ready to do whatever you want to do with me now mom, but let me sort of be grounded here a bit at home!” It’s a bit restricted. I still somehow... feel like I’d like him to have a nice morning solid nap... because that’s a nice mental break... and the more I get done in my day the more functional I am. A routine at least makes my life a little easier in terms of predictability. I’m trying to impose that pattern on him too. I wasn’t ready to put him out of my arms, when I saw you last. I think life was a lot more overwhelming last time. I’ve got things down pat in terms of, we can pick up and go and it’s not so difficult and because I’m not napping with him, I’ve got more energy. In some ways I’m almost too busy. He’s more demanding. He’s more his own person. He still is pretty easy going. He’ll sit in Vince’s arms and watch TV... but I just think it’s way too passive. He’s not learning anything. I’m spending all day stimulating him and teaching him! I think Vince is so tired himself that he can’t imagine doing anything but sitting in that chair and vegetating in front of the TV and I’m like: “Do something! Don’t just sit there!” ‘cause Kyle is content enough to just sit there and... to be honest, he’s very relaxed in daddy’s arms and he sits there very calm, playing with his toes or his fingers and watching TV and I’m like, “Forget it!”
There’s some routine coming out, but I can’t imagine leaving. I’m already sort of stressing about it all. He’s just so interactive and playful and alert. When I hug him, he sometimes holds me a bit, which he never used to do. It’s still a very special sort of relationship. I’ve mentally decided that I’m going to stay at home and go to work part time, ’cause I get goodies out of being at work. I like the idea of having a piece of both; not a lot of the other, just a little bite-size morsel, so that I have a little space from this.

**At thirty seven weeks**

Sitting on the floor, Kyle pushes along a wheeled toy, while vigilantly looking ahead to the next object in sight. Crawling over the first toy toward the camera case, he follows the camera cord until he comes face to face with the lens and Corin carries him back to his pile of toys. Sitting more squarely, he picks up a ball rattle, shakes it and re-places it on the floor. Corin rolls the wheeled toy back to him and as it crashes into a plastic tub on the floor behind him, knocking it over, Kyle swiftly turns around and crawls over some toys to get it. Striking it, he brings it to his mouth, then holds it at arms length to inspect it. Sitting with legs outstretched, he mouths one of the balls and hits the rattle against his hip. Then as he turns toward the camera, Corin swoops him into the air, kissing him as their faces align. She sits him on her hip and swirls him around enthusiastically to face the camera, while he proceeds to place the ball of the rattle in his mouth, holding onto her waist with his other hand. As she tries to release it from his hold, he yanks at it more vehemently and holds it high above his head. “Ho!” she exclaims, bending over to catch his eye as the music starts. Excitedly, Corin bounces him on her hip and he giggles, shaking the rattle. He tries to lick the ball of it amidst the bouncing and swirling and glances over at the camera. With tongue protruding, his arms wave uncontrollably. When Corin stops, his mouth is ajar, his head turned to the side. Kyle holds his rattle suspended for a moment and as the music starts up again, a smile breaks out on his open mouth.

Spun around again to the music, Kyle draws the rattle closer. As Corin kisses his cheek, he stares at the camera, banging the rattle now with his free hand during the few seconds of suspended motion. In circular motion they spin to Corin’s singing, with Kyle inquisitively looking at the rattle, cross-eyed. Held in front of a mirror, he holds onto the rattle tenaciously, his other arm hanging limp, and looks away. As Corin tries to engage him by making loud trumpet sounds, he resumes banging the rattle. She wipes his forehead as she pants, a little out of breadth now. Kyle looks toward the camera and smiling, Corin follows his glance: “Are you fascinated?” Persisting in looking ahead, he shakes his rattle as she claps loudly from behind.
Looking back and forth between his mother and the observer, his eyes rest on at the camera, and he proceeds to crawl over the toys toward the camera case. Corin follows. As he draws closer to the observer, Corin slides him back on his belly across the carpet. Picking up a toy, he taps and looks at it briefly, then scurries in the direction of the camera case. Corin stays put, momentarily; then goes after him again, pulling him back by his feet. She manipulates the activity centre to get his attention and with an excited expression, he heads toward the camera again on hands and knees. Sitting cross-legged, Corin sings and lowers herself to his level. He lifts the rattle high, then strums it against his leg, excitedly bouncing to the music ... Crawling toward the camera again, Corin pulls him back by the legs “I got you!” She pushes the activity centre to within his reach and he reaches over to close one of the open lids, while she opens another. He closes it and they proceed, Kyle closing, Corin opening. As Kyle goes to climb up onto it, his body weight slides it along the floor. Pulling to standing, he reaches the furthest open lid, closes it, looks to the observer, then at Corin, and she holds his gaze and brings her head closer to his, smiling: “You don’t ever give that big smile for the camera! Mommy gets the smile!”

Kyle crawls on into the next room. Corin follows and sits clapping, her arms outstretched. He turns around and bangs on the footstool between them. Turning back to the books, he rubs the corner of his eye and pulls to standing. Banging on the footstool again, he slithers down onto the floor, crawls in my direction and stops at my feet. Corin follows and sits by his side. He proceeds to crawl around by the leg of the horse and pulling to standing, holds onto the horse’s leg and bounces. Encouraged, he stands up and yanks his head the whole way back to see the camera/observer. Corin laughs. Kyle looks back to the horse and bounces vigorously. Spurred on, he stops and looks directly at her again, between waving his free hand, squealing and looking back to the horse excitedly. “Oh it’s ‘Windmills’!” she entices, referring to the song. He looks at her, then back to the camera. She beckons. He squeals and turns to face the camera. She leans forward smiling and he swipes at her face with his free hand, the other holding onto the horse tenaciously. She pulls back reflexively and watches quietly as Kyle holds onto the horse with both hands. Looking over at her, he squeals with excitement. Corin watches intently. He thuds down and crawls right under the horse. She goes to reach for him, but reneges. He reaches into the toy box and pulls out a rattle. She stays put. Sitting under the horse with his back to her, he squeals and bangs the rattle, crawls out and heads for the camera, new toy in hand. Picking up a toy en route, he drops it again upon catching a glimpse of the black case. Prohibited a few times from pulling the camera cord, he persists and latches onto it. Corin takes it from him and he intently watches her place it out of reach, then goes after it again.
Swooped up into her arms, Corin kisses his cheek, flips him around and raises him above her head, his legs kicking, his eyes following her expression. He smiles as she lifts him higher and suspends him horizontally above her head. As she slides him back down her front, he waves his hands about. She flips him around and lifts him up with one hand around his middle. He looks down at her and brings a finger to his mouth, making rasping sounds. She lifts him up level with her shoulders, placing one hand under his torso, up along his trunk to support his abdomen and chest. He looks straight ahead and kicks his legs, gurgling, his mouth agape as he is turned like a space rocket. He vocalizes as he is manoeuvred in the air. The more she imitates his sounds, the more invigorated he gets. Corin glides him up in the air and down again. More laughing. Suspended now with his belly aligned with her face, he explodes with laughter. She slides him further down until his face meets hers and he goes to suck on her nose. She kisses him. He stares at her and she kisses him again. ~~~ He slithers down to the ground. "I got ye!" Smiling, he speeds away and Corin pats his bottom as he slithers from her hold. The telephone rings. Corin stands up and Kyle crawls hurriedly over the toys after her. When she returns, he spots the cord and goes after it. She warns him not to and he takes his hand away, only to go after it again. She reaches over to stop him: "No touch!" She curls around him from behind and kisses his forehead and cheek. "What next?"

Kyle crawls over to the couch and reaches for a piece of paper. He scrunches it and looking back at Corin, takes it in his mouth, holding onto it with sheer pleasure, heightened by her encouraging response and persists in chewing the corner of it. Corin takes it from him and he follows it with his eyes. She puts it behind her back and he searches her empty hand. She replaces it with a rattle and he persists in searching the air and the couch, his mouth opening wide. Sitting down with a deflated look, he brings his thumb to his mouth. Corin nudges his shoulder with her head and he looks directly at her. She nudges him again. He gurgles, watching her come and go, his thumb going into his mouth again. She nuzzles into his belly and he gurgles excitedly, reaching his arms upward toward her. As she draws closer, he topples over and rolls on his back, not taking his eyes off her. She bends over and kisses his mouth and swiftly he rolls over onto his hands and knees and heads in the direction of the cord.

I was noticing how nicely he plays with things and just how connected we are. Sometimes he'll even tease me. [Nursing] He comes on and off all the time, especially when anyone's in the room. [Kyle yanks his head back and almost swipes a plate off the table. Squirming to get down and slithering through her hold, Corin places him on the floor.] Where you going? ... And just how busy he is, into everything and explorative. You can see the wheels
turning as he processes it. I think of him as exceptional [laughs] I’m sure, like every mother! I still wish he’s put on a few pounds. He’s a smart kid. He comes from good genes between his father and me. He’s gonna do okay in terms of brain. I don’t do flash cards or numbers or alphabet. I just play with him and once in a while I’ll try to point out things. Right from the beginning he would examine life. You could see the eyebrows furrowing, very intense, examining, looking at things. I value intelligence and capability. It’s a challenge to have a bright kid! I feel he constantly needs stimulation. He’s changed a lot in the last few months. Now he’s very adventurous. It’s a ton of work keeping things safe for him so that I can breathe, but it could be worse if I wasn’t child proofed as much as I am. A little snuggle and he’s ready to go again! I’m quite relaxed with him. I let him explore and bump and bruise himself. You decide whether you’re going to socially isolate your kid or let the kid go through the bumps and grinds of everyday life!

I’m mentally finding myself thinking about how am I going to leave him? He’s so dependent on me and his father too. We’re thinking about getting a baby-sitter regularly and going out more. Not that I feel the need to emotionally, but intellectually … I know we have to get away from him. I left him at the Y with the baby-sitting there. I was trying to get him used to … other people taking care of him and that mommy’s coming back and it’s okay. The first time I … heard him screaming from the hall … and it broke my heart, but I knew that that was just part of the territory and each time if he was familiar enough, he would not be as upset. I went and checked a day care out and … the woman was like … kissing him and I was like, “Don’t kiss my baby!” At the same time … you want them to be affectionate with them while you’re not there in the day, but it was like … I want to be the one. [Corin goes to fetch Kyle, who has crawled to the other side of the room] Mommy’s not paying you enough attention. [She re-settles him with a new toy.] People say that when they pick them up, the kid’s really happy and doesn’t want to leave … then you feel displaced, but you feel they’re okay that the kid would feel attached enough to not want to leave.

The new issues are that he’s not listening to ‘no’ so quickly… so it’s a lot of work to keep taking him away from danger areas. For three days in a row last week, he started hitting us with his nails like [demonstrates] and laughing and sort of grabbing at our face and we’re like, “No!” and he’s a very very gentle kid usually, very caressing in his touch. So all of a sudden he starts like, “Ah!” [demonstrates an attacking hand into the air] and have this look on his face and I’m like, “Kyle, be gentle with mommy! Make nice!” I was having trouble making anything of it and then I was conscious of me feeling angry at him for the first time in his life. Like is this normal
natural aggression coming out that he's experimenting with? Then ... I figured out where I think he got it from. He had this constant runny nose and we were constantly going at him with Kleenex ... and I'm thinking, to him that was a real aggressive thing we were doing to him. He just needs to know that ... he can trust that I'm going to take care of him. I think he already has a sense that ... Mom's gonna make sure that everything's going to be fine. As long as I'm down here with him, he'll play around me and on top of me or even sometimes I can sit and read mail and stuff. He usually whines when I'm on the phone. I think it's typical but it's not easy.

I have more energy and space to be doing my own thing a bit. He's allowed me more of that, just by being interested in the environment. I mean, even for us to be able to have this interview! I was able to read the whole transcript in one sitting, which I wasn't able to do before. There are safety issues I have about Vince which have come up. He's not as conscientious. He is and he isn't ... but this morning Kyle fell asleep in Vince's arms ... and Vince threw him in the crib and I'm lying in bed ... thinking, "I just put money on it that he didn't lift the side of the crib." And sure enough, the side is down. Like he's an excellent father, but in some ways lately, I almost see him being more like when there were just the two of us. He leaves stuff lying around, not thinking little Kyle can reach it now! He can get very absorbed ... in work sometimes. I'm not sure I can imagine it for me as much. I think ... you do think differently as a mother. You need eyes behind your head! At the beginning when he still wasn't climbing, we both would forget, so on some level I can understand he's not used to it. But I wish he'd just figure it out too, like I had to. It's just too much energy and more work if I have to check and take care of him too.

Kyle's much more connected to his dad now. He cries from my arms to go to Vince, whereas before it was generally the other direction. It started a couple of months ago and when it first happened it was a little, "Oh he's rejecting me already!" I feel we're probably the only situation I know of where the kid is that connected with a dad at this age anyway, and I'm happy for them to have that connection and I always try to foster it. He's at the time where I'm trying to mentally, physically separate a bit from him. I'm reading sections in the book about weaning and trying to get him to drink from the sippy cup, so that when he has to do it it's not going to be the end of the world. I still have the feelings about someone else putting him to bed. I'm getting ready to start to let Vince sippy cup him to bed. The problem is, I pay, because he won't drink enough ... and he'll be up in the night, I'm sure! We went to a movie for the first time since he was newborn. My mom baby-sat so I left a sippy cup of formula and he freaked for about 20 minutes and then passed out in her arms and as soon as he heard me come in, he woke up.
Rae and Sara: ‘Holding onto the inarticulate’

Sara is Rae’s second child, born when she was 29 and Kieran was around 2 1/2 years old. The parents, whose mixed ethnicity comprise a Canadian and West Indian cultural background, had been together for 8 years and looked forward to the birth. With her family living on the other side of the country, Rae has been at home since her first child was born. Both parents have a university education, the family income currently within the $50,000 range.

At three and a half weeks

With Sara asleep in her arms, Rae answers the door with Kieran darting inquisitively from behind. Fetching herself a hot cup, she settles into the couch, baby in arms, the words already flowing from her, fast paced, as Kieran engages with his father in the background.

What stands out is that ... my whole birth experience with [Sara] ... was incredibly fast and the nursing went extremely well compared to last time. Right from the beginning, I wasn’t worried about her. She latched on right away. She knew what to do. I wanted to have a girl, because I really have a very strong bond with my mother and really wanted to have that kind of a bond with a daughter. After the midwife cleaned her up and she was still in my arms, I peeked under the blanket and saw, “Oh, it’s a girl!” I was thrilled. It was neat not knowing. It was really really great to be able to push her out and I just felt afterwards so proud of myself. I felt like superwoman, like I could do anything. When she first came out, I thought that she looked a little like Kieran ... and then we started to realize that she looks very much like I did when I was a baby. I can see his family in her, but right from the beginning I’ve seen more of me.

I’ve had my mom here and Marc, so it really felt from the moment I gave birth that I had a lot of time to just cuddle and nurse her. I’m trying to treasure it now, ‘cause I know it’s going to change. That’s the really hardest thing, being here on my own. It’s different I find with a second baby. With Kieran I was just so in love with him. As soon as he came out it was like instant love. I felt every second I was always looking at him going, “Wow! this is my baby!” Marc and I would both look and go, “Oh, isn’t he so gorgeous!” ... whereas with her it’s not as intense. It’s not that I don’t have feelings like that towards her ... but it’s different and we’ve just moved and there’s all this work to do. Having my mom here really made it easier for me to bond with her from the beginning, but Marc hasn’t had that chance and also for us to have the time to bond together, the three of us, because we have another child we have to look after.

I’m really trying to concentrate on ... just soothing her more with my words. I was so worried about Kieran that when he was crying, I would just be so internal, in by brain, just so. “Oh God, he’s crying, crying, crying!” that I wouldn’t talk to him. With her, I guess I feel a little
more relaxed. As soon as she starts to get fussy, I pick her up and try to figure out what it is, before she starts to cry too much [Rae turns to Sara.] Ah! she’s awake! [Sara gurgles.] Hi! Oh! ... what a stretch! With Kieran I held him a lot. [Holding Sara in her palms now, facing upward, she watches her expression reflectively, her pace of speech slowing considerably.] I’m trying to be just more affectionate with her. [Held in cradling position, her face exposed, Sara’s hand shoots up reflex-like as she’s moved.] I find myself kissing her a lot more. I feel her skin more. That’s the way I always envisioned I would be with my babies. [Sara groans, her hands meeting at the mid-line.] I didn’t feel I was that way with Kieran, because I was always so stressed out and worried about him. [Sara’s mouth opens, she throws her head back and her fingers uncurl as she stretches her body to its full length. Rae holds her hand and Sara curls her body toward her. Relaxed, her head drops back, her arm falling to her side, her other arm resting across her chest.] When she looks at me, I melt. I feel like she’s my baby! [Rae moves her arm and Sara’s eyes open for a split second as she faces Rae’s breast, her fingers opening and closing.]

It’s really hard I find, having two children (with) demands that are different. The hardest part is that Kieran has always been very attached to me. I nursed him till he was two. He always wanted to be held and so as soon as she was born, suddenly there was a separation that I guess I anticipated, but didn’t realize how emotional it would be. It was really hard for him for the first week or so. He’s two years old! He’s trying to exert his independence and we’ve really had to put our foot down; and then this other separation that’s been happening now because of her. Sometimes I feel a little bit guilty about that, but also sad. I loved that he slept in our bed. I would always curl up with him and I really miss that. I liked having him curl up with me. I hope that he doesn’t feel like Sara is his replacement. I just see that it’s going to be harder to be there for both of them at the same time. If she’s crying her eyes out ... I have to weigh which one needs me more, whereas when he was an infant, I’d be right there. Slowly, I’ve been trying to encourage him to play on his own. I thought that it would be easier this time, but ... she’s been having these fussy periods ... and I’m thinking, “God, she’s going to have colic! What am I going to do?” I was reading about crying to reassure myself it was normal, but it is hard. Just last night, I was sitting down here with Marc trying to watch TV and nurse her, and she kept coming off and it seemed like she wanted it, but then she didn’t and I tried changing her, rocking her ... and they didn’t work and it’s like, ugh! ugh! ... just like, oh my God, you just want to shake the baby and I mean, it wasn’t that bad, like it wasn’t so awful. It was just, I can’t do this any more! [weary sigh]
I find that if I just go lie down, she settles, but then early in the morning she fusses and cries like she's got gas. She seems in pain. Her legs are curling up, but she doesn't want to nurse. I try changing her position and she'll relax a little; or sometimes she'll just fuss and fuss and then konk out. But there's nothing I can do and that's the hardest thing. It's frustrating. I've heard women say that they feel like just throwing the baby out the window and ... that's how I felt. I want to get rid of this baby! I don't want to deal with this any more, but I don't [definitive]. I just go on 'cause I've learned that with Kieran, okay this will end! With Kieran it was really frustrating, God, just terrible! Even though you know intellectually it will end, it's hard to know that for sure. I'd ... give her to Marc ... but the thing is, he often has to give her back. I almost feel like I'm trapped because of the nursing. I really feel badly that she's in pain and I wish I could do something to help, but it's like a big mystery I just can't figure out. Nothing helps! I remember when he cried, I was totally distressed and really would get very worked up. With her, I don't feel that intensity. I don't go to her as quickly, which is actually making me feel a little bit badly because I think it is important to pick them up right away.

I just feel very much like a mother. My mom was always very much into nursing too. She nursed my sister until she was three. I feel that role very strongly right now in my life even though I'm like, "Oh God, Sara, please!" Right now, it's my job, even though it is a 24 hour job and it's hard as anything and it does have its moments of pure frustration, but it's great. When I first had Kieran ... we had a lot of problems nursing ... so I got a lactation consultant and she suggested I go to La Leche, and it was really supportive. The women just started talking about their experiences and I thought, "Oh, my God, I'm not alone!" It opened up a whole new way of mothering that I think I felt sub-consciously or had sort of known about, but really didn't know how to get to, like sleeping with your baby and extended nursing. I just couldn't imagine ... saying, "No more!" Sara might be ready to wean earlier. It will depend on her. It makes me feel good that I'm giving her something that she enjoys and that it's helping her to grow. Mostly I think she needs food and contact, just the physical process. I love sleeping with the baby. That's just the best thing! I just roll over and go back to sleep, so I get more rest that way. As soon as she feels all snug next to me in the bed with the covers over her ... it helps her to sleep. It's just great to have that instant contact in the morning.

I don't have a lot of time for myself. Marc works very long hours ... and I just get to the point where I'm like, "Oh my God, I need a break!" I feel being a mother is my career right now, but I also would like to do other things in my life and I find it a bit frustrating that I can't always get started. Sometimes I feel so envious.
Sleeping upright in Rae’s arms, the bulk of her hunched body encased, with knees tucked tightly under her, her head nestled into the ball of Rae’s neck, turned inward, Sara begins to mooch. Rae shifts position, drawing her closer, both hands supporting Sara’s upper back. Raising her head, Sara opens her eyes and re-settles, her head nestled directly under Rae’s chin. Rae supports her bottom and pats her back gently as she speaks.

_I did have them together on my own for a couple of days there, and that was really hard ... because I really need to sit down and nurse or hold her, and then Kieran’s off and I can barely get him undressed. It feels very out of control sometimes. I feel extremely frustrated and scared, like, “My God, how am I going to do this?” But I keep thinking, “Okay ... it will get easier!” But when I’m right there it’s like, “I can’t do this!” At the same time, I’ve sort of been managing._

[Sara lifts her head again a couple of times and Rae’s pace of speech slows noticeably as Rae strokes her back.] _He’s always had somebody there._ [Sitting cross-legged on the couch, Rae watches intently Sara writhe and groan amidst gurgling. Holding her out from her body to face her, she places her in the crook of her arm to face outward.] _Oh, she’s just wakening!_ [She rubs her stomach.] _That gas is a real pain! She’s probably thinking about drinking!_

_Every now and then I worry in case something happens to her. What if she has some horrible disease and I lose her? One day she was yawning and her head went back and she looked like she was choking and then, all of a sudden, she had this huge bowel movement and I thought, “God! I didn’t hold her head up enough, Oh no! What have I done to her?” I was really worried that night, wondering was she going to be all right and of course the next day she was fine. I was just a little bit paranoid. And last night she was spitting up what I thought was a lot and I’m thinking, “Okay, she’s fine; don’t worry!” But with Kieran I would have taken him to the doctor right away._ [A loud cry. Rae manoeuvres Sara back to feeding position and Sara’s hands meet. A big yawn! Watching quietly, Rae lies her down on her knee. Sara raises her arms, drawing her hands together over her face as Rae returns her to a nursing position. Placing her finger into Sara’s palm, she withdraws it again. Sara curls her legs and lets out another cry, then relaxes her body as Rae gets ready to nurse. A few more cries. Switched to the other arm, Sara grows quiet, and facing outward away from the breast, opens her mouth in anticipation.] _I find with her that she often doesn’t want to [nurse] and afterward I put her down and she keeps looking at me. It’s very different._ [Rae places her finger into Sara’s closed fist and Sara wraps her finger around it, while nursing.] _I was thinking, I’m almost sad that she’s growing up already and I remember feeling that with Kieran too. I liked having the newborn, being so close to having given birth, and now that exciting feeling surrounding the birth is slowly fading away._
didn’t want my mom’s visit to end. I just wanted that whole time to be captured. I mean part of me is sad about it, but I’m also ... really looking forward to seeing how she’ll change and to see how they’ll interact.

Rae watches Sara in her stillness, how when moved more upright on her mother’s other arm, her eyes open. Sara groans quietly, yawns, and as she brings one arm toward her mouth, rocks her head side to side away from Rae. Another yawn, then opening her palm, Rae places her finger in it. “Hi!” Sara waves her hands and looks directly at Rae now. Rae presents her open palm for Sara to latch onto. Sara declines, placing her finger over her mouth. Groaning, she watches her mother’s face. Rae stretches her hand out flat above her and Sara latches onto her finger, whimpering. As Rae withdraws her hand, Sara visually searches her face. Offering her finger again, she withdraws it before Sara has a chance to latch on and turns to face Sara more directly. Sara’s body writhes. Half-closing her eyes, she stretches reflex-like, and closes her fingers near her face, groaning. Rae remains watchful, calm. Sara’s hand jerks upward and resettles. She looks back to Rae, crossing her arms at the mid-line. Making circular O’s with her mouth, she yawns, bringing one arm over the other. Still facing her mother, her semi-closed fists line up on her chest. She groans, stretches and her hands entwine over her mouth. Offering her finger again, Rae withdraws it as Sara goes to grasp it, to which Sara’s hand fans out around her face. She winces as if trying to expel something, her open hand held over her mouth now. Rae offers her finger again, allowing Sara to grasp and release it. Groan! Rae lifts her more upright on her knee to face her and kisses the tips of her fingers, as she re-positions her horizontally in her arms. Sara yawns, her expression relaxing as she turns to face her mother. Rae offers her finger again and Sara withdraws poignantly, drawing her own arm directly across her mid-line now. Sara lies placidly, her hands tucked close to her face—“Yesterday morning she just was inconsolable!”—then groans loudly and contorting her face, pushes her two arms down by her sides, following which, more frantic arm movement ensues. “It’s nice when she’s just sitting there looking, not necessarily wanting to nurse or anything!” Suspended from under the arms now, Sara circles her arms as Rae moves her upward. She emits a loud cry, her head jerks back and she shrieks. Rae places her across her shoulder, cupping her head and rubbing her back as she squeals. Held sideways, she mooshes frantically to face the breast, her hand shooting up to latch onto the nipple, her hand half-covering her own face and Rae’s breast, breathing heavily as she sucks. “When she lets it slip out of her mouth, it’s real frustrating, ‘cause I don’t know if she loses the latch or actually lets go.” Her sucking wanes. “Come on! ... You know how to do it!” Sara raises her head, her leg shooting up as she mooshes and groans. “It’s right here!” Re-
directed, she re-settles, her hand held over the breast amidst slight groaning sounds. A long silent pause.

I feel a little bit saddened. With Kieran, that whole first experience was so moving. And certainly I felt amazed by this birth ... but I guess the first feeling of having a baby was not as intense with the second. I guess I’m torn two ways, having a child and other things are happening. It’s nothing like having all the time in the world for this one baby.

At fourteen and a half weeks

I’m almost always thinking about her, because I’m constantly evaluating myself as a mother. Everyday I’ll be thinking of how I can stimulate her and oftentimes think I’m not doing this enough. I get so tied up in what I’m doing during the day that I have to actually stop and find a quiet moment to just devote to her. I tend to put her in the swing if I’m making breakfast and say, “Oh my God, I’ve gotta take her out of this swing!” I think, got to do the laundry! No, laundry can wait! I have a little book, “Games to Play with Young Babies” and I would try to read everything ... and would always feel afterwards, I haven’t been doing them enough! Often I’ll think about what has happened during the day and either be disappointed about it or feel that I need to improve on something specific. Or if I have a nagging feeling in me that there’s something I want to change, I talk to Marc about it. It’s always in my sub-conscious.

I think she just needs me to socialize with her as much as possible. When I do get her attention, I can really get her going. She squeals and she enjoys looking at me, at anybody really. She’s just become more aware. There’s a lot of interaction! It’s such a great time, because she seems so happy and I don’t have a lot of the toddler issues yet. I’m trying to take advantage of this time with her as just a three month old, who’s starting to smile and socialize. It’s nice just to have a little baby to enjoy and love and not have to deal with. For a while there, what I found really challenging was that she cried a lot and I didn’t really know why. If I put her to the breast, she might suck a little bit, but she’ll just come off crying. I think she just likes to be lightly bounced. Just the fact that she’s right up against me makes her feel comforted.

I think I’ve gotten over that first hurdle. She’s just started to become more aware of her hands. She just lightly puts her hands on my arm or on my hand and it’s so soft and light. I like that I can just ... put her on the bed and hear her ... making sounds and I can be busy doing something else and know that she’s pretty happy. I think there’s a transition happening. With Marc going back to work ... I found that it’s been quite hard and then recently ... I’ve gotten myself into a routine and it’s not as difficult as it was before. I’m so happy that the winter’s over.
We can go out more, which is great for my mentality and I think for theirs. I’m sort of ready to start to teach her and encourage her to grow and learn.

Hearing Sara on the baby monitor, Rae leaves and returns, bearing a bright-eyed, alert baby, who inquisitively looks about and directs her gaze toward the camera. Sara’s fingers come together around her mouth as Rae watches her closely. “It’s pretty fascinating over there!” Sara stares ahead and pulled up to sitting, removes her fingers from her mouth, staring more wide-eyed now. Rae strokes the cat and engages Sara, who holds her own wrist and vigilantly spots something on the floor. Silence. She raises her head again, with one hand enclosing the other, yawns and jerks her head back reflex-like. Lifted to face her mother, Sara gurgles and they nod in unison. Her arms flail. “Want to stand up?” Sara moosches and groans when lifted, and Rae sits back down. Positioned facing her mother, she coos and grimaces and as Rae lifts her up again, the whimpering evolves into a cry, and Sara pulls her head back, her body wriggling. “Do you want to nurse? Is that it?” Rae swings her around to face sideways, but Sara continues to cry, her legs kicking as she goes straight for the nipple, her arms thrashing about as she sucks vigorously while looking up at Rae. As she settles, her foot curls, while she fingers her mother’s sweater and breast. Struggling, Sara’s mouth opens and her head goes back as she starts to cry.

Rae stands up and faces her outward, rocking her from a seated position in her arms. Sara relaxes, her eyes turning toward the photographs on display. Rae follows her gaze. Wincing, Sara emits an uncomfortable cry, then curiously stares at the camera with a half smile. Rae puts on soothing music and sways Sara to it. Turning her around, she lifts her upward to face her, donning a wide smile. Sara reciprocates; then emits a cry. Rae immediately pulls her close and pats her back. Held slightly outward, Sara looks about more calmly from Rae’s shoulder, her eye catching the camera again. She stares at it wide-eyed, then goes to suck on Rae’s sweater. Rae swoops her up again to face her from a suspended position and her smile draws a smile from Sara, which shortly transforms into a cry. Rae immediately returns her to face outward, bouncing her in the seated position on her palm, and whispers something in her ear that settles her. Sara latches onto her mother’s finger, her legs dangling comfortably as she is swayed side to side, some books catching her eye. Another yawn, then more intense and curious observing on the baby’s part. Again Rae turns her around to face her and this time Sara stares back, lips pursed, with a fixed grin. “Do you want to talk to me now?” Momentarily, Sara touches Rae’s face and gurgles. Rae carries her over to the couch and pushing the cat aside, places her lying, while maintaining eye contact. Sara whimpers when moved, her arms and legs thrashing about. “Oh, you don’t want to?” Holding her by the wrists, she pulls her to sitting, places her back down and
pulls her up again. "What a big girl!" Placed back down, Sara groans until she is pulled to standing. Returned to lying, she kicks her legs with glee, a short delay leaving her grimacing and groaning, a wide dimpled smile bursting forth as they reunite face to face. "You love that, don't you?" An even wider smile! Sara shows dismay each time she is reclined and instant pleasure in being pulled up. Her forehead kissed as they come in contact, Sara purses her lips. Rae raises her eyebrows. Sara imitates. As the seesaw game continues, Sara kicks her legs with excitement, but as soon as Rae lets go of her hands to tickle up her middle, she cries to be pulled up again. ~~~

Encircled in her mother’s arm now, Sara extends her own arm to explore Rae’s upper body. Rae offers her finger and Sara dismissively kicks her leg and lifts Rae’s clothing around the breast, as if trying to get closer. Lifted upright, Sara jerks her head amidst groaning and crying, her legs stretching out like cement blocks, her face reddening. Rae lifts her more upright to face her again and a striking verbal dance ensues, whereupon Sara leads and Rae follows:

S: “Ah!” R: “Ah!” S: “Mmm!” R: “Mmm!” A loud gurgle; Rae imitates. Intense eye contact. S: “Ah!” R: “Ah!” S: “Ah-ah!” Rae laughs and Sara’s arm goes out. S: “‘Huh!” Rae imitates. Sara reaches toward Rae. Rae blows and Sara imitates, while maintaining intense eye contact. S: “Ahhh!” Rae imitates, smiling. "You love to talk, don’t you?" Sara emits another sound: “Eh!” and Rae follows. Fully focused on her mother now, she smiles profusely, hands waving, then brings them to her sides. Rae continues to imitate her sounds, which brings forth reflex-like arm movements. R: “Ahh!” S: “Ahh!” Sara’s smiles crescendo into a gurgle, as she lifts her head and coos at Rae. “Oh!” Rae responds, holding her own head back in delight. She directs another sound at Sara, and Sara responds by gurgling, still fully focused. And the ‘conversation’ proceeds:

S: “Oh!” She raises her hands. R: “Oh!” [laughs] S: “Wah!” R: “Ooh! Talk some more!” S: “Wah!” R: “Wah!” S: “Wah!” Deeply moved, Rae looks to me with a wide smile. Sara winces, emitting a loud squelch and Rae beckons to her as she turns toward the camera now with a bewildered expression. “Hey!” She crouches over to see Sara’s expression and Sara winces. Bobbing her head, she returns to mid-line to face her mother. “Oh!” she exclaims and Rae imitates. Sara turns away toward the wall. Rae calls her and she turns to face her head on, gurgling with both hands together. Amidst the cooing, she laughs, gurgles and emitting a wide yawn, looks around, then back to Rae. “Oh! Tell me more! Is that right?” Growing more restless now, Sara starts to cry and Rae lifts her up “No! Don’t get fussy! Want to fly?” and with that she swoops her into the air and down again until their lips meet. Receiving a smacking kiss, Sara winces and starts to cry. Rae re-positions her back on her knee, and tries to continue the
conversation, but Sara’s crying persists. “Enough talking!” Rae lifts her up again and bounces her in her arms, Sara turning toward the books again. Instantly, she calms and looks into the camera, seemingly content to be held and swayed in her mother’s arms. Wide-eyed, Sara looks from the observer to the book case. Rae turns around to swipe a mouthful from her mug and Sara instantly follows her with her eyes, then returns her glance to the book case, her legs dangling contentedly.

What stood out for me was the talking to her. I remember when she was really little, sitting down here at the end of the night. She would make a sound and I would copy and she loved it and then she would make another. It was like we were having a real conversation. It makes me feel ... very connected to her. When I’m just holding and rocking her it’s a comforting feeling and I know she’s feeling comforted, but when I’m actually talking to her, I feel like I’m actually communicating with her soul. Nursing her is a way of communicating ... that’s on that same level, because ... she’ll look up at me and then I feel like I’m looking deep ... into her soul. We communicate by touching most of the time. It’s not as intense. I think she just likes to look at us, to socialize. It was nice to have a concentrated amount of time ... to just devote to her.

She likes to be up and moving, but I’d also like to start to give her toys to hold on to ‘cause she’s starting to grasp things. It’s exciting to find something that she likes. She brings out my sense of joy and admiration and my undying love [laughs]. Suddenly I’ll be in the kitchen with Kieran and feeling hum drum dragged and then I’ll just look at her or I’ll just think of how I feel about her ... and then Kieran gets kind of excited too. I find the isolation really hard. I’ve got a list this long of things I really need to do before I can even start to think about things I want to do for myself. I always try to find some time to be by myself whilst they’re asleep. I usually just try to curl up in the bed and get rest and read ... even just talking to a friend. In fact, I actually don’t mind that Marc isn’t home in the evenings so much because that’s the only time I get to myself. Kieran goes down for a nap in his own bed for a certain time and I lie down with her and I feel really grateful for that routine.

I feel right now I’m sort of coming across like this is all wonderful, but I don’t really feel that all the time. Like during the day sometimes I start to resent the fact that I have to stay at home because it’s just so hard. To have two of them at the same time is very draining, especially when it goes on. You have no idea until you’re actually in it! She’ll get into a fussy mood and Kieran will be crying and I’ll be like, “Oh my God, I have two crying, screaming kids here. What am I gonna do?” The worst part is that I really lose my cool. I scream and lose my temper and I just kick myself later and think, “Oh God, I’m a terrible mother! I’m not cut out for this! I hate
this! I don't want to do this!” Kieran really just tests me to the limit and I lose it and feel really guilty about it afterwards. If I’m trying to juggle both of them at the same time ... I let her cry more often than I would like. I’ve been feeling guilty about it, but I’m learning that it’s okay to let her cry a little bit if I have to. I’m always evaluating, is this piece okay? I think one of the reasons I got sick was because I was staying up really late trying to figure out whether I want to immunize her or not. It’s just tearing me up. I just don’t know what to do. When I was sick last week, we were starting to worry that I had whooping cough, and I was thinking, “Oh my God, I have to get her vaccinated right now, or she’s going to die!”

I remember thinking with Kieran, how precious life is. I guess that’s one of the things that happens when you have a baby—just realizing how life is so precarious. Life and death, it’s just so close. I think about how much I love her and then I think, “God, what if I lost her?” I would just die inside! And then ... I started thinking about what would happen ... to my children ... if I died? Suddenly I’ve really had to deal with just the thought of my own mortality. I was thinking ... in a way this is a good thing ... because it’s making me feel more like I gotta ... take each day and enjoy it, and that’s a good lesson for me to learn with my kids right now, because I’m finding that I’m just trying to get the day over with ... rather than just try to live it moment by moment. I had known all that intellectually but not really lived it ... so it was interesting to kind of feel that for the first time. As soon as I’ve a baby it’s like, oh yeah, I remember that feeling that ... I’m growing older and that eventually I’m going to die! I start to think about the whole cycle of life and how my mother’s growing older. My grandmother died a few years ago and mom’s getting to my grandmother’s age that I remember as a child and then I’m going to be the age my mom is soon. It just goes in chunks of time, decades and then, oh my God, I’m going to be older! It does feel like everything’s sort of come together. My friend just had a baby. It’s interesting to be out of that stage now and getting on with the fact that she’s growing up. The first two months were just so intense.

At twenty eight weeks

I’ve forgotten what it’s like to have a baby around. Right now she’s just the biggest delight in the world. Sometimes Kieran will be having this major tantrum and I’ll think, “God, I don’t want to deal with this. I can’t stand it!” And then I’ll look over at her and she’s smiling away at me and I just feel this wave of happiness. They’re low maintenance right now. They just need to be hugged and cuddled, or to be right near you and bite on a toy ... whereas I’m chasing him around ... and he has a tantrum if he can’t have what he wants. Sometimes it really gets to
So to be able to have this little being that you can just hold and she smiles, I just feel really happy. She'll throw her head down as if she wants to bite onto my shoulder. She's just so overwhelmed with her feeling of delight. I was just in Calgary and everybody was just totally delighted with her and loved her to bits and I love her to bits. Like this morning in bed ... she stayed for 25 minutes ... entertaining herself. She'll sit up and look around and laugh or lie on her back and she'll have her hands in her mouth and her legs will be kicking and she'll move around. It's funny, at one moment she'll be fussy and want something and I'll try to figure out what it is and right in the next minute, she'll be ... just grinning from ear to ear ... making these adorable sounds of delight, like "Ughaa!" She'll push herself like that. It makes me feel more relaxed.

I guess I'm learning about what her personality is like. When they're a newborn you think you do love them, and I did love her, but I didn't really know her. My mom said as soon as she first saw her, "I think it's going to take me a while to get to know her and for her to get to know me!" ... and I realized ... that was sort of the same with me from the time she was born. I really liked having the support and being able to share them with my family, whereas I find it a little bit lonely sometimes here at home. I feel she's so much a part of me that I don't have a self in a way, 'cause she's always almost physically attached to me ... like the umbilical cord is still attached. I'm always just automatically responding to whatever it is she needs or wants. She's like right there beside me, whereas Kieran is sort of further out there. It can be hard to have somebody there all the time that you always have to deal with and meet their needs.

I think my relationship with her might be ... a little less anxious, a little bit more enjoyable in a way. She's not in my thoughts all the time. Kieran was always in my thoughts. If I went out of the room, he was in my head and I had to get back to him right away, whereas now with her, as I get involved with him, I'll have completely forgotten about her for several minutes, which is very strange. She doesn't nurse a lot. I can just rock her to sleep. Sometimes it's frustrating because I'll be wanting to lie down and I'll want her to nurse. It's a little foreign to me to get up and walk with her when she gets a little fussy. I mean I offer the breast all the time. Even when she doesn't want it I try to give it to her. It's hard because I've always thought that would solve any problem.

Rae goes to fetch Sara (heard coughing on the monitor) and upon returning, places her in the Moses basket half-filled with toys on the floor and sits down alongside her with legs outstretched. Sara beams up at her mother, wide-eyed, looks to the camera and then down into the basket. She grasps a soft cloth book that is close to hand, then returns her glance to Rae. Rae
points and labels the picture in the book: “That’s quack quack!” Gurgling, Sara shakes it, while glancing at her mother. Smiling, with arms extended, she whacks the book up and down. Sara beams up at her and Rae returns a wide smile: “Hello!” Sara looks intently with pursed lips at the camera and around the room until the book catches her eye again. Rae offers to read it and Sara looks around again smiling. “What do you see?” Rae raises her head and Sara’s head bops curiously. Silently, Rae watches, then points to the book again: “Look, it says quack quack!” Sara bends over her possession, pulling at its corners with her teeth.

Stumbling upon the handle draped inside the bassinet, Sara latches onto it. Rae shakes it and looking up at her mother, Sara brings the handle to her mouth and holds on tenaciously, her eyes simultaneously drawn to the contents of the basket. Then smiling, with a relaxed expression, she nods her head. With the handle in one hand, the book in the other, she looks up at the camera, then behind her and back to the book. Turning the page more pointedly now, she leans forward, babbling. Rae laughs. Sara looks up at her, opens her mouth wide and takes the book into her mouth. “Ugh! Want me to read it?” Rae takes it and turns the pages as she reads. Sara yawns and falls sideways. Rae’s expression grows deflated as Sara tugs on a toy that is wedged down the side of the basket. Struggling, she unleashes a toy bunny and bites on it voraciously, leaving only its legs dangling. Rae smiles. Sara manipulates it. Rae reaches over to demonstrate shaking and the movement makes Sara’s whole body tremble as she keeps her head down and her shoulders rigid. As Rae releases her hold, Sara grows more animated and whacks the bunny excitedly, rotating it in her hands. Rae hands Sara a doll, which she takes and discards, her expression subdued. Rae introduces other soft toys, which Sara swiftly takes into her mouth. As Rae gets up to move the cat, Sara persists in sucking. Reaching for the book, she brings it to her mouth, and turns her head to follow her mother’s sounds. Rae reaches over and picking up the book, proceeds to name the animal sounds. Sara grins widely. Rae laughs: “Oink oink!” Sara looks serious and then a wide smile crosses her face as she excitedly pulls the cloth sun up to her mouth. She gurgles and explores the inside of her mouth with her fingers, making rasping sounds as Rae looks on. Rae imitates a bear sound, bares her teeth and growls angrily. In awe, Sara removes her fingers from her mouth and looks back to the book, captivated. “Lion ... rahr! rahr!” Focusing on the pages, Sara breathlessly sucks in air, impassioned, as Rae continues to name the animals. Fingering over the next page in anticipation, she looks at the picture. Story complete, Rae smiles and hands Sara the book. Seemingly chuffed, she brings it to her mouth and re-settles in her seated position. Shaking it excitedly, she looks around her wide-eyed and smiling, and clamps down on it again with glee.
Sara reaches for the book again, chomps on it, and pulls back to inspect it. Rae moves a cloth sun progressively higher above Sara’s head until Sara looks up. As it looms closer, Sara’s expression grows serious and her movements freeze. Rae touches her chest with it until Sara gurgles tight-lipped. As Rae withdraws, Sara reaches after it with open mouth, mimicking Rae’s earlier facial expression of the angry bear going to chomp. Grasping it, she excitedly bites down. ~~~ Sitting upright again, she rummages in the basket and finding a teething ring, brings it to her mouth, turns it around while straining her eyes to see it, and licks through each revolution. Her eye catches the camera again; then she turns and looks straight ahead.

Rae shakes a red shaker directly in Sara’s line of vision, to which she immediately drops what she’s been licking and her two hands go out, her mouth opening almost instinctively as she moves toward it in anticipation, her head slightly ahead of the rest of her. She yanks it forward in an attempt to get it into her mouth, but as she tries to wrap her lips around it, Rae intervenes: “Shake shake!” and pulls it from her mouth to demonstrate. Sara pulls it back, holding it upright like an ice-cream cone, covering the ball of it protectively with her cupped hand. Watching Rae carefully, she rotates it as she tries to get it into her mouth. She gnaws on the surface of it with wide open eyes, then momentarily holds it out away from her to inspect it. Groaning, she explores its surface with her tongue and gums. Rae withdraws, then takes hold of its shaft and starts to shake it rhythmically. She taps Sara’s chest lightly and Sara holds her head back smiling, her expression growing serious as she pulls it toward her mouth again. She inspects it, then looking up at Rae who is now shaking the matching red shaker, drops the first one instantaneously, her arms stretching out to grasp the second. Rae shakes it out of her reach. Sara averts her gaze and picks up the cloth bunny, which she places in her mouth, still glancing longingly at the shaker in Rae’s hand. ~~~

Distracted by Kieran running down the stairs, Rae goes to see what’s happening, while Sara stares at a toy octopus, mesmerized. Opening and closing her palms, she looks at the camera and when Rae returns, she persists in looking around. Rae lifts her out of the basket, stands her on her knee, and kissing her cheek a few times, swivels her about. “Hi! Just you and me, yeah!” Rae holds her by the hands now as she rocks her in standing position on her knee. As she draws her close to kiss her, Sara leans back gurgling with delight. Rae imitates and pulls her up to standing again. Sara reclines and pulls to sitting, watching her expression closely and showing some discomfort, begins to cry. When her hands are freed, she places one in her mouth, and clings onto Rae’s T-shirt, whimpering. Held closer, Sara’s hunches up her legs, curling her body toward Rae as she is swiftly swooped into nursing position. Rae holds her out to loosen her
clothing and Sara’s cries escalate. Her legs go up, and with open eyes she latches onto Rae’s finger as she goes for the nipple and sucks voraciously.

Sara strokes Rae’s clothing and kicks one foot off the other, alternately extending and flexing her toes. Then latching onto her own clothing, she frantically fingers the cloth. Rae offers her finger and Sara declines, friskily moving her body about, while sucking audibly, her hand going up and down between exploring. Rae holds onto Sara’s feet, alternately stroking and picking pieces of fluff from between her toes. Sara scrunches up the cloth of her dress. Rae stares down at her with glazed expression. Sara’s leg shoots up reflexively as she curls her body more inward. Rae gazes dreamily as she fingers Sara’s feet more pointedly now. Sara’s movements grow more frantic, her legs shooting up together as she mooches, unsettled. Rae whooshes her upward and Sara suddenly comes off the breast and sits up trance-like, flushed. Pulling on her ear, she whimpers. Rae lifts her upright on her knee to face her. Now whining, now smiling, Sara shakes her head, and hooks her arm around Rae’s neck. Rae kisses her and she pulls back in protest, her expression growing serious.

Even though I was just letting her do her own thing, I still wanted to go, “Oh look at this!” or change it somehow. I kind of went in and out of that. One thing that really stood out was when I started nursing her. I really notice(d) the prolactin hormone ... the mothering hormone ... wash right over me and I’d feel this incredible love. At times ... I can actually feel the hormone going through my body. It’s a nice way of connecting with her and at one point before I started nursing her, I really wanted to just ... hold her, ‘cause I didn’t like the fact that she was just sitting and playing. It was a way of bringing her into my arms. Kieran’s ... going through this phase where he’s really so much more demanding than she is. At times, I just feel like I want Kieran to go away and I just want to enjoy her... and just ignore him, because sometimes I just feel like being with him just takes away from that experience. I feel badly about it too, because there are times when I just want to sit down with Kieran and do a puzzle and I can’t ‘cause I need to be holding her. I don’t usually get much of a chance to replenish myself. I guess the biggest challenge is trying to deal with my own feelings of frustration and my temper ... in terms of Kieran, ‘cause he draws them out of me and then I get really down on myself and start to think terrible things, like that I’m a terrible parent. I’m not fit to be a mother! [laughs] And everyday I say to myself, “Okay I’ve got to try and not lose control!” and then I don’t and the next day is the same and I don’t know how to get it together. I just sometimes wish I could just detach myself and it’s hard to detach yourself because there’s so much of yourself involved and when you’re with your kids, it’s just hard to step back and deal with the situation in that kind of a way. I think
I've a lot to learn from ... being a mother about how to deal with these things. I'm starting to realize ... it can be very draining having them there all the time constantly needing you.

I don't want her to grow up, because I'm enjoying her being a baby so much. She's not trying to exert her independence. She's just still part of me. My mom kept saying: "Oh, she just has eyes for you" and it's true. She would just stare at me for the longest time and if a stranger comes along and wants to hold her, she just starts crying and she just wants me so much. I love it. It's very unconditional. She's just so happy to be in my arms and she doesn't whine and complain and throw tantrums. I think ... when she becomes a toddler ... I'll have a lot of the same feelings that I have now about Kieran and that's part of the reason that I just want to enjoy her babiness. That dynamic's a little bit easier, perhaps because she's a baby and because of the sex. I remember Kieran was always wanting to get on to the next stage and he'd get really frustrated and try to do things that he couldn't because he wasn't able yet physically, whereas she doesn't seem to be too upset about that. I want it to slow down definitely. And also because of all the lessons I feel like I need to learn while I have my kids. When I saw my mom and I could see that she's slowly starting to lose a little bit of her memory that starts to worry me. My fear, I guess is just the cycle of life—we grow up, we get older and we die. I always think I should have a baby at home [laughs]. I mean I'm trained as an X; but once I started having babies I realized this was for me. But in a way it's kind of exciting too, because I have that all ahead of me to figure out.

At thirty nine weeks

Sara sits beside her mother on the floor facing the camera, bright-eyed. The cat approaches at her eye level and she takes a deep breath and looks up at Rae. As it moves out of her orbit again, Sara crawls after it on hands and knees, suddenly stopping short to view it stretched out on her side in front of her. As Sara reaches out her hand to touch it, the cat's legs extend and Rae shields her with her forearm. "Gentle!" Sara persists, slowly opening her hand over the paw. Rae protectively holds her hand back and Sara recoils to sitting between Rae's crossed legs. Watching the cat intently, she reaches out again, then recoils to the safety of her mother's body. Rae remains watchful, protective. Sara goes to reach again and Rae pulls her back as the cat stretches her legs more forcefully. Rae continues to stroke the fur. Sara imitates and when the cat moves, she pulls back, fearful. As Rae persists in stroking, Sara's enthusiasm wanes. She draws closer and imitates the stroking with large motor arm movements involving her whole body, stroking the paw and the rug indiscriminately with an intense expression. Rae
watches the cat as she strokes: "**Good girl!**" [It is unclear here whether she is referring to Sara or the cat.]

Sitting back between her mother’s legs, Sara looks up at the camera with a serious expression, then over at the cat, B and back to the camera with a coy smile, her hand going up to her cheek. She turns toward her mother who is still stroking the cat and imitates. Sara looks up at the observer and strokes the rug, her top lip protruding. Holding B’s foot, Rae looks at Sara invitingly. Captivated by the cat’s movements, Sara draws closer, her eyes inquisitively spanning the length of its body. Rae keeps stroking. Momentarily, Sara pulls back and places her finger in the corner of her mouth, then re-engages. Growing agitated, she mooches about and noticing her unease, Rae leans back to receive her. Sara climbs up on her knee and almost immediately crawls back toward the cat and pulls at its leg. B screeches and reflexively, Sara pulls back wide-eyed as Rae strokes the cat protectively.

With her head held coyly to the side, Sara turns to her mother, placing her hand on her thigh, then crawls after the cat again. "**I don’t think she wants you to play with her right now!**" Pulled up on her mother’s knee, Sara looks straight ahead, then at the camera, unsettled. Rae slides her lengthways across her body and Sara arches her back, yanking her head back to see the cat. She rolls off Rae’s knee, catching the camera with her eye. Rae places her sitting in front of a shelf of toys, pulls out a drum and a red shaker and demonstrates strumming. Sara picks up the drum and brings it to her mouth. "**Bang bang!**" Turning it over, she manipulates it. Rae draws closer and demonstrates drumming. Sara drops it and latches onto the red shaker, bringing it straight to her mouth. Dropping the stick, she picks up the drum. Handed the stick, Sara beats the drum with her palm. Rae demonstrates tapping again and again and Sara’s eye catches the camera. Rae leans over to kiss her cheek and Sara raises her hand to stop her. She approaches from the other side and Sara withdraws. Rae steals a kiss from the other cheek and Sara raises her hands, shrugging her off. Sara whacks the drum with her fist. "**Bang bang! That’s it!**" Whimpering, she turns to face Rae and grows quiet. She looks around her, up at the camera and groans. She goes for the red stick and placing it in her mouth, glares up at the camera. It falls and she crawls toward Rae, eager to climb up on her knee. Rae sits still momentarily, her hands on her knees and only when Sara climbs up by her arms, does she reach out to lift her to standing. Unsettled, Sara looks about, slides back down onto the floor and crawls over to the toy shelf, pulls out a toy, then crawls back to Rae, crying. Rae lifts her up into her arms. Sara climbs up her mother’s body, her legs moving quite frantically now, her crying growing more agitated. Rae hugs her. Sara mooches restlessly and Rae goes to kiss her. The crying persists. Lifting her
upright again, she pulls her own knees up to cradle her body. Crying even harder, Sara’s arms become entangled in her mother’s. Swiveled to a horizontal position, Sara thrashes about and anticipating nursing, thrusts her body forward towards the breast. “She’s been biting me recently!” [Aside] and prefaces the feed with: “No biting, Sara!”

Sucking hard, Sara mooches and holding onto her ankle raises her leg. Spanning it across Rae’s chest, she momentarily grasps her toes and moves her leg up and down. Moving closer, her hand rolls over Rae’s breast. Then she slaps her own knee, grasps her foot again and extends her leg upward. Releasing her grasp, her leg dangles loosely down Rae’s torso. Turning her body inward, she holds onto the bunched up clothing around her mother’s breast. She emits a heavy moan as she sucks and bores her knees now into Rae’s abdomen. Rae watches her glide sideways and come off the nipple — “You want more?" — and glides her back into position. Sara resumes sucking and rotates onto her stomach, her hand stretching up to Rae’s shoulder. Loud sucking, and groaning. Rae returns her to a cradled position in her arms and holding onto her toes, Sara flexes and extends her legs. Pulling away, she slides off Rae’s knee onto the floor to face outward. Sitting squarely, she looks up at the camera with a coy smile. Now are you happy?”

Leaning forward, Sara looks up at the observer; then climbs up on Rae and looks around her.

Rae pulls her up on her knee and Sara smiles coyly with her thumb in her mouth as she is swooped into a cradling position. Her eyes follow the cat as it enters her line of vision again and disappears between shelving. Sara thumps down to sitting and pulls herself up again, looking in the cat’s direction. As B’s tail reappears, Sara looks on, fascinated. Then the cat comes into full view and meanders past. “Are you going to get her?” She gets into crawling position and remains quite fixated. “You’re not really sure what to do!” Sara arches her body, pushing her bottom up, whimpering at which point Rae introduces stacking cups. Sara rolls over, sits up, picks up a small cup and brings it to her mouth. Rae points to the indented picture underneath, picks up another, labels it and hands it to Sara. Straight into the mouth; then another. Sara explores it manually. Rae labels one animal after another and Sara leans over smiling, dropping one cup for the next. Looking at the picture on its base, she rotates it and Rae introduces another: “Here’s a lion ... rahr!” Sara looks up at her expression and dropping the cup she is holding, takes the new one, inspects and drops it. The activity proceeds. Sara persists in licking, looks to the observer and begins to explore the cups manually. While Rae builds a tower, Sara carefully watches her place each cup, her arms flailing excitedly as she goes to touch the growing tower with cupped hands. Reaching for the last cup, Rae captures Sara’s attention for a split second and as it topples over, Sara is left holding the middle cup. Rae starts to re-build and with flailing
arms, Sara’s intense expression returns. Placing her open palm on top of the half built tower, Rae takes hold of Sara’s hand and signals her to wait. Sara sits back and watches. Squealing excitedly, she reaches out again. The structure complete, Rae leans back, “Okay!” and they exchange glances. “You can knock it down!” Touching more tentatively now, Sara watches the tower snap in the middle, the top half tumbling down on top of her. Blinking, she waves her arms and knocks over the lower half, following which Rae begins to stack them one into the other in order of size. As Sara lifts up one cup, Rae points to its matching container: “Put it in!” Sara inspects it. Repeating her instruction, Rae demonstrates and Sara lifts it out again. Rae gestures to her again to put it in and bites her lip as Sara lifts up the whole stack. Rae gestures again and hand over hand, guides Sara through the process. Sara looks away, more solemn now. When Rae becomes more persistent, Sara drops the cups and goes to climb up on her mother, throwing her arms around her neck. Rae kisses one cheek, strokes her hair, then the other. Sara whimpers. Rae swoops her sideways across her chest into an embrace, then holds her upright over her shoulder. Sara mooches, unsettled, her legs climbing further up Rae’s arm. Hand to mouth, she looks from left to right until her eye catches the toy shelf. ~~~ Sara crawls toward the couch, where Rae is sitting stroking the cat, and pulls to standing. Groaning, she shuffles from the ball of one foot to the other, struggling to reach the cat’s fur. Lifted up onto Rae’s knee, she immediately goes for the cat. “Gently!” Pulled back, she mooches about, unsettled. Rae starts to play seesaw with her, but Sara remains unsettled. Pulled up from lying, she looks to the cat and strikes Rae’s face while clamouring to reach over to touch her. Suspended in the air, Rae swerves her toward the cat and again she goes to touch the cat and Rae pulls her back. Rae sits her down among the stacking cups, but Sara crawls toward the camera case. Rae prohibits her from putting the cord into her mouth a few times and placing her further away, introduces another stacking toy. ~~~ With a tired expression, Sara flicks it away and buries her head in Rae’s breast. Held upright, she groans and starts to cry; then yanking her head back, pulls to sitting and crawls toward something else that catches her eye.

She definitely knows what she wants more now. A couple of weeks ago, she just brought her hands together. So now I’ll go: “Yeah, pat-a-cake!” and try to encourage her. It’s kind of like teaching. You’re getting some feedback. To suddenly see her do it is very rewarding. Often I don’t feel like I stimulate her enough ... so I feel a bit guilty about that. Following her makes me feel relaxed. When you’re not thinking time just slows down. And I wasn’t really thinking much. I was actually being just there, which is unusual. She probably liked that. We’re always running here and there and not really interacting with her for a concentrated amount of time.
It’s the first time that she’s really been so interested in the cat. Because she can crawl now ... I’m finding this stage a little bit difficult, because I’m so used to having a baby that has to be held and doesn’t pull things off the shelves or get into things. I’m terrified she’s going to fall right onto her head. Last night ... she managed to stand up and bobbing up and down, she banged her head. I’m constantly picking up little pieces of paper that I know she’s going to choke on if she gets them into her mouth. I just miss that little baby that would just sit there and play or lie down. But ... I mean I still look forward to the future and her growth.

The most challenging thing right now is trying to make it a place that she can play in, but also give her the message that there are some things she can’t do. I want to be little bit more—not strict—but when I say, “No!” I want to really mean it. I mentioned she’s biting me. I don’t know why, but it’s really driving me crazy. I’m starting to dread just putting her on. Maybe she doesn’t want the milk ... or maybe her tooth is hurting and she just wants to bite on something. Even when she goes on sometimes, I’ll say, “Sara, do not bit me! It hurts!” and then she will. It’s like she’s testing me! When she was a baby, she just required a lot of holding and cuddling. Now, I think she really is starting to require some discipline, in terms of being talked to, so that she can understand things more [raised intonation].

Kieran’s really having a hard time adjusting to her changing, because he wants her to be a baby still and to lie her down and just play with her and kiss her ... but she ... wants to crawl around and play with the toys. She’s starting to get a bit more upset, because he wants to confine her more, but she’ll just try to wriggle away ... ‘cause she’s trying to assert her ability to move around. He doesn’t like it much. He wants to have the control, right? [long reflective pause] Up until now, she’s been pretty easy to take care of and (as) she’s sort of getting into more things, my frustration level and my patience is a little bit short. So last night when I was getting angry and realizing I’m getting angry at her already, it was kind of upsetting.

I actually went to see a counselor and have been looking at ways of dealing with (my) anger. I still have many years with the kids. They’re constantly going to be testing me and I’m going to constantly have these feelings. I remember years ago I dealt with a lot of issues with my father. The situations are different, but the anger I’m feeling, like my blood starting to boil and my sense of frustration and just sort of blurting it all out, is similar. I rely on my friends. If I could just have a regular time that I knew during the week, I could say: “Okay, I’ll just wait for 10 o’clock, Saturday” and have a plan of what I’m going to do and just totally be by myself and do my own thing. And just realizing that I’m not perfect and that I’m only doing the best I can. I’m constantly trying to improve. I notice that dinner time is when I start to really lose it. That’s
when my patience is worse and the kids are fussy and cranky and it just starts to escalate from there. I just start saying to myself, “Okay when they go to bed I can just veg out,” but then what happens is, I have a billion thing to do. In fact, for the last month I’ve been going to bed with my mind just going woor woor, just around and around. See the problem is that sometimes I do have this time to myself, but then I end up doing things. Sometimes I wish I could just have time to do nothing or just have no plan. That’s the thing, like I always have a plan, because there are so many things to do and things I want to do. It’s like constantly crossing things off on my list!

Sara I think, is pretty much in the same place within me, just really there [brings palm to chest]. I feel like I’ve really just sort ... given up a lot of my own being in a way. We won tickets to a play ... and I can’t go. It’s not so much that I can’t see the play, it’s just the every day! Sometimes I do just need a break. After nine months of it I feel frustrated. I’m actually surprised at how well she has adapted to Marc when he is here, because I remember Kieran was much much more attached to me when he was an infant. We don’t get much time to ourselves. Sometimes I just feel like we don’t even have a relationship. We rarely see each other and when we do ... he’s exhausted and we all want his attention. I make sure that I have adult contact all the time, on the phone or there are three friends that I see almost every week. Otherwise I feel I would just go crazy.

Sharon and Helen: ‘Safety as the bottom line’

Helen, a much wanted first child, was born to parents who had been together for four years when she was conceived. Sharon, who has a long career history and planned to resume her studies after the first six months, was 38 when Helen was born. The family’s cultural background is Canadian-European, the father’s family still partially residing in Greece. Sharon is somewhat estranged from her family. The combined family income is around $100,000.

At two and a half weeks

Cuddled up with her back against the couch, Helen is asleep in the snugli when I arrive. Awakening with a shrill cry, she bunches up her limbs, fists clenched, and turns inward to face the back of the couch. Rocked back and forth, she loses her pacifier, which Sharon swiftly retrieves and holds in position in her mouth. “Everything’s okay honey!” Helen calms for a moment, then as her whimpering grows louder, she loses the pacifier again. Sharon replaces it, and Helen calms. “There you go! Helen is a good girl!” Her hair stroked, the pacifier falls out again and Helen’s cries grow louder. Sharon struggles awkwardly to manoeuvre her into the
infant harness that is already attached to her body, the carrier—creating a barrier between them. Secured in position, Helen’s screeches ebb and flow. “Your gonna like it once your in it!”

Still sitting, Sharon holds Helen upright and addresses her face to face, while trying to put the pacifier back in her mouth. Helen shrugs, but accepts. A singular screech; more crying. “Okay, lets move ye!” Helen brings her hands up toward the pacifier, still screeching and unconsolled as Sharon stands up. Holding her out semi-reclined and gently swaying her side to side, Sharon starts to sing, “Helen is a beautiful baby. Yes she is!” over and over. Helen’s eye catches the light of the window and the crying stops and starts; then grows more frantic. Sharon continues to sing as she watches Helen’s hand go up to her chin, her eyes following the light from the window. Still singing, Sharon wipes her own brow. Helen stares out of the window, transfixed, her head to the side, leaning on the snugli, and gradually quietens to Sharon’s singing. Sharon strokes her cheek, “Everything’s okay Helen!” and follows Helen’s gaze as she continues to sing the same words over. With her body more relaxed and her eyes closing, Helen catches the camera from the corner of her eye, a frown forming. “She likes to have her feet massaged!”

[Aside]. A truck passes outside and Helen’s eyes open in a flutter and span her side of the room. Sharon watches intently. [Another aside] “Motion seems to distract her from whatever she’s feeling, whether its colic or fear or anxiety; motion and singing, my voice and touch, but then there are times where she gets really frantic and nothing works.” Helen’s eyes gradually close to Sharon’s singing and swaying, her face holding a frown. Scrunching up her nose now, she looks to the camera without changing expression. Sharon gently massages Helen’s feet that now hang limp. The phone rings. Helen’s eyes open wide, one more vigilantly than the other, one pressed against the edge of the snugli. She doesn’t budge. Sharon keeps swaying. “We’re not gonna get that, no! We start over!” She continues singing. Helen’s grimace remains fixed and her eyes continue to open and close as her hair is stroked. Bringing her hand closer to her midline she sucks on the pacifier and looks to the camera each time she is rocked in that direction. Sharon turns her to face the window. Silence. She sings and Helen’s gaze is drawn to the camera and back toward the light. Her eyes close. Still the frown. Sharon strokes her hair. The phone rings again. Helen scrunches up her nose. “Don’t they know that you’re trying to sleep honey?”

As Sharon backs herself down onto the sofa, Helen’s head bops forward and she loses the pacifier again. Sharon goes to replace it, but Helen refuses. Following her gaze, she resumes singing. Helen brings her hand to her mouth as Sharon rocks her now in short rhythmic moves, yawning. Leaning over to inspect Helen’s expression—“What ye lookin’ at? You can see I’m still here”—she continues to sway and sing. Helen’s fingers join near her face and drawing one finger
to her mouth, she winces and turns her head to face her mother. Gurgling as they make eye contact, Sharon strokes her hair and Helen yawns, her tongue protruding as she watches intently her mother’s expression. Another yawn and her long fingers uncurl, fan-like in unison. Sharon jiggles her gently and Helen rocks her head side to side as if trying to rub her nose against the side of the snugli. Clenching her fists, she crosses them over her chest now. Another yawn and her fists fan open. Moving her head side to side, her hand movements grow more animated as she coughs and starts to cry. “Time to get up again!” Sharon pops the pacifier in her mouth and Helen brings her finger up to meet it. [Aside] “We give her the pacifier because it distracts her and calms her down, but that only works if she’s relatively calm.” Sharon stands up and resumes swaying. Helen starts to cry. Sharon introduces a teddy bear, which Helen looks at sleepily, one eye still half-closed against the snugli. Sharon shakes another, which Helen looks at it, her eye half on the camera. She blinks and glances at the toy, her eyes closing. Sharon resumes singing and stroking Helen’s head, yawns herself. “She’s getting pretty tired. So is mommy!” She sways side to side, watching intently Helen’s head droop, her nose scrunched, the pacifier still in her mouth. [Aside] “If I put her down prematurely, she’ll be wide awake again.”

Helen’s body falls limp into Sharon’s as she is stroked affectionately down her back. Groaning, she loses the pacifier again and starts to cry, her face reddening, her legs pulled up and her mouth opening wide, emitting loud shrieks. Still swaying, Sharon manoeuvres her into a horizontal cradling position and silently sits back down on the couch. “You hold all your tension in your face!” [Aside] “I can tell. She’s not calm, tense, tense, tense!” Sharon jiggles her a bit on her knee, then goes to open the harness: “It’s like a space suit! ... Yes sweetheart, you fall asleep!” Eventually Helen’s eyes remain closed.

It’s a really intense experience and it’s learn as you go! It’s frightening, but at the same time, it’s really powerful. It’s beautiful, like nothing I’ve ever experienced before. It’s overwhelming a little bit. I feel very responsible for her, protective and frightened at the same time, wanting to do the right things, but I feel connected to her. I think she’s getting to know me and she’s her own little person. She likes her feet being massaged. She likes a light stroke.

Yesterday ... she cried from 2:30 to about 7 and ... I tried all the things, like check to see if she’s wet, if she needs to be burped ... and she just wouldn’t stop crying. I got really frustrated, ’cause she turns really red and that high pitched squeal, that out of control crying—at one point I just thought, “I’m going to put you down Helen, because I can’t do anything else for you!” and I felt really guilty and angry with myself for feeling like losing it, almost like shaking her to say, “What can I do?” And for the first time I understood— I mean, not that I felt that I was going to
do anything to her—but I could see where people lose control. [Helen shrieks] Okay, I’m gonna hold ye! [And quietens as Sharon opens the snugli.] Just trying to understand what’s going on for her! I’ve never experienced anything like it. You feel totally helpless, angry, and yesterday I got frustrated with her, even though in my rational mind I know it’s not her fault, but it was like, “I can’t take it anymore!” Incessant crying for 3 hours straight just makes you crazy! I was shaking her like this [demonstrates vertical rocking] ’cause she likes movement and I could see where you just could keep shaking, hoping that it would stop the crying. I put her down ... and I went to the bathroom and made a cup of tea and came back. When George got home, I said, “I need a break!” It was a 12 hour day!

I’ve got tons of support and I’m losing it and I consider myself very patient! But when she’s in these crying bouts, it’s awful to watch her. It looks like she’s in real pain when she draws her knees up and clenches her fists and screams. It’s not that different type of cry where just nothing’s going to make her happy. It’s when she’s just beet red and she gasps and cries so much, it doesn’t stop. It’s frightening! You wonder if she’s going to make it; if she’s going to die! Then there’s her ... feeling for her little body. You can’t do anything really to comfort her. The frustrating part is even though you give more and do more, nothing seems to work.

Being there for her is a 100% consuming. She sleeps with me. My husband sleeps on the couch now. I’m totally devoted to her. I’m not speaking on the phone. The two weeks George was off we were going here, there, trying to figure it out. I took her to the chiropractor yesterday and she cried for the whole time. I feel helpless when she’s like that and then I get a bit angry. Yesterday, my threshold was worn ... but at the same time I’m hopeful that all these things will help her. I’ve got this beautiful baby and I’m delighted, but I’m looking at my body and going, “What happened to you?” [hearty laugh]. I look very different than how I used to look [looks to self portrait on the wall] and that’s only a year and a half ago! I look like a mom, like a frump in my mind. It upsets me. I’ve got tons of clothes in the bedroom. Nothing fits. My shoes don’t fit. My rings don’t fit. Nothing fits!

The colic started when we got home. We were elated and nervous. Nobody is shocked by the crying, as if it just sort of comes with the territory, but when you’re watching a baby, it looks like the baby’s in distress. We were overwhelmed. The best thing is when George goes up and down the stairwells with her or drives the car and eventually the motion distracts her enough that she calms down. It’s like you trick her! [laughs] It’s the feeling helpless. My husband reached his threshold last week. He was walking her for I don’t know how many hours and he started crying. It was good he saw the chaos. We promised one another that when we’ve had it,
we've had it, like, "Here, you take her!" And everyone I talk to about it has an opinion and an experience. It's a little overwhelming! I don't want to do anything invasive to her. They started saying, I'm letting her snack too much and for too long. They wanted me to put her on a schedule every two hours, but with Helen you just get her calm and relaxed and then you're waking her up again to feed her and it starts all over again. The La Leche people had another opinion and... my naturopath... said I should eliminate all these things from my diet. We're listening to what the experts say but... I hope we're not doing any damage to her. It's like information overload! Go with what works! When you're in the situation you'll do anything to give her some peace and yourself some peace. That day I was angry. Part of me was feeling, I went through the pregnancy, I gained all this weight because I didn't want to take medication to harm the baby and now I have to do more!

I think it was the third day I had a bit of postpartum. I was having some discomfort and here's this crying baby and I'd had a difficult pregnancy and when the naturopath gave me this huge list of what I... cannot eat, I was like—and this is really basic—I can't even have a cup of tea now! So I went off on this crazy tangent. I felt this incredible burden of breast-feeding, like you've gotta breast-feed! You've got to sacrifice! And I was resentful! What's good for her is one thing, but if I end up a maniac or depressed, that's no good. So I just cried and fed her, but I stayed in the bedroom. I was mad and frustrated. She was fine. George had her. It was also the reality of looking at my body. The pregnancy dragged on. I got the flu and was really sick for 3 weeks and just slept and coughed and was incontinent. It was depressing. Night became day and I couldn't sleep. I guess it prepared me for this in a weird way. I was very frightened.

When the contractions started... I remember praying and I took a picture of this nun with me [gestures to a photograph on the book case]. She's like a mother to me... and my best friend was there and... we were protected from reality a little bit, like all the worries of the world when you're in this little positive room-in place with all your needs taken care of. We bonded, the three of us and it was like a cocoon. When I saw her... it made me think of God in the sense that it's a miracle when you see the baby. It was almost unreal! We felt very protective of her, because the nurses come in and start handling them and poking them... and the thought of, my God they're sticking a needle in her and she's so tiny, so fragile! I don't want to hurt her. We were really careful, but really excited too and overwhelmed. But I don't want to say that there aren't negative feelings. Yesterday... I understood the darker side of people, how you can be violent if your coping mechanisms are shot. I understood rage, just that feeling of helplessness. I
get teary when I think about children now ... how vulnerable and fragile they are and I’m super protective.

Even though I’m very career-oriented, I’ve been able to just push all that aside. I’m still gate-keeping to some extent, because there could be a flood of people, and I feel resentful because I’m tired and any time away from Helen I want to sleep or eat. I don’t even get to eat! It’s not like we have Grandma or mom we can call on. I could see where you could lose touch with the outside world pretty quickly. I could see where you could lose yourself ... ’cause it’s a very insular kind of experience. I poured so much into my work for so long, it’s nice to take a bit of a break. Part of me’s not wanting to tie myself up too much (but) there is a feeling of being trapped a little bit, of being tied down. You are! But I try to be my best for her. Yesterday was the only time that I felt I could lose it, and I would never, but it scared me and I felt guilty about it. I’d like to think I know better!

She’s always on my mind. It’s a bit of a burden, but ... I think about how much joy she’s brought me already. It’s overwhelming and I’m practical too. If I feel like I’m going to lose it, there are two or three women close by that I can call. Nothing else really matters. I mean it does and it doesn’t, but it’s like you’re in a time warp. It’s a whole other world! [As Helen’s cries escalate, Sharon changes her and returns to feed her, propped up on a pile of pillows by her side, her legs reaching toward the back of the couch, her arm almost under Sharon’s elbow.] I didn’t realize how physical breast-feeding is. It’s really demanding. It’s a real special bond. I think its the whole physical connection ... but also the baby being inside of you and coming out and that whole business of you’re one and then you’re two. Helen ... really wants contact. When I sleep with her, she opens her eyes to see if I’m there. She doesn’t like her crib. She hates that swing. She hates the infant carrier. I don’t always know what she needs! I think about not wanting to leave her with just anybody, or leave her even. The women you meet to baby-sit may be fine, but how do you know for sure, for sure? When I take her outside I feel very protective. The first time we went shopping we put her on the cart and I was thinking, “Oh is somebody going to grab her? Is she going to fall?” It’s that feeling of being responsible for somebody else. But there’s another part of me that feels quite strongly that it would be good for Helen to be exposed to other ... people. You gotta go out and do things ... but certainly protective. I’m probably not going to want to leave Helen to return to work, but yet wanting to at the same time to have a career, but I do think I’ll be different. We’re both totally consumed with her right now. For a year we haven’t had a relationship really. Knowing that George is coming home helps. And I’m not expecting anything else of myself except look after her right now. A part of me abhorred that
kind of stereotype, like it’s not gonna happen to me! There’s this bond now with mothers, which ...
I think for the longest time I’ve pushed away. And I’m embracing it now.

What’s amazing is it’s a fresh life ... and that overwhelms me at times with joy ... that overwhelming feeling of the newness, like the way she looks at everything. It’s like a whole new hope I guess! It’s almost like having the baby has tied everything together. When I went into labour apparently they told me my mother phoned and ... then, when we were in the room after the birth, I thought ... it may have evoked in her all that stuff of her maybe remembering when I was born. I know that she must think about me a lot and she would have loved to see my baby. I felt sorry for her because I thought about how different her birth experience was like ... and I thought about how much joy I must have brought her as a baby. I also felt proud of me in terms of what I was able to with all of that. I have overwhelming support ... so I feel safe. Out of all the things I’ve done, being pregnant and having her has probably been one of the most difficult ...
It’s all day and all night. If anything, I worry about anything happening to her. I’ve had thoughts of what if she dies? What if she gets a disease? I’ll go and just make sure she’s breathing. I mean your mind just goes crazy! I think as time goes by, things will change. I understand now when parents say they lost their temper with their kids, how bad they felt, because I really dislike seeing myself out of control emotionally. That frightens me a little bit. But I have to recognize that I’m human too and that we’re all capable of that.

At thirteen weeks

She’s at the stage of sucking her fist. Being there for her is just as consuming, but it’s more enjoyable because she can respond and she’s not in distress like she was. I play with her ... and hold her ... but I’m not uptight. I think she knows who I am now. She tries to talk ‘cause I always talk to her and walk through everything I’m doing. We’re in more of a routine.

She’s really impacted our marriage big time. When things were difficult, George started sleeping on the couch and we never recouped. I’m totally focused on Helen. I wake up before she starts crying and she responds the same way. There’s nothing left for my husband. He says it doesn’t bother him, yet he’s of the opinion that we’re spoiling her. You can’t split yourself so many ways! You go to bed at 11. You’re like a zombie. The last thing you want to do is be amorous. I mean your antennas are out! It’s sort of like being a blob. It’s like being self-less, I think. Yeah, that you give up your self to some extent and that’s the whole breast feeding thing. I feel like I’m a function more than anything for Helen and that’s rewarding, but there are moments still where I could spend a 12 hour day on my own (with her) and ... she’s just not
happy. It does get to me a bit. But because she’s so much more responsive now, those feelings are less often. She is on my mind but it’s a positive thing. I know it will probably be just a matter of time.

Our whole life’s totally upside down. The place is not orderly because ... we both made a decision early on that it’s more important to ... play with her than clean up. It’s more important to ... maybe forgo what I wanted to do even though there’s some days truthfully, between cleaning up all her spit ups and her poops, everything else stops. She still has periods where she’ll just start crying and that’s kind of scary. I think she holds her breath and that really frightens me. I’ll be feeding her and then I’ll see her gasping and I just freak out, drop the bottle, pick her up and tap her on the back. It makes me scared that she’s going to die. Sometimes she’s sleeping so soundly that I’m afraid to touch her, ’cause I don’t know if she’s breathing or not. So I’m losing, afraid that something’s gonna happen her, I do worry about that.

I’m very protective of Helen. I can leave her as long as I feel she’s comfortable and in good hands. I gotta get up and go and I know rationally, it’s better for me. I felt a lot better after working out and then I could be more present. I also felt it would be good for her to get used to being with other people and seeing other things ... but I have a lot of fears about the day care situation. It’s going to be difficult to let go. I’m also enjoying everything at the moment. She’s changing all the time. Seeing her is like watching a miracle and taking part in it too ... just the way she looks at things, like that first time she sees her hand or ... looks at the trees. She’s just so full of joy. The innocence, the beauty, it’s awesome, just to see her checking everything out [short pause]. I like her really trying to talk to me. It’s neat that she’s trying to reach out to me somehow. When I sleep with her, she tucks herself right under my side almost and her hand comes over to touch me. I also know that I can put her on the breast and calm her down. It works! I think sometimes she’s so excited ... that she’s not able to shut down. She likes the swing a little bit now. If I come in, she just light up!

The main challenge is integrating the outside world again—the real financial reality ... so that things will be better later; ... balancing being a mom, a wife, a friend ... a student, an employee, and being your own person somewhere in there. I always identified myself as a career person. I’m surprised how quickly that all just kind of went down the drain. I had a bit of a disturbing call: the women whose replaced me, she’s ambitious, no kids and it was like: “Well what are your plans?” I felt vulnerable because I’m at home ... I’m not hyped and ... I feel relieved that I’m not there and a little depressed about having to go back to it. I was sad that I didn’t have the option of even taking another six months or a year. At the same time ... you don’t
want to live through your child. On a non-emotional note, I think it’s good for her to be out in the world ... and to be adaptable and I think too that it’s good modeling that she sees her mother working as an independent resourceful person. But you can’t have it all! You’re still having to leave your baby and cut yourself in two.

There were a couple of moments that I felt like I could lose my temper with her and shake her and I put her down. And there were a few times that my husband lost his temper and that ... was enough to say: “Wo!” I read everything I could get my hands on to try to understand it. I prayed a lot. It’s like looking at somebody who’s really frustrated. You gotta stand back, try to look at yourself in the situation and be with them where there at and hope that eventually it will change. One day I felt like I was going to lose it, because I was feeding her all the time and nothing seemed to be helping. My doctor’s replacement said: “You need to supplement with formula” and I really felt torn ... really bad because here’s this pure baby, and you know breast milk’s the best thing ... but when I gave it [formula] to her she was happy. I felt like a failure a little bit ... If you don’t breast feed it’s like you’re killing your baby! I felt so guilty, wondering am I hurting her for the rest of her life.

I'm surprised how my appearance too just went down the drain. I mean it bothers me but not like it would have before. I think it’s because I see myself as competent and able to integrate it all somehow. It’s changed my priorities completely. What’s important is that she’s healthy, she’s happy. Before I would stay back at work in the evening, but I have someone at home that I have to get to first. If I had the option of staying home forever and not working, I would still want to do something part-time, ’cause it’s a part of me. Cleaning up spit up and poop ... eventually would get to me, if that’s all I was ever doing. But if I could balance that with some things for me, it would be fine.

We’re thinking more ahead now. There’s more to think about because I’m a systems person here. I’m the organizer ... and it’s like you’re thinking for three people. I’m already thinking how I can help the day care provider structure her day. I do worry that if anything happened to her I would be just totally devastated [looking at Helen]. I’ve been very philosophical. She evokes peace in me. It’s heightened my relationship with God even more. All children start out ... beautiful, innocent. It’s a little overwhelming at times thinking about that and that’s where you have to trust. I would hope that I could always make Helen feel safe. Having a child is life-giving I think, without turning it into my life ... sort of like starting over. I’m sure most parents must feel that desire to make it wonderful for your child, to make them feel safe, to give them everything that you’d like to be able to give them ... knowing you can’t. Where
I can though ... I'm encouraging some independence. I feel like I have a fresh start with Helen, ... that God's blessed me with an opportunity to see how it could be. I want to protect her. I worked out one week for four days and I felt, okay this is the old me coming back, and then boom, I can't go! The love I have for her is different than the love I have for my husband. If push comes to shove, she comes first. I think motherhood is a huge, huge job. I mean, she looks up and smiles and wants to eat and you gotta feed her... but you can't always be 100%. At this point I think it's sacred and an honour to feel so dependent upon, but I think there's other times where it's a bit much—when you're working and ... you have to juggle all this stuff just to have your basic needs met and be a bit secure. Now that she's bottle feeding I can hand her over. That part I do like. I think now what's different is I can reconcile things a little easier. I'd like to be able to breast feed, but can I take this pump on the sub-way and hold her? No I can't, so then I can't do it. I'm being ... more realistic.

I think we're more separate than before. She looks more resilient. I have moments where I feel myself ... forgetting that I'm a mom, and I like that. My humour is coming back and my personality a little bit. I was lying there today at 10 with the sun shining through the bedroom and thought, "Isn't this wonderful ... just lying with Helen!" and she looks up at me and smiles. So I think as I let go of the breast feeding more ... I'll feel a bit of sadness. That will be tempered with reality because I already find it stressful when I have to get somewhere and I'm breast-feeding. It takes so long. But I am able to let go. I'm proud of that. When you can leave her with somebody you trust, you have peace of mind. You got to live in the society. I mean you have to function!

Sitting upright on Sharon's knee, bottle fed, her hands across her chest, Helen's eyes span the room, then re-focus on the held bottle. As Sharon goes to wipe her mouth, Helen yanks her head back, her hands coming up to her face and grimacing and squirming, she starts to cry. Pulled up over her mother's shoulder, her back patted, Helen shoves her hand into her mouth and removes it again, milk dribbling down her chin. Sharon brings her to sitting, telling her she will clean it up. Reclined on Sharon's knee, Helen looks bewildered. As her mouth is wiped again, she coughs and cries, curling her toes, her arms flailing. Frowning, she arches her back and lets out a cry of protest! "You don't like being interrupted!" Helen turns inward toward her mother.

Lying more relaxed now, she looks upward. Another grimace and her body winces as she turns away to face the window. Placed over the shoulder again and facing outward, Helen grins bright-eyed and mischievously, her head bobbing. Turned to face the window, she winces, opening her mouth with an aching expression that crescendos into a cry and her arms go out as
she doubles up on Sharon's shoulder. Her back patted, her head slips sideways and she pulls herself up on Sharon's arm, her expression dazed as Sharon draws back to see her. Leaning over the shoulder more, her arm dangling down Sharon's back, her eye catches the camera. "Who's that?" A half smile. Curiosity fills her expression as Sharon sings their song, "Helen is a beautiful baby!" Clutching onto her mother's sweater another half smile appears. Sharon looks at her sideways and yawns. They both stare straight ahead in opposite directions, Helen leaning over her shoulder. With a glazed look, Helen slides down Sharon's arm. Half-dazed, Sharon persists in looking ahead as she addresses her: "You're happy now, aren't ye?" Helen looks ahead some distance now, yawns and smiles bright-eyed at something that catches her eye.

Perched in Sharon's arms with her two hands down by her sides, her legs outstretched, she turns toward the camera and pouts. "No, you don't like that?" Sharon introduces a large soft rattle and Helen turns away, but is then drawn in by its sound. Recoiling, she stretches her body, arching her back, her arms and legs flailing, calming down only when Sharon removes the toy. Arching her back again, she whines and starts to cry, her arms extended. Re-positioned over Sharon's shoulder, her curiosity is revitalized as she peers into the room, wide-eyed. "What Helen wants, Helen gets!" Sharon persists in staring in the opposite direction. "Are you going to try to talk to mommy today?" Helen's expression flattens as she stares at the camera. Sharon yawns despondently. Helen scrunches up her face, looks to the other side of the room and back to the camera, making quiet droning sounds. Lifted higher onto her mother's shoulder, Helen stares straight ahead, wide-eyed. Sharon pulls back to search her expression and addresses her excitedly as she returns her to sitting in her arms. Immediately arching her body, Helen stretches her legs adamantly. "Okay, okay, over the shoulder you want, then that's what you'll get!"

Placing Helen semi-reclined on the couch, Sharon gets up to move: "I'll go over here and see if you can see me." Helen follows visually the sound of her mother's voice, then looks away, her expression growing serious. "Helen, look up at mommy! ... Hello!" Turning her head side to side, she gives a beaming smile. Pedaling with her feet, she drools through a half smile. Looking up at Sharon, she grimaces, her fists clenched, her smile growing wider as they maintain eye contact. Half smiling now, her legs flail, an excited grin revealing her dimples as she persists in watching her mother. Sliding down again, her clenched fists wave about excitedly. Sharon approaches and touches her cheek endearingly. Beaming, Helen brings her hands to her mouth and scrunches up her neck as if being tickled. "Tell me more!" She persists in looking at her mother, smiling broadly as she babbles, her hands going out to the side. Grinning, she pulls at her clothing and looks down at the T-shirt moving across her feet. Sharon clasps her bare foot
and Helen looks up at her. "Let’s go! The bicycle! Show us how you push!" Helen’s legs go limp. Sharon sits back and Helen’s legs and arms flail in jarring movements as bubbles appear in the corner of her mouth, her expression growing serious. Silence. Yawn. Helen watches her own kicking, then looks around the room. Sharon lies her down on the couch and holding onto her feet, cycles her legs and chants: “Helen does the bicycle! Look at Helen go!” to which Helen lies limp, looking straight ahead with a serious expression. Momentarily, she turns to face her mother, then inspects her hand. “You just want to look at your hand now!” Sharon leans back. Helen clenches her fist and brings it to her mouth, What stood out was the eye contact. She didn’t want to be held sitting upright, but wanted over the shoulder. It was different her lookin’ over the shoulder, but holding her a few ways until she’s comfortable is typical. We’re in a nice space together. We’re comfortable ... even in silence. I think when I talk she, to some degree, responds and ... if I go up to her face, she’ll just keep talking. She wasn’t that talkative today. The close face contact she really likes. She’s trying to communicate. She’s acknowledging.

At twenty three weeks

What’s changed is we’re interfacing with the world more. Now when I take her outside ... there’s more coming back from Helen. There’s more of a dialogue. I’m thinking along more practical lines. I’m much more focused on how I’m going to be able to work ... get my body back in shape ... be a friend again. I’m in transition still.

She’s not breast-feeding as easily. There’ve been times when she’s rejected it. When she shows her dismay, part of me is sad, just in terms of time passing, but part of me is happy, in that it frees me up. I don’t feel as drained. I have a women coming in (and) Helen is ... transferring to her, but ... I don’t find she stimulates her enough. She was leaving her in the crib too long. I felt protective. Like this lady does care for her ... but I think Helen knows the difference. I have moments of panic when I’m down town, like what if something happened to her. I know this woman wouldn’t hurt her, but there’s nobody who cares for Helen the way that I would.

Now that I’m back at school, Helen’s on my mind a lot and sometimes that’s distracting. It’s like I’m a dinosaur ... I feel I’ve got one foot here and one foot here and I don’t feel like I have the same ability. I feel very responsible in terms of bettering myself to try to get a better job and to have more free time down the road ... to be part of her journey. My husband feels that way too, but ... I think I feel the pressure and responsibility more.
My being there for Helen has indirectly or directly made my husband feel left out. Since she was born there was a lot of different types of conflict that were never around before, and I felt that my husband was somewhat resentful on some level, mostly because I haven’t been there for him. I don’t think he has been there for me. I felt like something had been lost. I think he was more tuned into himself and his own struggles and actually resentful of how tuned in I am to Helen, because when push came to shove, I was always doing something for her.

Helen’s close to her dad and he is there for her, but it has changed our life and I think I was more prepared for that. We’ve left her a couple of times with a baby-sitter and the very first time it was a bit scary. It was like something was missing. I think we felt some relief because we were freed up a little bit, but we also felt a loss in terms of our interacting with her. When I leave her I feel guilty—no not guilty—actually ... I always feel okay provided she’s okay and the person is safe. If I start obsessing about it, I just turn it over to faith because you could make yourself crazy worrying. It’s also good for her to be with other people. [Helen’s eyes are focused on her mother from her seated position, contentedly propped up at arm’s length from her in the corner of the sofa. Sharon glances over at her, laughing.] I always do worry a little bit, but I have to compartmentalize it; otherwise I couldn’t function. I don’t think it’s that healthy to be that protective and so insular from the world. At school, I’m lookin’ at all these 22 year olds who are ... preoccupied with getting information and I’m just ... more interested in breast pumping because I feel it connects me back to Helen.

And I feel the pressure of the work coming back ... and I feel torn because I know ... I’m putting additional stress on my marriage and my life by pursuing this degree. Part of me says, maybe I should just put it off, but ... going to school separate from my life with Helen is uplifting. It gives me a focus and it’s positive. It’s an overwhelming sense of responsibility. I’m always trying to anticipate obstacles or situations that are going to come at me. I was really ... upset with the sitter last week and was thinking, if I don’t get this resolved, I just won’t be able to go back to work. I felt paralyzed. I’m working really hard to make my husband accountable, because I felt like it’s all falling on me. It bothers me that I had to coach him, but he would miss those things that I would see or expect. I think I’m more protective of Helen, and more responsible, much more acutely aware of her need for stimulation, security and safety. George thinks I’m too protective and involved with her, that I give her too much basically. [Sharon leaves the room to change Helen.] You gotta drop everything and be there [laughs]. I really felt alone. I felt like there’s this train and I’m the engine and if you pulled me out of it, the train would stop. It was awful. I was very angry that that happened. One of the things that’s helped is
I've recognized that my husband is not able to do things the way I do them. He's able to do other things. Since we've started counseling, he's been there more for Helen and more for me and he's thinking of us as a unit now.

My physical appearance stirs up a lot. It's a visual reminder that my life is different ... but ... I'm still the person that I was. Helen brings me more than she takes away, I'm really happy when I get home to see her and I get really grounded. And to be truthful, I don't want to be anywhere else. Part of that is just your own aging process and letting go. But if I was being honest, the weight is the one thing that does creep into my mind a lot. I feel like I've become a different type of woman. I've become a mother ... someone who cooks, who cleans! It's not a sexy image. It's more of a 'schlumper' [laughs]. This is where I feel torn. There's a part of me that would like to just go to work, give up the breast-feeding altogether and ... get to the gym every day. I'm having to wrestle in my mind. I want to still breast feed her, because it's good for her and it's something I can do while I'm away from her. Pumping is a way of maintaining the link emotionally ...and it's a nice way to check in with her. The naturopath said in two weeks I can go back to eating how I used to. So as each piece comes back to me I start to feel more hopeful. It's like my former self, but a different self. It can't be like it used to be. If I let go of school I could have more time, but it's like everything's a part of you all at the same time.

I feel that everything detracts from her. I want to be able to do it all well, but at the same time, I know it can't all be done at the same time. My biggest fear is I don't want to burn out. What it comes down to is she is more important. In terms of my inner space, I'd say she's right in the middle and it's not to say when I'm away from her, I'm not able to do other things, but she's not excluded. When you have children and you're working and struggling, you're constantly letting go of people and things. There's a loss. If you invest in yourself, then at least you can land on your feet. So this is that fine line I feel I'm walking, because there's another part of me that says, I want Helen to see me self employed and competent and able to make a decent living so that she will aspire to that. At the same time I don't want to be a workaholic. I think Helen needs me to be happy and content with my life so that I can be more present to her. If I'm depressed about my job, that's going to impact her. I've never worked bloody harder in my life, but if we lived on one salary we could barely afford to keep this condominium.

I could see me becoming dependent, me always focusing on Helen and never focusing on my husband, so I had a bit of letting go there. It's nice letting her sleep in my bed, but George and I need to rekindle our intimate relationship and she needs her own space. It's a boundary issue almost for me. I don't want her to be my surrogate partner and I think she needs that
independence too. You could use it as a way to avoid your relationship with your husband. My own mother did it where all her attention was on her children and then when we grew up she wanted us to meet her needs. Well it doesn’t work like that. I just don’t want to start bad habits.

With her mother sitting on the floor beside her, Helen stands in her walker bouncer, smiling gleefully as she plays with a small toy rabbit. Taking the rabbit into her mouth, she explores it with her fingers, stroking its long ears with one hand, holding the leg with the other. Sharon looks on silently. They exchange smiles. “Are you gonna put that in your mouth?” Helen looks to the rabbit then back to her mother. Sharon makes cooing sounds to catch her attention. Helen gives a wide smile. “Look mom what I did!” [Sharon quietly reflects]. Helen looks up at her, smiling, and places the rabbit back in her mouth. Sharon leans forward: “Happy smile! I hope you never lose it!” Helen chews on the rabbit’s ear and swivels around in her bouncer, catching the camera from the corner of her eye. Turning suddenly to face her mother, she goes back to chewing the rabbit’s ears. Distracted now by the sound of the camera, she stares at it wide-eyed, looks back to her mother with a wide grin and resumes chewing. Sharon laughs heartily and Helen swivels around again to face the camera.

As Sharon bends over to put Helen’s slipper back on, Helen reaches over to grasp her hair. “Are you gonna pull mommy’s hair? Go right ahead!” Helen runs her fingers through it and grins as she puts the side of her hand into her mouth. Again, she looks from the observer to her mother and back to the observer, while sucking on the rabbit and continues to swivel back and forth between them. Helen yanks her head back as Sharon wipes some drool off her chin. Sharon takes the rabbit to wipe it and Helen looks on intently, her arms flailing, her fingers fluttering, leaning forward, while making sounds of protestation. “I know, but it’s messy!” Starting to cry, she turns away, upon which Sharon introduces a rattle, which Helen grabs and takes into her mouth.

Fetching a book, Sharon sits back down and enthusiastically turns the pages for Helen who has the toy wedged in her mouth. Helen looks at the pictures. The book makes musical sounds and Helen raises her brows as she follows the sound. Smiling, they exchange glances. Helen reaches out to touch the book, opening her eyes wide as Sharon turns the page to reveal a pop up 3D scene. Helen grabs at it in awe and Sharon holds it at a distance. Lowering her head, Helen looks back at the camera. Sharon opens a soft book and Helen squeaks and gurgles as her mother gets her to feel the scrunched up pages. She pulls at it with her teeth and it crinkles as she manipulates it. Looking to the camera, Helen releases the book. They exchange glances again, then looking at the book, Helen yanks herself back in the bouncer, grasping the shaker toy.
Manoeuvering herself into a seated position, she scrunches up her body and starts to cry. Swiveling around, she coughs and her arms go up. "Have you had enough in there?"

As Sharon tries to lift her out, Helen gets caught in the harness and starts to whimper. Lifted over Sharon’s shoulder, she calms and looks at the camera. Placed standing on the carpet, she lowers her head and cries. Held in standing position, her legs cross and bend at the knee. Sharon holds her by the wrists, swaying her body, singing: "Shake rattle and roll!" Still crying, Helen looks behind her. Sharon puts her sitting facing her. Whimpering, her arms grow limp, then flail. Sharon pulls her to standing, lifts her up over her head, then down again to sitting on the floor between her legs. "Good girl! You can sit up!" Helen’s eyes follow the toys on the floor. She stretches over toward the book and Sharon hands it to her. Sharon turns the pages and as Helen leans to her side, Sharon catches her by the arm. The book opens on the musical page and Helen leans forward, spanning the page curiously as if taking in the melody. Still listening, she feels her slipper and bends forward to chomp on it. She latches onto her foot and Sharon pulls her back, distracting her with a teddy bear. Leaning to the side again, Sharon catches her and brings her to a reclined position between her legs. Mouthing the rattle, she starts to cry, looking a little off-centre. Sharon leans her forward to sitting, laughing as Helen goes to bite the slipper. "Everything in the mouth, eh?" She pulls her to standing.

Swayed side to side, Helen looks around her and from behind, Sharon kisses her cheek again and again. As she goes to topple, Sharon catches her and turning the page of the book, which Helen ignores, continues to introduce her to the characters. Helen glances at it while fingerering the fur on her slippers, remaining quite oblivious. Sharon brings the soft rattle to Helen’s mouth and she pushes it away. Placed lying on her stomach, Helen goes to put the camera cord in her mouth and as Sharon tries to take it away, she clasps onto it tenaciously. Sharon opens the book to distract her and her eyes wander back to the cord again and again. Placed lying, Helen’s eye catches the cord and she starts to cry. Her cries grow harder, her nose pressed to the ground, her arms outstretched. Sharon pulls her to standing and Helen turns to the cord and the black camera case, even more restless. Searching for something to amuse her, Sharon lies on her back, knees bent, and holds Helen straddling, but the crying persists. Sharon sits up a bit exasperated: "You wanted to keep eating your slipper! No, you can’t have that honey! They’re dirty!" Helen persists in going after the cord. Lifted onto Sharon’s knee, she looks longingly at the camera case. Pulled to standing, the crying resumes and Helen displays a frustrated expression. Sharon puts her sitting on top of her head, to which Helen stares ahead and brings her fingers to her mouth and tentatively looks around her. Brought down again, she grins,
more relaxed now. Sliding down onto the floor, her gaze follows the black case. With a bewildered expression, she looks at the observer. As Sharon introduces a book and begins to read, Helen scrunches up her face, closing her eye, mooching uncomfortably. Sharon persists in reading, but Helen squeals and pushes the book down, trying to peer over it.

She’s definitely exhibiting more of her own will. I worry sometimes about her swallowing something or hurting herself, but ... it’s wonderful to see her unfold. She’s exploring more. She’s more stimulated by music ... and textures, so I think things are more interesting for her.

At the beginning, I think she was aware of you being there and something being different. She was ... sort of looking at both of us before she’d do something ... more attentive to us than to her activity. Following her was neat. It’s much calmer. It slowed me down. I don’t expect to be perfect, but I do expect myself to make her feel as comfortable as I know I’m capable of making people feel. All my energy goes into her and it’s immediate. It’s learning to read her! I am uncomfortable when she’s uncomfortable. There’s more of an exchange. She smiles, I mean this perpetual smile ... and the alertness. I just have this vision of when I was sleeping and I’d look over. I’d be bagged and I’d see this little face. That’s my measure of success.

There’ve been a few times that I was yelling at George or crying or upset and she would be just lookin’ at me. She knew! She didn’t know what, but she knew something and I think she’s a little more in tune. I think we’re both changing. We’re testing new situations, testing each other with what we can and cannot do. I don’t feel she’s so fragile. She doesn’t have that blank sort of look about her. She’s always taking things in. She will get bored easily like her mom!

It’s almost like closure a little bit. I won’t say my cocoon is ending, but ... it’s like the end of a stage sort of for Helen and I feel I can let her go a little bit and I can let go a little bit and this has been really helpful because all these things I’m thinking I can say out loud and it’s letting me know that I can move on too. I’m more confident. It’s almost like it’s a major learning curve again, how you think you’re not going to get through and how hard it is and how intense it is. I don’t think there’s anything else you could do that’s more important.

At thirty six weeks

Sitting perched on Sharon’s knee, with a serious expression, her foot wagging, Helen looks around her, while Sharon massages her hand and whispers in her ear: “You’ve had a nice time with mommy this past two weeks. It’s going to be a bit hard for mommy to go back to work!” The sound of the camera re-focusing catches Helen’s attention and she looks at it head on. [Aside] “At night time Helen didn’t want anyone else to hold her except mommy!” Helen
looks over her shoulder at her bottle and Sharon brings it to her. Helen yanks her head back with her arms in the air. "No?" She presses her lips tightly together and puts her hand on top of the teat, pushing it away. Sharon stalls, then brings it to her lips and reclining, Helen begins to suck. Relaxed now, with her legs hanging limp, Helen holds onto a plastic ball, her other hand coming up to hold the bottle. Sharon releases and re-grasps it, upon realizing Helen is not actually supporting it. Helen stretches her body comfortably, while looking at the observer. Something catches her eye and as she pushes the bottle down, a few dribbles of milk roll down her cheek. Sharon brings the bottle back to her mouth and she resumes sucking, while looking head on at the camera.

The phone rings and Helen jumps with a startle, her head turning toward the sound. "We're not going to get the phone. We're busy!" Sharon moves Helen onto her other arm, away from the sound, Helen’s outstretched arm following the bottle. Dropping the ball, she grasps the bottle with two hands now. "Good girl!" Sharon addresses her husband as he enters the room and Helen looks up. "Mommy's gonna have her drink now!" Sharon takes a gulp of coffee and Helen’s knees go up. She takes the bottle out of her mouth and draws it back again, lying further back. Taking it out again, she holds her fingers in the air to look at them. Moving her hand in and out she inspects her fingers intently. She re-grasps the bottle and fingering her other wrist, opens her mouth and encloses the plastic teat. Upon hearing her mother’s voice, she whips her head around and re-settles. Taking the bottle out of her mouth again, Helen goes to sit up, then lies back down and resumes sucking.

She raises her head as she spots something on the floor. Sharon strokes her hair and massages her fist. Helen gurgles quietly as she drinks, sitting a little more upright now to see the observer. Pointing her finger, she holds onto the bottle with one hand now. "You want to see what's going on!" Rubbing her fingers together, she holds her arm out, looks at her hand and lies back holding her bottle. Sharon places her finger into the curl of Helen’s hand, which Helen encloses and releases. Opening and closing her hand, Helen makes a fist and encloses it carefully with her other hand, looking on thoughtfully as she sucks. Holding onto the bottle with two hands now, she glances at the observer from the corner of her eye. When Sharon nods to her husband as he leaves, Helen looks at her own hand and encircles her wrist with the other, then props herself up to watch her father exit. "Daddy's goin' bye bye!" Sitting even more upright, holding onto the bottle with one hand again, Helen looks straight ahead.

Helen and her mother exchange glances, maintain eye contact and turn toward each other. Lying relaxed, Helen reaches her hand up and tugs on her mother’s hair. "Yeah! That's what you
like to do!" She fingers it as she drinks from the bottle, gurgling. Sharon sits her more upright, tipping the bottle up. Helen strokes her hair and springs upward to face the camera, waving her free arm about. Sharon takes another slurp of coffee and Helen reaches up to touch her hair again. "What are you trying to do to your mother?" She gurgles and emits a half laugh as she slides her hand down her mother's face to touch her nose, now her mouth. As Sharon opens her mouth, Helen's hand returns to her hair. Quietly laughing, she lies back with her legs hanging limp, her head back and her arms reaching up, still exploring her mother's face. Sharon pulls her up slightly and Helen leans back, holding onto her bottle, looking around her from this secure position in her mother's arms as Sharon smiles and quietly imitates her sounds.

Helen sits up suddenly and holds out her left hand to observe it. She takes the plastic teat back into her mouth and looks straight ahead, her eyes spanning the room. Sharon moves her to lie on the couch beside her, placing her head on her lap. Taking the bottle out of her mouth, Helen yanks her head back to see her mother's face. In her red sweater and elasticated jeans, she pulls to sitting, little girl-like, at times, bending forward. Sharon hands her the bottle and she pushes it away as she focuses more on her own hand, which she holds at arms length in front of her. Sharon positions her sitting with her back up against the couch. As Helen reaches toward the couch arm, Sharon lifts the bottle off the nearby table and brings it to her mouth. Helen wiggles toward the coffee mug, which Sharon removes from her reach, saying it will burn her. She hands her a string and ball which Helen fingers and lets fall. She pulls uneasily at her sleeves and arm, then re-grasps the nipple of the bottle, turning it upside down. She stretches lengthways across her mother. Sharon pulls her to standing and presents the string again, which Helen takes into her mouth, exchanges from one hand to the other and brings it into her mouth again.

Standing upright, comfortably positioned in her mother's arms, facing outward, Helen makes loud sounds and they imitate each other. As Helen grows more content, Sharon kisses her cheek from behind. "Tell us more!" Still sucking on the string, Helen turns to the sound of the heat clicking on, her eyes opening wide as they span the room. Sharon continues to encourage her sound making. Helen sits perched and still on her mother's knee, her legs crossing comfortably at the ankles. Sharon strokes her hair. "You're going to see the baby-sitter on Monday!" Helen feels the stripes on her sweater, touches her sleeve and her leg falls limp. She yanks her body to the side as if wanting to get down. Sharon pulls her to standing and lifts her up to fetch her new teddy bear, which she places on the sofa. Helen looks at it and plonks down on her bottom. Reaching out to touch his face, she looks back at her mother, then turns to face the camera and leans forward, smiling. Still held, she slithers down head first, and immediately goes
after the camera cord, imitates Sharon’s patting the couch, then looks back at the observer, smiling.

Helen hesitates as she is walked in the direction of the camera. Then shifting direction, she smiles and shuffles forward, held by the wrists. With a big mischievous grin, she looks head on at the camera, then plonks down on the carpet and proceeds to crawl toward the camera cord. As she gets closer, Sharon swoops her up and faces her in the direction of a child’s chair, out of which Sharon takes a doll and into which she parks Helen, the doll on her knee. Helen quickly slithers down onto the carpet, pulls at the doll’s hair and rolls it over. Crawling independently, she turns back with a wide dimpled smile, then pursues the doll. “Who’s that?” Coming down on the floor, Sharon sits the doll facing Helen and makes kissing sounds. Helen looks at the doll, then turns in the opposite direction to crawl after the camera cord but is stopped in her tracks.

Looking back ... she’s more her own person. She makes her needs known more. I’m used to doing things and just being with Helen forces me to just sit back and be really present in the moment. I can think beyond these walls and I’m engaging in the world again. It’s been a learning experience, like I’m in it, but I’m also able to stand back from the experience and look at it. I think I’m more separate. And she sees me differently too. She sees me as somebody that’s close to her, but I’m not the only person in her life anymore. So when we do get together we have fun. She’s so inquisitive. She’s more mobile and independent and has more opportunity to hurt herself. I’m trying to child proof and make it fun for her, but at the same time safe and that’s quite trying. There’s a bit of guilt sometimes too. She doesn’t like it when you’re playing with her and then go away. She just needs to know that you’re there.

There’s a temper there now. When you take things away she cries, but you have to say no to some things because they’re not safe. During the week everything’s full gear. I feel like I’m on a schedule constantly. I’m at the point where I’m saying, I love Helen and want to be with her, but I’m building in mechanisms so that I can also be away from her and do some of the things I want to do to get my identity and self back, and that’s really hard because when I have free time, I feel I should be with her. I’m not breast feeding anymore. When I stopped about two weeks ago it was a huge relief: I felt sadness, but she was starting to wean herself ... so it was a mutual thing. I bought this expensive breast pump and I’ve been clearing stuff out to other women and I’m thinking, there’s a part of me that doesn’t want to give it away. It’s sentimental. I think it’s like a tie to Helen. It’s something that I did to show my affection and my caring for her and if I give it away or sell it, that’s kind of cutting it off. I felt the cocoon phase had stopped, that I was out in the world a lot more often ... but I miss the comfort of Helen. It’s a mixed feeling. Part of
me was sad, but part of me was glad too that she didn’t want me that way anymore. I do feel it’s like the end of that little nesting time with just her and I. She was letting me know she didn’t want it, so it made it easier for me. It was a physical thing too, because I knew once I stopped breast feeding I wouldn’t have to eat as much and wouldn’t be as tired. That really was taking its toll. It meant putting myself on hold. My hormones changed. I didn’t feel as … teary, sentimental and sensitive. I felt a resurgence of being able to get my body back a little bit, individuation with Helen, like being one and now we’re separate. I mean, how long can I avoid doing things because I’m a mom. I’m always too busy with Helen to go to the gym, but at the same time, it’s a health issue. That’s my first step towards independence for me. Last night, I’d been with her since nine in the morning and I was very tired and part of me was sort of thinking, I’ll be glad to go back to work after the break.

For a month now this new baby-sitter has her from 1 to 5 and she’s getting a lot of attention and stimulated and it’s very warm and loving, so it frees me up a little bit. I’m not as worried about her. I get on the phone with her twice a day and … at about 3 o’clock I’m already anticipating seeing her. I picture her face and her smile and it picks me up. I know that she’s really bonded with me as her mom, so I don’t get jealous or threatened by it and … as soon as she sees me she just lights up. I can’t give her everything that she needs myself.

I’m more focused on getting her stimulating toys and keeping her interested all the time. It’s less physical in that sense. Sometimes I get sentimental when I see other little babies … ‘cause I remember her being so young and tiny and I long for that sometimes, but I also remember how hard that was. What’s probably shifted is the realities of life. I’m thinking more these days that the best thing I can do for Helen is to have an adequate financial stability and harmony so that she can thrive. Nurturing alone won’t do it.

She’s still definitely within my heart and soul, but she’s a little further away. But she’s still internal—still within me. I’m still carrying her all the time. I don’t think that will change. She’s still I’d say, the most important person in my life. People say to me now my identity has changed. I’m seen as a ‘good mom’ and a devoted mother and that’s fine, but I’m not 65. I still want to be seen as somebody that is able to function effectively in the world besides that. I need to reclaim myself and my physical self is a big part of that. In order for me to get it together I have to pull back a little bit.

We’re still running tired. We have a long way to go in terms of finding time to be intimate. We both underestimated how much work this would be. It’s an energy thing. You have no energy! I know that it in my mind logically things are a process but when you’re in it
sometimes, it’s like, oh my God, this is never going to end! We both talked about the drudgery of it all. At work ... I’m divided. And I’m totally divided with my friends. I’ve had anxiety for four days. I’ve got five or six people to call and it’s not that I don’t want to. It’s just the child proofing has to be done and I’ve got this deadline looming over me. It’s sad in a way. You make a choice over your daughter or your friends, ‘cause even now if I get on the phone for half an hour, it bothers me. There’s no time for myself. I did think long and hard about giving up school, but there’s hope in that. Children grow up and leave and I don’t want to stop everything and then not have—yeah Helen will be happy, but then where will I be?

I’m more sympathetic to tragedies and the state of the world. I think there is a responsibility to make the world a better place. When I was at home on maternity leave I think ... things weren’t rolling off me as easily because I was stressed. I felt more in a cocoon, whereas now, I do feel as emotional out there, but ... I’m able to distance it, but I think a lot about it after on a more political level. It’s taught me how to learn and live again as if I’m starting over ... but at the same time I think I worry more than I did. Like I always knew that I’d be okay ... but now I worry about her and what will happen. She needs assurance. She needs safety from me and I think she needs George and I both to be well, so that she won’t have to see that negative stuff. The biggest things I’d say would be safety and security and love and if we can do that for her then I feel that we’ve given her a start. ~~~ We’re pretty integrated now. She sort of knows my routine. As long as she can see me! But if I leave the room that’s a different story ... Woh! [Helen crawls over to the sound system and bangs her head on the side of the stand. Sharon attends to her and she calms.]

Carolyn and Al: ‘A conversation in the making’

Al is the first much-wanted child born to Carolyn (aged 30 and of Korean descent) and her partner (second generation European) of 6 1/2 years. Both parents have a university education, Carolyn having worked up to the time that Al was born. The family have ongoing contact with their immediate relatives, live in the city and earn an approximate joint income of $100,000.

At three weeks

Right now it’s just amazing ... like the miracle of life. I feel it’s the most special time for us. [looking at Al] Oh! ... she seems content and relaxed and it makes me feel like I’m doing the right thing. Just trying to keep her happy has been the biggest challenge. It’s also been very rewarding. I think in terms of ... can I provide her with the food she needs? Is she getting all the physical needs met? [Addressing Al] How do you think we’re doing? I’m not sure whether or not
she recognizes me yet. I’m thinking, for her to come out of this environment where she was comfortable, warm, fed and had everything taken care of is going to be a huge adjustment ... for her body to get used to life outside of the womb! The biggest challenge ... is to make sure she’s getting adjusted to that, how to eat and take in the environment. At the same time ... trying to talk to her and let her know who we are.

Life is very different. Right now ... I don’t miss work. Actually I think of this as my job now. I’m still mostly amazed that she’s here, outside of me now. After giving birth to this person, I’ve yet to find out what she’s going to be like. And then ... overwhelmed ... exhausted. I mean, there’s just some days when there’s such a variety of emotions that I’m feeling. The first week was very difficult. I wasn’t prepared for how to manage this little baby and how tired and confused I would be. [Al lets out a cry] Oh! ... And I’d read books and thought I’d prepared myself, but of course I don’t think you can prepare yourself for how little she is. I’m only starting to get a handle on what her needs are. She gets this really serious look. At this point I think it’s her body just kind of testing its muscles and going through a kind of exercise. I find it hard to attribute emotion to it. [Al winces and lets out a cry and Carolyn watches more intently.] But I do find myself talking to her as if she does have emotions and understands me. I think I do it just as my own way of coping.

I’ve been thinking in terms of keeping myself calm and healthy ... and making sure I’m not too tired, so that I can deal with her if she’s cranky, without stressing myself out. I feel definitely a big responsibility. I’m trying to anticipate her next move. It’s a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. It’s a lot more emotional, a lot more rewarding. I did want a girl first. I thought, we’ll be able to have all the mom and daughter talks when we get older. I am looking forward to that. [Addresses Al in a higher pitched tone] But right now we gotta work through this stage of just eating and sleeping and burping!

I feel a bit more in touch with my mother ... and other mothers. I think of what she went through and have a different appreciation and a whole lot more respect for her now. I know it would have been ten times more difficult being in a new country with four little kids. I think I’ve entered a whole other world. To have gone through that experience of carrying and giving birth to a child makes me think of a life cycle and just that experience makes me feel more of a woman [light laugh]. Although I was born in Korea, I was raised as a Canadian, but my parents brought us up as they would have been raised--more focused on discipline. I mean I know they loved me and my brother and sisters, but never vocalized it. So for me, it’s important that I tell her that I love her and be more emotional that way. It has given me a focus as to what I think is important.
I feel privileged to witness her developing. Today she’s ... holding her head up just that little bit longer and she seems to be focusing a little bit more [watching Al while she speaks]. When my mother was over, she just kind of stood there and stared at her, going, “I don’t know what I’m doing. I could stand here all day and just look at her!” Sometimes I just stare at her and I’ll say to my husband, “Come, just look at her!” It’s hard to know if she’s focusing on me, but I think she is. And then sometimes I think she’s focusing on the picture or the window. Her big eyes are looking all around. I try and picture what she’s looking at, seeing everything and taking it all in. It’s mostly awe-awed at her and at the whole process of her becoming. The fact that from day to day I can notice a little change in her, that’s what amazes me. We’re waiting for that first smile where she’s actually looking at us. [long pause as she massages Al’s feet.] I think she’s very intense. I feel like I’m watching something very special. I just want to absorb it all in and try ... to enjoy each of these little moments [Al moans] Oh!

When she’s upset I get frustrated. [Al shrieks] And I think, what do we have to do to make her happy? I go through everything and think there should be an answer, though sometimes it doesn’t seem like there is. I think we just have to be calm and help her through it. Sometimes we just hold her and wait until it passes. For a couple of days she was colicky and was crying for about two hours or so and nothing would console her. It’s hard to be calm when she’s like that. So we started to take turns [Loud singular cries.] But we don’t get upset because [Addressing Al] it’s not intentional! I find that I’m really trying to come to terms with what I need to do for her. I want her to be content all the time.

When she’s upset, I think about her future. I think everything that I can do now to show her that I love her and that the world is a good place will help her to grow to a secure person [soft tone]. I want her to be healthy, calm and relaxed. I find myself propelled by what she needs and how I want her to be as she gets older. We made a conscious decision to have her. We planned it and tried to prepare ourselves for it. This is what I wanted to do, so this is what I’m going to do. I think of the camping trips that we’ve done, which have been difficult and there are days when you’re just tired and frustrated with each other and with a lot of portage and you may not feel like it, but you gotta go ahead and do what you have to do. Otherwise you’re gonna be stuck there! Like when she’s upset, it will pass, so we just have to work through it ... day by day, ‘cause she’s going to change day by day. I’m waiting for her to get into a schedule, but at the same time, I’ve been told that will change, so not to get too hung up on that. When she’s awake, I can focus totally on her. When she’s sleeping, then I can think of me.
I didn’t expect to be so tired and emotional the first couple of weeks. I was really ... very unsure of myself and her. She was tiny and I felt like I was completely unprepared. I just didn’t know. I was like, is she eating enough? Is she sleeping enough? And she was spitting up a lot and I called the hospital. I felt like somebody else could do a better job, like, oh my God, what am I doing? But now ... we’re starting to get a sense of each other. We got through it with a lot of support from family and friends. I just had to get rest and feed her and my husband changed her and looked after her so I could just get the breast feeding down, because she was spitting up so much and I was just so worried about whether she was getting enough food in her. [Louder shrieks from Al, who has just come off the breast.] We had a lot of visitors for the first two weeks which ... helped keep me on emotional even keel. I felt a bit more normal because we talked about things like adults. I found I could just be up from hour to hour. I would be feeling just wonderful, like I was high, and then just, “Oh God, I can’t deal with this!” I felt completely overwhelmed by her and by what I was trying to do.

When she finally latched on well ... it was like the biggest accomplishment of the two weeks. And then the low point was the first time she really went colicky for a couple of hours and nothing we could do calmed her down. I just felt like a failure. I just couldn’t understand her. [Al shrieks.] I felt like, “Oh my God, what did we do to change this baby? She was so good!” [Al calms; Carolyn coos.] We couldn’t figure it out and she just sounded so miserable and ... we can’t do anything, but we should be able to do something for her. I felt frustrated and aww! I felt like screaming myself. [Al shrieks again and Carolyn gently holds her, whispering to her softly.] I feel for her. Like when she’s upset, I feel I have to do something to calm her down.

I try and read the paper every day just to bring back a part of my regular routine from before. I find that helps to just take a mental break away from her and feel like I’m still part of the rest of the world and aware of what’s going on. It just helps me to re-focus and calm myself down and then I listen to CBC in the mornings. It helps me feel like it’s not just me and the baby. I feel like an adult. Before, the structure of the day centred around work, whereas the structure of my day now just centres around her. There is no structure! It’s just whatever she needs from moment to moment. I feel more free ... not tied to the clock the way I used to be. When I get to take my shower, it’s like, “Wow! It’s never felt so good!” I feel more human. I think of other cultures and how they raise their kids and ... about life cycles and I just feel a bit more in touch with that side of life. In the moment that she was born there was just the doctor, the nurse, my husband and myself and I felt like there was nothing else in the world ... just us. It felt so magical.
I think of when we were in Mexico on the beach and there was this family in one of the restaurants there, and the kids were just playing... in the back and had no toys, just a chair, and... they were just enjoying each other and enjoying life and right now, I’m just enjoying the moment more. That just being with her brings happiness, as opposed to doing something concrete. Just the time is enough to bring a deeper or a more complete sense of happiness. It seems just a little bit richer... simpler in some ways, but it touches in a deeper way. Everything is so rush rush usually. You don’t have the luxury... to enjoy a conversation with somebody... because in the back of your mind is... that person’s coming at such and such a time and we have to do this and this! But with her right now, I can just enjoy the moment and not worry about what’s coming next. I feel how cultures lived before we came so structured. Like that family in Mexico, I guess they lived by sunrise and sundown. So now I’m just letting her set the pace. It’s more peaceful.

It’s a bit difficult to capture exactly how I’m feeling. I had’t really talked about it, just enjoying it. When I first saw her I was just overwhelmed that she was there and... I had her in my arms and she was looking at me. [pause as she watches Al.] It’s hard to describe. She was so tiny and I thought, “This is my baby!” [Addresses her gently] Oh! In this relationship, it’s the need from her and in every other relationship... you can always walk away. This is the very start of her life and there’s nothing else that she brings to the relationship from another relationship. Everyone brings their own experiences from the past. She just is. Everything that we build is what will be her experience. It’s very moving that way. This is... so amazing! Everything’s fresh and new. I think about how she might be when she gets older, about having conversations with her. At this point she’s a bit serious. She gets this look. She furrows her brow [engrossed in watching]. I wonder what she’s thinking about. I just think about life. Today’s a good day. She just seems very calm. She looks really serious. I feel like she’s satisfied and I’ve done a good job! She’s eaten well, burped. I’m doing okay as a mom.

Lying curled on Carolyn’s knee, her head resting in Carolyn’s palm, Al looks up into her mother’s face as Carolyn takes hold of her mitted hand and follows her gaze. Leaning closer to Al’s body, she sways it gently, as Al’s gaze extended beyond her mother upward. Silence. ~~~~ Locked now, in a mutual gaze, Al brings one leg up and strokes the ball of her foot against her other knee, while Carolyn lifts her other foot, and wraps her hand around the ankle to massage it. Al’s hand shoots up reflexively toward her face, her mouth opening. “What is it?” As she stretches her body slowly, Carolyn draws Al’s leg closer to her own chest, massaging her feet and toes. Moving her head slightly, Al looks at her mother, captivated, her mouth opening wide.
Carolyn fingers Al’s toes one by one, intently watching her expression. Al’s hands reach upward and touch the sides of her head. Carolyn smiles and yawning, Al returns her glance. Still cradling her toes, Carolyn mimics Al’s half-open mouth. “What do you see?” Bringing her hands up, she turns slightly to the side, in synchrony with Carolyn’s side-turning head. Another yawn. Carolyn mirrors her moves and follows her gaze toward a picture on the wall. She takes Al’s other foot in her hand, massaging the ball of it with wider strokes, Al’s leg flexing in her hold. Al continues to look at the picture. Holding her in her gaze, Carolyn elevates her, still reclined in her palms, one supporting her head, the other, her lower back, as she draws her still closer to the picture. Thus suspended, she sways her gently.

Relaxing her expression, Al rubs her face with mitted hand. “Oh! yeah! ah!” Carolyn’s whispers reflect Al’s moves. Sliding her closely down her body, their faces align. Al brings her hands together across her chest, whimpering, as Carolyn lightly sways her side to side. Intently they search each other’s expression. Al rounds her lips and blows out an ‘O’ shape, cooing. Carolyn imitates. Slowly drawing her hands up to her face, Al punches them out in the air again and turns her head side to side, all the while maintaining eye contact. “Oh!” Carolyn smiles in awe. Al juts her chin out and sticks out her tongue, her leg stretching up to Carolyn’s chest. Then turning toward the camera with bright eyes, her tongue turning in her mouth, her head suspended in Carolyn’s palm, issuing direction, she emits a half-yawn and turns her head back wide-eyed, to face her mother.

As Al faces the camera, open-mouthed, with a subtle inquisitive expression, Carolyn tilts her slightly upright. “Want to say Hi?” Silently she looks, toes curling as Carolyn strokes her temple with the thumb of her cupped hand. Al strains her eyes to see the camera as she turns her head toward her mother, her mouth open. Carolyn watches closely. Al’s toes curl, now wiggle as she brings her arms down by her sides. Carolyn cradles her foot. Al stretches her arm upward, brushing it past her face, as if offsetting a sneeze and on the second swipe, turns her whole head in tandem, as she makes a squeaking sound. “What?” Wiping her mouth with her mitted hand, Al looks beyond her mother’s shoulder with an intent expression. “Oh!” Carolyn follows her glance, and through her pursed lips, Al blows imaginary bubbles that evolve into a yawn.

As Al watches her mother intently, Carolyn fondles her toes. Her tongue protruding for a half second, she silently holds her mother’s gaze, her hands coming to meet at her mid-line. Another tongue protrusion and she turns her head to the side. Gracefully pulling her hands up to her face, she springs them forward again, while Carolyn visually follows her moves. Another tongue protrusion is followed by a smile. Her toes massaged, Al lets her head drop back, her
folded shape weighing deep into Carolyn’s lap, her feet stretching up to Carolyn’s chest, her head held snug in Carolyn’s palm. Lifted forward, she emits a half smile, whimpers, then slides further down. Carolyn lifts her up in the air and places her across her shoulder. Al hunches her body, pulling back slightly, to which Carolyn returns her to the reclined position on her knee. Al brings her fist toward her opened mouth and stares up at her mother. Locked in a gaze, Carolyn strokes her chin with the back of her finger. Al licks her lip, then bringing her hand across her mid-line, closes her eyes, yawns, and draws her hand to her mouth. In silence they peer into each other’s eyes.

Al’s eye catches the camera again and Carolyn swoops her into a cradling position. Turned more inward, Al brings her hand up to her face, her legs kicking, her mouth agape. Grimacing, her head bops against the breast and Carolyn takes her hand. Al turns inward, while still holding her mother in her glance. Carolyn brings her into the next room to change her diaper. Reclined on Carolyn’s knee now, Al moves her head from side to side, her hands trembling. “Are you getting hungry?” Her crying escalates and as Carolyn goes to open her clothing, Al’s body curls toward the breast, her mouth going straight for the nipple. Held in position, she latches on immediately. Making strong sucking movements, she brings her hand up over her face to touch the breast, her legs more outstretched now. In the silence of their mutual gaze, she rubs one foot against the other, while Carolyn runs her finger across her face. Al scrunches her upper body and looks up at her. Carolyn encloses Al’s hand and her feet re-settle. Curling her body inward, she groans. Silence. Making sucking sounds, she moves her legs nimbly and her arching foot gets wedged in the crook of Carolyn’s arm. She rests her hand on Carolyn’s skin. Her cheek stroked, she scrunches up her legs and comes off the nipple. “Oh!” Carolyn thrusts her body forward to encourage her to latch on again, to which Al resumes sucking. Carolyn moves her thumb across Al’s head while she supports the back of her neck and observes Al’s sucking gradually wane. Slowly Al’s hands uncurl as her body grows limp.

**At twelve weeks**

Sitting on the verandah to catch the breeze on a hot summer afternoon, Carolyn’s eyes remain focused on Al, as I mount the steep steps to join them. Inside, Al grows restless and Carolyn tries to soothe her by holding her over her shoulder, lifting her up into the air and switching her from side to side amidst her loud tearless crying. Suspended, Al looks at her with pouted lips and knitted brow, whimpering until re-positioned on her mother’s shoulder. Maternal sigh! Al looks outward, crying, side glancing at Carolyn while rocked.
In a moment of quiet, Al’s eye catches something in the distance. Carolyn pats her back, rocks her rhythmically and kissing her forehead, sits back down on the couch to face her. Staring sideways, Al puts her fingers in her mouth. Carolyn lies her on her knee, which brings forth a squeal. Sucking her fingers now, Al gives her a sideward glance, then looks away, as she is lifted upright again. Whimpering, she turns to face her mother. Brought to lying on Carolyn’s knee again, she explores her mouth more vigorously and Carolyn leans over. “What do you see?” she asks, as Al’s head goes back, her eyes spanning the room behind her. Al brings her whole fist into her mouth and looks away as Carolyn goes to play ‘see-saw.’ Silence. Carolyn leans her further out, and pulls her up again when she starts to cry. Fist in mouth, Al arches her back and stares pointedly to her side. Rocked back and forth, she glances over at me. Still with a serious expression, she turns to face her mother and starts to cry. Raised in the air, facing outward, Al’s hand goes out, her face reddening as she cries.

Carolyn places her sitting on the floor, facing outward. Then pulling the activity blanket closer, she suspends Al above it, facing downward. “Ah! What’s that?” [enthusiastic]. Silence. Al reaches out unsuccessfully. Carolyn taps a shaker. Al whimpers and Carolyn whooshes her forward, leaning over to see her expression. As her feet reach the activity blanket, Al’s body grows stiff. Carolyn pulls her back to sitting on her knee, while Al’s gaze returns to the blanket. Held in position, Al reaches out her hand, then yanks her elbows back with a serious expression. Hand over hand, Carolyn encourages her reach for a toy, to which she at first, remains tentative, but then leans forward, cooing. Carolyn imitates. “Want to try and grab it?” More cooing. “No?” Al’s head juts forward, but she does not grasp the shaker, now within her reach. Growing restless, she cries. “Want to do something different?”

Carolyn lifts her up onto her knee and shows her a crinkle butterfly. Al pushes it away, kicking in protest. Placed lying on the blanket, Al cries hard with eyes shut, her head back, arms and legs flailing. Sighing, Carolyn stands her on her knee and bounces, then swoops her on up into the air: “We’re flying!” Al’s body tenses and Carolyn brings her back down. More whimpering. Lifted up again, Al’s legs relax. More groaning cries. Carolyn stands up and pats her back, but the crying persists. Al brings her arm around Carolyn’s neck and looks down at the floor. Silence. Carolyn whooshes her downward to face the toys and places her standing on the floor, but the crying persists. Carolyn suspends her horizontally to view the toys and Al remains restless. Exasperated, Carolyn wipes her mouth and Al cries. Standing on Carolyn’s knee, she calms while digging her heels into her mother’s thighs. A serious expression forms. “Gotta keep moving!”
Carolyn swings her side to side, then sits her down sideways on her knee. Loud cries. “Oh!” Carolyn lifts her up onto her shoulder, standing up to rock her. Cradling her in her arms, she sways her rhythmically and Al calms momentarily. Carolyn rocks more energetically in circular movements as the whimpering resumes. Al’s cries grow more angry in tone as she gets a hold of Carolyn’s hair. Still rocking, Carolyn places her over her shoulder and Al remains restless. Carolyn sits down and rocks her back and forth. “You’re not hungry, are you?” She stands up again, dancing as she cradles her in her arms in rocking motion, Al’s hand in her mouth. Carolyn pants. Al calms. Given eye contact, Al stares at her while swayed in her arms in this low cradling position “There we go!” The swaying quickens. Al sucks her fingers and relaxes. “That’s better! Mommy gets a work-out! Ooh! ooh! ha! ha!” [rhythmic panting]. Al tries to mimic her sounds, smiling as her eyes span the room. “Mommy’s getting tired! Feeling better?” Still smiling, Al turns her head toward the breast, and sucks her finger amidst groans.

Sitting back down, Carolyn opens her shirt and Al remains unsettled, Al takes the nipple fast in her mouth. Carolyn stands up and rocks her as she sucks vigorously. Al’s body grows more relaxed as her legs curl around Carolyn’s hip, her hand resting behind her head, her eyes closed. Carolyn sways. Al’s toes curl under, her legs tucked up, semi-folded. Carolyn rocks her rhythmically and Al’s fisted hand slides forward as her arms relax. Carolyn strokes her hair, her thumb coming down to stroke Al’s exposed temple. With her nose pressed up against the breast, Al’s sucking wanes and her legs fall open as she relaxes into sleep. As the rocking wanes, Carolyn leans forward and Al resumes sucking. Sitting down, Carolyn leans further forward, to which Al releases the nipple and stretches out satiated, her mouth half-open, her expression relaxed.

The most challenging thing is just keeping her entertained. She just needs to be movin’ around, changing positions. I’m thinking maybe she might be teething. She’s been chewing on her fingers a lot and she won’t settle down, so I’ve to constantly keep ... doing different things to keep her attention. If it goes on for long it gets tiring and a little frustrating. On the other hand, I’m getting my work out!

She’s just started noticing little things. She’ll stop for a few seconds now on an object. It’s obvious that ... she’s trying to take things in. I try and imagine what she’s thinking on seeing ... for the first time. It’s been amazing watching her get more developed with a toy: in the beginning when we put her under the activity centre... her arms were totally uncoordinated ... and once in a while she’d hit it. And then over a week we could see her gradually getting ... more focused ... and ... then it gets to the point where there’s no doubt that ... she’s aiming and hitting
it consistently. It's just amazing that from one day she doesn't know and a couple of days later she knows.

There's more responsibility now, 'cause she definitely notices when I'm not there. She knows me now and she's starting to know her father and she knows when she's not at home. She's getting into a routine. In the morning she'll ... just play by herself for about 20 minutes and ... she's fine on her own, giggling to herself and then she'll start to realize, “Oh I want Mommy” and she'll let out these little cries and they'll start off slow ... and she'll wait. Then she'll call out again, “Ehh!” [more emphatic] a little bit louder and wait again and then, if I haven’t come within 5, 10 minutes, she’ll get more persistent and call out louder. So I know she ... recognizes that need ... to have me nearby. I'm beginning to understand her patterns and I think she's still trying to figure me out. I was trying to get into a routine where I could have some time to myself and then I could devote the rest of my time to her and I'm finding that a little bit harder. I look forward to 11 o'clock when she falls asleep... to wind down and just get my thoughts together. To replenish, I just flake out on the couch, treat myself to a bowl of ice-cream. When she's sleeping, that's when ... I let go. But during the day it's pretty much focused on her. Being a mother takes up most of my inner space.

When I think back to the first month, it was just the basic physical needs, feeding, changing, whereas now I feel more responsible for the social needs, the interaction. If she wants me she'll let me know, so I feel so much more that I have to be there for her. I find I have less time to myself than I did before. It's a different fatigue. I'm constantly picking her up and carrying her around with me, so it's more demanding that way. At the same time I don't want her to get too used to it. My husband's a little bit more uncomfortable with it. He doesn't want her to get too used to us picking her up all the time and making those demands on us. I want to pick her up. I don't want to see her uncomfortable, 'cause ... it could be that she's recognizing being alone. I'm aware that she's aware of who we are and where she is and being alone as opposed to being with us. It's important to me that ... she doesn't feel that we've abandoned her.

A couple of times in the car we've been driving home and she's been hungry and fussing ... and we're 5, 10 minutes away from home, so I figure it's better for us to just drive home than to stop ... but ... I want to ... feed her right away. I think it's a trade off between always meeting her demands immediately and trying to set some bit of control for us. We were pretty much house-bound for the first six weeks. So in the last month, we've been ... trying to schedule more events as a family ... so that I'm out and meeting people and it's not just her and me ... 'cause I don't want to feel like I've been cut off either from the world. I know I could get into a cycle
where I don’t make a point of seeing my friends and socializing outside of her. It’s obviously been an adjustment for her ‘cause she’s been more fussy, compared to a home day, where she’s definitely more relaxed. It’s just bridging that hour. It’s a little uncomfortable.

Actually tomorrow we have our first night out. I don’t know if I feel ready, but I feel it’s time. We’ve been trying to get her onto the bottle so ... we’re trying to ... get her used to the feel and taste of it, which she doesn’t seem to like too much. Part of me wants to ... just go with the breast feeding, but on the other hand it’s not realistic because eventually I’m going to have to wean her when I go back to work [Carolyn pulls a face]. I’m not really looking forward to going back to work right now. I don’t want to miss anything. She’s just starting grabbing her toes now and each time she does something new I want to be there ... but that’s the reality.

I guess I’m thinking more of the bigger picture now. Before, it was just the tasks, the duties ... whereas now I think ... more long term ... in terms of giving her a foundation, building a sense of security, so for the next month or so, making sure I’m there for her when she calls for me ... and then, as she gets older we can stimulate her a bit more. I think of how hard it is sometimes and I think of how other people manage. I joined a mother and baby group. It has been nice to meet with other mothers ... just understanding how their experiences are different from mine and how they’re the same and it’s been really good to sort of assess where I’m at. Just knowing that other people are going through the same things, it makes me feel more relaxed about what I’m doing. The first month just not knowing what to expect ... was incredibly stressful. I kept thinking, is this a sign of something more serious? I don’t want to project anything negative to her. At the same time I’m thinking okay, ... what can I learn as we’re growing? [Al gurgles.] Yeah, she likes this [Swims her in the air] Woooo! [laughs] If we can get a smile out of her it makes it all worth while.

There are times when she’ll catch your eye and we’ll have a little conversation, where she’ll coo. The other night we sat out on the porch and it was just a beautiful night ... and we had a little chat and I felt so at peace. I feel more connected to life cycles. I think it’s just bringing everything together. I’m thinking of my parents a bit more now as they’re getting older. I’m trying to picture as she gets older, how I’m going to feel as I become my parents age ... and I think more about my own mortality and their mortality. A friend was mentioning this theory ... where a pool of spirits in the universe pick a baby to enter in order to teach the parents a lesson and to have a lesson learned of their own, like to fulfill something that they haven’t yet experienced in their life. I don’t think I believe it, but the thought that she’s here to teach us something as well as to learn about life in that kind of way, and what that might be. I’m picturing
her ... having her first date. Are they going to be around to see her get married? It wasn’t anything I really thought about before and I just think more like this is life: we live, we grow, and we get older and at some point we’re all going to pass away. I think about our families and how wonderful all that is to go back generations. Before I took it for granted.

It is a different space now. I feel back to reality! It was very magical in that first month. She was so new. It was just so incredible and now I just feel more responsible and structured. I’m thinking more in terms of how we’re raising her... and what structure to have in place, whereas in the first month, I was just enjoying ... her in the moment. I think I’ve come down a bit off my little high. It was wonderful that first month or so [pause as she looks at Al nursing] but this is wonderful too. I think a bit more of her as someone with her own needs and wants and woes. If she gets bored with something, she’ll let us know. She likes change. She likes stimulation. She likes movement. I like thinking that she’s going to be a strong person. It’s hard on me, but ... I like seeing that in her when she makes demands. And I like that she’s curious. She seems to take an interest in the world.

She’s smiling a lot more now ... and when we have the little conversations, she’ll look right in your eyes ... and she’ll start gabbing. Sometimes she’ll do it in response to something you’ll say and other times she’ll just go on her own little story. I’ll say, “So tell me a story!” and she’ll just squeal and every so often she’ll just give a big smile and there’s no doubt that she’s happy. I guess the closest thing it reminds me of would be being out in nature ... and just letting it all envelop me. Like when we’re on our canoe trips and it’s just us and it’s a quiet time, listening to loons and looking up at the stars, ‘cause she looks right into your eyes and there’s just you and her. I feel very connected to her when we have this time and she’s really looking at me and recognizing me and when she’s sleeping, ‘cause she’s so quiet, so peaceful. It’s gonna go so fast! I feel much more like myself now. I kinda have a regular night’s sleep and I get up and have my routine and I’m thinking fairly structurally, like getting her into her nap time and planning for her, getting her used to going out on the weekends, whereas that first month ... it was just ... almost like being on a cloud, just floating and enjoying her that way.

**At twenty five weeks**

[Sitting on the verandah] I feel like we’re having a bit more of a conversation. Emotionally there’s a lot more enjoyment now, because she’s more interactive and I can get a response from her. There’s more of an immediate reward. She truly recognizes me and needs and wants me and I think to a day when we can have our talks and this is the start of that. She’s
taking everything in. She has her ... likes and dislikes and she makes it known. There's a different sense of responsibility now. I’m trying to communicate with her and teach her things. I’m trying to provide her with more structure. It's rewarding but also challenging and frustrating because she still doesn't understand everything. I’m looking forward to that point where she can actually answer. Right now I’m having conversations with myself! Like I’ll ask the questions now and hope for her to just babble in response, but it would be nice to have conversations with her. I still crave adult conversation but not in the same way. I can do things with her and still talk on the phone, but now the radio's more background noise and I think more in terms of trying to talk to her as if she’s responding. I feel more connected to her than when she was just a little blob and didn’t understand. I know she’s involved.

We’re trying to structure her day and get into a schedule more so than before so she’ll have her play time and we can do other things around her and that becomes routine. Thinking towards the day when I go back to work, I’m trying to get things in place and make the change gradual. For the last month my mom’s going to spend time with her so she’ll be used to seeing her during the day and for the last week I’ll leave her part of the day, so she’s used to being alone with her. I’m thinking of stepping outside of what we do and thinking in terms of planning ahead so as to make that change easier for her. I want the routine to help me as well. If I wasn’t going back to work I would still want the structure. She doesn’t want to miss anything. She’s very curious. She just fights her naps. I think she’s been going through a growth spurt. She’s more hungry than usual for the breast milk. She’s been a bit finicky about solid foods.

I feel more like myself now. I’m thinking more about my own needs. I’m actually looking forward to going back to work, to having my life aside from being her mother, whereas before I was happy to be wrapped up in her. I’m at the point where I need my own space. At the same time I’d love to be in a position where I could stay at home with her longer. I’m going to miss not being there for her during the day, because that’s when she’s active and I’m going to miss some of her firsts ... but at the same time ... I’m looking forward to having a bit of space for myself—being me, as opposed to being her mother all the time. I’m ready for that [laughs and addresses Al who is leaning right over to the microphone]. You want to talk, don’t you? Tell us a story!

I think more in terms of how we’re teaching her things, because she’s much more aware now. She’s not crawling, but she’s fairly quick with her hands. She’ll grab at whatever’s within her reach. We haven’t totally child-proofed the house yet, so if I’m carrying her around with me. I’ll let her grab the flowers and the tree and she’ll shake it, but when she starts to put it in her mouth, I’ll say, “No!” and take her away and she’ll try again. So I’ll usually take it out of her
hand and distract her. I think she understands a little bit because with her teeth now she’s nipped me a couple of times when I’ve been feeding her and I’ll say, “No!” very sternly and she’ll stop [Al squeals] and look at me [Addressing Al] Yes, you’re gonna tell your side of the story! [Al makes short guttural sounds.] I know you’re just testing your voice. It hurt, but I was trying to make sure I got her attention and I very sternly looked at her directly in the eye, making sure she understood and she seems to have, ’cause she hasn’t done it. But I was expecting it. She chews on everything and her teeth are pretty sharp. [Carolyn imitates Al’s loud sound.] Raaaar! Yes!

It’s a little more difficult now she knows what she’s asking. She’ll make it known when she’s bored. When I put her down to play by herself, sometimes she’ll scream and put her hands up to be picked up. Sometimes I’ll come down on her level and play with her for a little bit and then she’s okay to play by herself. [Lying on her back across her mother’s lap, Al watches the conversation, moving her finger up and down rhythmically inside her mother’s enclosed fist] She’s doing that! Other times she just doesn’t want to play, so I’ll pick her up and take her with me. She knows enough to say, “I don’t want to do this!” and will make some noise to demand some change. I’m more concerned about spoiling her now and that picking her up all the time, she’ll get too used to it. That’s part of why I want to structure the day. Hopefully as she gets used to the routine she won’t be as demanding of change. The challenge is in teaching her: “This is your time; this is my time!” I still do indulge her a little, but I’m looking towards getting her into a schedule. I feel torn about it. I’d love to just indulge her for as long as I can, but at the same time, I know we need to be a little more disciplined and that she has to learn to play by herself a little longer so that it’s going to be an easier transition in the long run.

I think Bob and I have been out three times since she’s been born. I’m looking forward to structuring that into our lives. I think that’s important that we still maintain our lives as a couple in addition to being a family and in addition to that I want my life as well. I think I’ll be a better mother for it. I’m feeling the need a bit more to have my own space. When she’s asleep … I can stop thinking of her. It’s a release. I wouldn’t say I’m burdened … but there’s definitely a sense of relief.

She really knows me now—no question! She still wants me to put her down when she’s going to sleep at night. It’s wonderful! I’ve obviously done something right! [bursts of laughter] There’s a bond there for sure. She knows me, she wants me, she needs me, but at the same time we want her to get used to my husband putting her down. So we both decided that we had to structure more time for just the two of them so that she would recognize him as providing some of her needs. We definitely have a relationship, so it’s more to build their relationship. When I’m
really tired, I'd love for her to be able to go to my husband and really not want me so that I can just relax a bit, but for the most part I like it. There'll come a day when she won't want to be needing my husband or me so much. We both feel it's important that they both have something that's just the two of them. It's for my sanity and also for their relationship.

[Inside, Carolyn sits facing Al on the activity blanket on the floor, watching her constantly as we speak, all the while maintaining continuous contact with her body through massage and gentle rolling.] Look at all those good things that you have! [Al picks up a toy duck] Ha! You've got duckie. Tastes good .. mm! ... I have these moments where I just feel the responsibility for raising her, where it just kind of hits me that I'm responsible for [Addressing Al now] every single need that you have--Yes!--even more so than my husband. Even though he's involved with her ... I feel ultimately I'm the one who's setting the ground rules for her and making the decisions as to what to do. I've taken on that role, not necessarily that I feel it's mine ... but ... being the one too to tend to her needs and wants all day, I feel that I'm in a better position to take that responsibility. I wasn't prepared for that. Before we had her I believed that we would be equally involved and even though he feels very involved, I definitely feel there's a difference. I make the decisions as to what we're going to feed her. I'm going to be responsible for her for the next 20 years! This is a huge part of my life now. I feel like my life is never going to be the way it was before ... but at the same time it's very rewarding. Mostly I'm trying to enjoy it as much as I can, because I know this part of her life will go quickly. It's probably the warmest relationship I have, in that she needs me so totally and completely. More than a bonding with nature, it's much deeper. I feel it's a bit more of a friendship now. I feel the responsibility of teaching her things and raising her to be an independent little person ... and I'm still learning as we're going. It's something that I think you don't appreciate until you actually go through it. With other mothers it's something unspoken, having gone through it, dealing with the responsibility of your child. I think more in terms of just enjoying each day as it comes. Before I know she'll be talking back. I think everybody should go through the experience [laughs]. It's humbling, just appreciating ... the whole learning process, and how she's changing day to day and taking in everything. I'm learning about myself too. She teaches me to appreciate the little things. I'm trying to relate to what she might be experiencing and seeing things a little bit fresh, a little bit more innocently. It puts the rest of your life in perspective.

I think of how she needs me and this whole process of her growing up. It's just amazing. From one day she can't sit up, she can't grasp and the next, she can. To see her change like that in front of my eyes is amazing to watch and be a part of and it's part of the whole life cycle. I'm
appreciating my family more—my mom and grandmother. We'll have some photos of her with her great grand mother and I think that will be special ... to look back on and to tell her stories about her, just that whole continuity of family. I mean there's times when I'm just kind of overwhelmed. I have this little baby, but she's her own person, separate from me. She needs me, but ... she's gonna have her own piece to say when she gets older and that's the whole idea of her being. She teaches me patience. I find I have to be a bit more self disciplined, a bit more patient with myself and with her. The learning process is still slow for her.

Keeping her entertained is definitely one of the big challenges right now, 'cause she's so awake and alert. It means always trying to be creative. I'm just getting into the practice of trying to label things for her so she's hopefully taking a bit of that in. I feel like I'm doing my job as mother and teacher as well. I still can't get over how quickly her mood will change.

Carolyn lies on her stomach alongside Al, animated. Leaning on her elbow, she watches Al sit perched on the play mat, her toys beside her. With a serious expression Al looks directly at the observer, puts her fingers in her mouth, slaps one hand down on her knee and brings the other out to the side. Carolyn smiles. Al touches the container of shapes. It rattles. "What ye got?" Reaching for the plastic duck, Al brings it to her mouth. "You want duckie!" She chews on it--"Mmm .. is it good?"--flings it from her mouth and it hits Carolyn in the face. Carolyn passes her the container of shapes. Leaning over, pulling at the duck, Al's hand gently brushes Carolyn's face. Waving her hands excitedly, Carolyn pants and the duck slips from Al's grip. She reaches out and retrieves it and Carolyn applauds.

Dropping the duck again, Al leans over to grasp it, while biting down on its head. Struggling to carry it in her mouth, it falls and she whimpers. "Try again!" Stretching after it again, it rolls and she reaches after it, her mouth opening wide in anticipation. "Good girl! You got it!" Facing the observer, Al chews, holding the toy with both hands now. Carolyn looks on, relaxed. "How does he taste?" Al chews, then flings the duck out of her mouth in Carolyn's direction. Carolyn rolls onto her side, supporting herself on one elbow. Elated, Al reaches after the toy and brings it to her mouth. Gurgling, she leans to the side and is about to fall over when Carolyn lunges forward and catches her around the waist: "Gotcha!" Oblivious, Al gnaws away at the duck, flings it out of her mouth and goes after it almost immediately. ~~~

Carolyn squeezes the duck above Al to make it squeak, and Al grabs and pulls it into her mouth, then flings it out of her hand. Carolyn picks it up and squeezing it again, walks it up Al's body, playfully bouncing it off her belly, her chest, her chin, her nose: "Hello!" Al grasps and takes it into her mouth. Carolyn draws closer and gurgling, Al brings her knees up with
excitement and extends them fully. Carolyn makes chomping sounds and Al gurgles as her legs go up and down. Again she drops the toy and Carolyn squeezes it playfully, laughing as Al giggles. "Oh oh! Where'd it go?" Carolyn raises it high above her playfully and Al giggles and bends her legs. When Carolyn stops, Al whimpers in protest. Handed the toy, she flings it. Pulled by the hands to sitting, Al’s head turns back after it. Then yanking at Carolyn’s hand, she reaches back to fetch it.

Opening her mouth wide, Al slowly incorporates the duck and begins to chew. Carolyn mimics her devouring action and she drops it again. Al’s eye catches the camera, still open-mouthed. Carolyn pulls her to standing and seeing the duck again, Al stretches her body to reach after it as she is raised horizontally in the air. Picking it up, she pulls back to standing and begins to chew. There follows a moment of suspended motion as she stares at the camera, the toy held limply in her mouth. Al resumes sucking, then drops the toy from her mouth and reaches down after it from Carolyn’s hold. Pulled back to standing, the cycle of dropping, reaching and dropping repeats a few more times. Carolyn sighs and pulls her to sitting on her knee, to which Al slithers down onto the floor and begins to cry. Carolyn squeezes duckie in front of her and Al stares ahead, arms flailing. Pulled to standing, she loses the frown. The duck squeaks underfoot. Carolyn laughs and a smile spills from the side of Al’s mouth. Carolyn leans around to see her expression.

A moment’s quiet. Al’s expression grows thoughtful. [A dawning perhaps.] A half-yawn and her arms flail again. A few pants, a downward deflection of eyes and supported, she leans forward and whimpers. Carolyn swoops her into the air to face her and places her standing on her shoulders. Sliding her down her front, she steals a kiss and turns her to face outward. Al whimpers again, brings her thumb into her mouth, making a wailing sound and Carolyn cradles her in her arms. As the wailing grow louder, Carolyn puts her lying back down on the play mat, and tickles her chest. Al brings her knees up. The wailing subsides and Carolyn pulls her to standing. Al looks around her, then back at her mother, jiggling on her feet. "Are you going to walk?" Bending her leg at the knee, Al lifts up one foot. "Wow!" Held by the waist, her hands shoot up. "You want up?"

Swooping Al into the air, Carolyn arches her over her head and stands up, taking Al onto her shoulder. Al pulls back. Pouting, her brows knit and with a burst of crying, she turns inward toward her mother. Carolyn bends down to show her a candle on the floor and yanking out from her mother’s hold, Al grabs at it. As it goes to fall over, Carolyn tries to distract her by pushing the television buttons. Banging on the screen, Al gurgles open-mouthed, her body stretching
back toward the candle. Standing, her legs now locked, hamstrings taut, her feet depressed into Carolyn’s thighs, she stretches her body further in the direction of the candle. “No!” Carolyn distracts her with a book, but she persists in looking back at the candle; she leans over and fingers the pages as they flit through Carolyn’s fingers. Carolyn closes the book and demonstrates strumming on it’s cover, to which Al pulls it toward her, frustratedly starting to cry. Carolyn introduces a container of shapes and Al flips it out of her hand. Carolyn swoops her into a cradling position, while shaking the container again. More wrenching cries. With arms flailing and mouth open, Al is brought to standing, then swooped upright into the air and placed standing on the sofa. The crying stops and starts. Carolyn puts her lying down and she brings her knees to her stomach. Carolyn pulls her to standing. “Want to do the boing?” She plonks her down on her bottom and the whimpering wanes. Pulled to standing again, muscles taut, Al looks about. Plonked down again, Al smiles. And again. Half-smiling and half-crying as they proceed, Al’s eye catches the camera, her expression now serious, now relaxed as she looks straight at the lens. As they continue the boing game, Al looks over at the observer, smiling. Turning toward a cushion on top of the sofa back, mother and infant whisper quietly as their eyes meet and they become locked in a gaze. As Al whimpers, Carolyn takes her in her arms and cradled, Al’s movements grow even more frantic. Al pulls at her mother’s shirt while thrashing her legs about, arching her back out from her mother. Given her pacifier, Al calms momentarily as Carolyn massages her lower leg. Al flings the pacifier onto the floor and the whimpering starts again. Carolyn slides down onto the floor, baby in arms to retrieve it and swoops Al up into her arms. Fingering the pacifier with both hands, Al groans and pulls away. Pacifier in mouth again, she looks directly into Carolyn’s eyes and goes to pull at her glasses. Carolyn yanks her head back and Al reaches out to touch her lips. A loud squeal. Carolyn draws her close in an embrace and the pacifier falls out again. Another squeal. Drawn even closer, her head supported in mother’s palm, Al leans back and looks toward the observer, arms flailing.

Carolyn carries her into the kitchen area and puts her sitting on the table, to which Al pulls a cloth place mat over her face and leans back, Carolyn’s arms breaking her fall. Silently, she kicks her legs—“Where’s Al? ... I see you!”—kicks the place mat off and covers her face again. “Peek-a-boo!” Pulled to standing, Al looks toward the camera—“What’s over there?”—then back down at the place mat. Pulling at it again, she covers her face and slithers back down. “Where are you Al?” Groan. Squeal. Al kicks her legs. Pulling her to standing again, Carolyn sways her back and forth, as she looks through the window at the trees.
At thirty six weeks

Sitting on the floor bright-eyed, Al looks up at the observer with a serious expression. Looking down at her mother’s hand on the floor and back up at the observer, she raises her palm in slow motion as if presenting an offering or blowing a kiss. Slowly, she draws her hand to her mouth, raises both hands and turns her body toward her mother, then back to the observer. Lifted onto her mother’s knee, she babbles with hands suspended. “You’ve got something to say?” As they exchange glances, Carolyn turns her sideways. Al looks at the observer, then back to Carolyn, her arm flung around her neck now. Emitting a little cry, she flings her arms more tightly around her mother and drawn closer, climbs up and leans across her shoulder as something catches her eye.

Supported in standing on the floor, Al leans over to look at the toys below. Carolyn picks up a book and Al points, emitting a string of sounds. Sitting back between Carolyn’s legs, she points to the pictures and as she turns the page, Carolyn begins to read. Al flips back a page and Carolyn completes the rhyme. Distracted by a noise, Al turns her head back toward the camera and Carolyn follows her glance. Returning to the book, she continues babbling and turns the pages back and forth. Carolyn follows. Turning again to face the observer, her hands go up. “Do you want to go over there?” She watches her mother’s hand gesture and looks back to the camera. Looking up at her mother, she begins to cry and reaches up her arms to be lifted. From the safety of her mother’s arms she looks over at the observer.

Reaching out her palm, she quickly withdraws it, still leaning on her mother’s chest. A short cry of protest! Her body twitches. She glances at the book. “You want to finish the story?” As Carolyn reads, Al points to the pictures, her other hand covering the page. As she turns her head away, Carolyn reads even louder, tugging on Al’s sweater. Al turns around. Captivated by the picture index at the side of the page, she flips over one page and back to the previous one. Following, Carolyn reads wherever Al points. Then groaning, Al raises her arms to be lifted. As Carolyn completes the rhyme, Al looks back at the observer and climbs up on her mother’s leg. With one hand, Carolyn pulls her to standing and she emits a faint squeal as she stands facing the camera.

When a container of shapes is introduced, Al reaches in, looks up at the observer and averts her gaze as she grasps a shape. As she looks back at the observer, the container crashes to the floor and she immediately turns to follow it as it rolls away. Her expression grows serious as she clutches a block in her hand. She turns back to Carolyn and returning a smile, looks down at the prize in her hand. “Yes, the purple one!” She looks at the block, at her mother, then back at
the observer. She drops the block and Carolyn hands her the container, which she shakes and kicks over, spilling its contents. Carolyn picks up a yellow block, "It's a square, yes!" She outlines the shape with her fingers and Al looks at the observer, kicking the container over again. Picking up a block, she discards it again and with a determined expression, grasps her mother's wrists and pulls herself to standing. She struggles to see the observer now around her mother's forearm and laughing, she babbles excitedly, arms flailing. Carolyn looks on, smiling. Al grins. Carolyn holds her by the waist and hands her another block and playfully, Al passes it from one hand to the other, babbling. Holding the block at arms length, she moves up onto Carolyn's shoulder and their cheeks make contact. ~~~

Carolyn carries Al into the kitchen and finger feeds her morsels of food with her still in arms. Enthusiastically, she pops cheese into Al's mouth and clutching onto her mother's arms, Al stares back down the hallway at the observer. Sitting down, Carolyn holds Al standing on her knee. With a tired expression, Al brushes her eye with the back of her hand and accepts some apple, while shaking the rattle in the air. She leans over Carolyn's shoulder as something catches her eye. Carolyn follows her glance, offering more bagel at the same time and continues to follow her gaze while Al looks curiously around the kitchen.

Yanking her head back, Al looks directly at the camera, then turns her body around to face it head on. Carolyn pops another piece of cheese into her mouth and she chews slowly, her eyes drawn to the food tray. Visually searching the room again, she shakes the rattle and looks up, stretching her arms upward. "The clock, yes!" Carolyn brings the trainer cup to her lips and Al lowers her head to drink from the spout with noticeable sucking movements. Offered more food, Al squeals in protest and goes to slither off Carolyn's knee. Placed belly down on the floor, she stretches one arm in front of her and moves it side to side on the floor, snake-like as if paving the way. She looks from the observer to Carolyn. Brought to standing, she raises her arms, then as she notices the rattle by her feet, Carolyn hands it to her. Standing facing the camera again, Carolyn lifts her slightly to move her along. Al turns toward a floor plant and Carolyn immediately places a ring stack in front of it, which Al knocks over in clamouring towards the plant. Carolyn lets her touch it -- "Gentle!" but removes her hand as she grabs more forcefully. Al persists in grabbing and Carolyn pushes the plant further out of reach, spinning the large ring to distract her. Al goes after each ring in turn, but when she goes to reach the plant again, Carolyn moves it away. Al stares at the observer, then at her mother, and drops her bottom lip, her eyes still on the plant, her hands on her mother. Carolyn demonstrates gentle touching. Al
goes to pluck at the plant and almost immediately raises her two hands up to her mother. Carolyn lifts her up across her shoulder and carries her back into the living room.

Taking a rattle from her mother, Al stares at the observer with a serious expression; then reaches her arms up to be lifted. Carolyn stands her on her knee and when the crying intensifies, assures her, “I'm here!” Peeking out from her mother's shoulder, she looks at the observer, shakes the rattle and starts to wail. Carolyn places a pacifier in her mouth and Al looks first to the observer, then back to her mother. Carolyn pulls out a puzzle block and as she proceeds to build a tower, Al lifts off a block, looks at the observer and with a sleepy expression, knocks over the tower which Carolyn rebuilds. Lifting off another block, she inspects it, flips it, and knocks over the whole tower. Al repeatedly removes blocks as Carolyn builds. Carolyn hands her a ball, which Al crashes into the tower. ~~~ Turning to face her mother, she grasps her clothing and looking at the camera, she buries her head in her mother’s chest.

She's just so much more aware now of everything and very aware of me. She notices if I'm not there. She'll either call for me or she'll try and make her way towards me. Even when she's with her father, I'll come to see what they're doing, and she'll become distracted and want my attention. So if they are having time together, I'm staying out of the picture so she can bond to him even more. She still demands a fair bit of attention from me. There are times when I just indulge and enjoy it and other times, when she's clamouring for my attention, when I get frustrated, like “give me five minutes! ... I need a little bit of space to myself!”

She's just really opening up to the world now. She notices other people. At the beginning she was very focused on you and very fascinated by your camera. She kept checking you out. She notices everything and it's wonderful to see that she's taking something else in. In the mall she stares and smiles and makes faces at people. Sometimes it's a little tiring. I'm just trying to absorb everything about her right now because I'm going back to work on Monday. Finally, I feel like I kind of understand her, the hungry part of her, the part when she wants to be picked up.

I was fairly comfortable following her lead. There are times when I try and show things to her and other times when I just let her go and explore. It's a lot easier now to stimulate her 'cause she finds everything fascinating. The challenge now is to introduce something that's different so I feel she's learning something, but mostly she's just discovering things herself right now. She's gotten into hiding things in the last week or two.
I didn’t do anything to encourage that, but for some reason she started putting her soother or her hat in between the cushions on the couch when we’re sitting playing and she just thought it was great. She’d put it in there ... and then go in there and reach for it, grab it out and put it back in. And it seems to just happen, not necessarily by anything we do. But at the same time, sometimes I feel like I should be teaching her things.

I like to spend a lot of time with her, but I still feel a little bit of guilt when we do things for ourselves. My husband and I are trying to have some time for ourselves. We went out for dinner last Friday and when we were leaving—that’s the hardest part—I usually feel awful because I know she knows I’m going and she wasn’t happy about it. I went out during the day just to do a bit of shopping and my mom was looking after her and when I got home she was just so upset with me ... but at the same time I can’t be there 100% of the time.

About two months ago, I went through a time where I was just starting to climb the walls a bit. I felt a little bit boxed in and I really just needed space ... just to get out and ... not have to think about her and deal with her. She went through a stage of being very demanding when she knew who we were and she knew strangers were strangers and she wouldn’t go to anyone else. She was basically tied to the hips type thing. She would go to her father, but not for long. I think it was partly fatigue, partly knowing that I still had three more months. So we agreed upon a schedule where I could have a couple of hours to myself. I went jogging, just did my own thing and ... the mental and physical break was just what I needed. That lasted for about a month and a half maybe and we just got really busy with her and doing other things, but on weekends I’ve still ... been able to take smaller mental breaks and don’t need that space as much. I stopped feeding her through the night around six months, but she was still getting up. I felt like I was just running on a treadmill and I needed to get off. But ... getting away from her for a couple of hours once a week really made a difference. It’s nice to be the one she wants because I know she loves me. Then at the other side, it is hard to be there all the time for her. But I really wanted to give her as much as I could. Actually ... there are times when I wouldn’t mind to keep snuggling, but she ... wants to go off and play. And then other times it’s like, “Okay, I need a bit of space!” In the long run it balances itself out.

I’m trying to think about how to balance everything between her, my husband and work. I haven’t thought about work for almost nine months, so to get myself back into that frame of mind without losing myself in it, because I think that would be a little tempting, especially in the first couple of months, ‘cause I’ve talked to some friends and ... after 6 or 7
months going back, they're like, "I hate to say it, but I love it [more laughter]. I can sit down and enjoy my lunch, enjoy my coffee. I can talk to somebody"... just that being free of the child. So I'm kind of looking forward to that. But the biggest challenge is going to be making sure I'm ... giving her the attention she needs, still setting aside time for my husband and myself. For the last few months I've pretty much made her the focus of my life. It's getting to the point where ... I've got to let her fuss a little longer so that I can get some other things done. She's still pretty central in my life, but I'm just making more room for myself.

[Carolyn watches Al asleep in her arms.] When she's gabbing away, it's like she's telling me what she's doing. And then there are other times when she's mad at me for leaving her (and) she wants me to come back. So there seems to be a bigger range in her expression and how we relate. I'm looking forward to her being able to talk. I think she'll be outspoken. So far, she seems to know what she wants. That comes out when she's fed. I'm looking forward to being able to actually communicate with her and explain things she can understand. When I read to her she's paying more attention, almost as if she's reading along. She'll make noises and she'll point at the pictures and I feel almost as if she's understanding what we're doing.

We've got a bit of a routine now and ... there's a rhythm there. Before I was trying to get her into a routine and she didn't take to it very well, so I decided to kind of wing it and I feel more relaxed. I think she's probably more comfortable. She's just not that tight on her schedule. It's quite different from how it was at the beginning, 'cause there's still a bit of a framework for me and I do like having that even though it's loose, because I have to get myself back into a routine for work. We're just ... trying to be more flexible. My need for structure the last time was probably related to feeling just a bit too trapped. And part of my drive to get her into a routine was so I'd have time for myself. When we were able to make time for myself ... that took the pressure off and I began to look at it differently. We started giving her the bottle at around 7 months. It was a real relief and she's actually refused the breast for the last month almost. She took it for about two weeks after I introduced the bottle and then she would just latch on for two seconds and then go right off and be fussy. I felt a little bit hurt, because we lost that breast feeding bond and really, I quite enjoyed that; but at the same time, I thought, well at least I don't have to worry about my scheduling now, because I was a little concerned that if she got up a bit late, then I wouldn't be able to give her the morning breast feed before I went to work. So it frees me up.
I've been enjoying being able to watch her develop and change and her learning to hide things. She's starting to crawl and she's fascinated by everything, especially by everything we do. She wants to be down on the floor now. It's just incredible watching her and knowing that she's really coming alive as a person. The timing's quite good. We've been both very focused on each other. Certainly the more interested she gets in other things, that frees me up so I can pursue my own interests.

I have some mixed feelings about going back to work. I'd like to be able to stay home longer with her but at the same time, I think she's old enough to be with somebody else during the day. It's my mother, so it's the next best thing! [laughs] She likes to interact with other people, mind you, usually in the comfort of my arms. I'm just there to prop her up. It's been more than I expected, as far as the 24 hours around the clock, but also in terms of what it's given me. I'd say joy is the biggest, in just watching her grow and discover and relate. She's definitely her own person. [Al engages us both with her wide smile and reaching glance.] Yes, you want to tell us something?

An interpretive reading of the lived experience of holding and being held in mind at each transition is presented in chapters four through six. Chapter seven provides a developmental overview of shifts in the experience across transitions. The next chapter moves directly into the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of the data gathered in the first five weeks.
Chapter Four: The First Five Weeks
Boundary Definition and Diffusion, Maternal Space and the Beginnings of Mutual Exchange

As the baby in the early weeks grapples with his own coming into being as a bounded entity outside the semi-sheltered walls of the womb, so too does the mother, in contending with the demands of entering a new territory marked with change, re-visit her own sense of existence and her identity anew. This time, fraught as it is with intense passion and turmoil, draws one into the deeper recesses of inner life, inviting a re-encounter, for better or for worse, with one’s essential humanness. Such is the precariousness of the birth of an infant, the birth of a mother. The four women who participated in this study were in one way or another, exceedingly moved by the coming into being of new life with all its enigmatic force, and at a pace consistent with who they each are, embarked upon the journey of ‘being there’ for their babies with varying degrees of trepidation, fear, longing, doubt, and joy. In this chapter, I will present a hermeneutic-phenomenological reading of the experience of holding and being held in mind in the first five weeks of postnatal existence, as extracted in thematic form from the data and presented under the following: 1) boundary definition and diffusion; 2) transactional looping: the beginnings of mutual exchange; 3) the unitive moment: the co-mingling of union and dysjunction experiences; and 4) the felt exigencies of inner space. The sub-themes within each category are outlined below under each thematic portrayal and presented in Table 1. at the end of the chapter.

Boundary Definition and Diffusion

“I’m thinking, for her to come out of this environment where she was comfortable, warm, fed and had everything taken care of is going to be a huge adjustment ... so for probably the first two months, the biggest challenge for her and for us is to make sure she’s getting adjusted to that.” (Carolyn-1)

This overarching theme refers respectively to the infants’ and mothers’ sense of psychic boundedness as it pertains to the experience of self-body boundaries, including the felt nature of the boundary between self and other. It comprises two sub-themes: (a) contact and boundedness, derived primarily from the observation data, which includes the phenomenological category, ‘boundary definition’ and (b) the partial diffusion of boundaries, which describes the maternal experience as derived from the women’s narratives.

1 From here on, unless specified, I will use the male pronoun to refer to ‘the infant’ purely for easier reading, in light of discussing the baby’s experience primarily in relationship to the mother.
The portrayal is true for all cases to varying degrees. Examples are interspersed throughout the phenomenological text, with exceptions articulated.

**Contact and Boundedness: Acquiring a Sense of Boundary and Cohesion**

"Mostly I think she needs food and contact ... As soon as she feels all snug next to me in the bed with the covers over her, that contact throughout the night, it helps her to sleep." (Rae-1)

Catapulted out of the bounded existence of relative plenitude in the womb to a precarious boundless infinity postpartum, the baby is born with an initial sensation of being loosely gathered together within an uncertain boundary. Likened at birth to an astronaut "who has been shot out into outer space without a spacesuit" (Bick, 1986, p. 296), what seems pertinent for survival at this point is contact--coming into contact with a reliable surface that binds the nascent parts of the personality together and lends form. From birth and intermittently throughout the months thereafter, there is an observed urge to gather together the pieces of a self that have survived this first physical rift—first encounter with the ‘unknown’—in order to protect and instigate survival (Gaddini, 1984). Expressed again and again through bodily means, the sense of fragility is observed here in the baby’s muscular jerking following an abrupt shift in positioning, experienced momentarily as a loss of a continuous skin sense. When a soft spit-up cloth is removed from under Kyle’s face when he is sleeping at four and a half weeks, his body jerks, twitches, and shooting his arm up to touch his head, he grimaces and shivers; then slowly with closed eyes, he brings his hands together, crossing them at the mid-line as if bridging the felt gap in a pull towards circular containment. Similarly, when unexpectedly swooped up into the air before being placed on her mother’s (Carolyn’s) shoulder, Al at three weeks, startles, momentarily bunching up her body as she brings her fist towards her open mouth as if plugging a hole in the as yet, vulnerable continuity of self. With Helen, one witnesses at two and a half weeks, a more intense form of catastrophic panic upon losing her pacifier.

The infants in this study were seen from time to time to reach out in search of something that could hold their attention, be it a light, continuous movement, or the repetitive sound of the mother’s voice. Optimally it is the nipple in the mouth, in conjunction with the familiar holding mother—initially experienced passively and concretely as a binding force, a "psychic skin" (Bick, 1968), a “limiting membrane” (Winnicott, 1960b, p. 45)—that serves this function. Further to being physically held, the infants in this study were observed latching onto something external and continuous in an effort perhaps to feel all in one piece. For Helen, it is her mother’s (Sharon’s) continuous voice and the view of the light through the external window that brings
about a certain calm and sense of groundedness. For Al, it is Carolyn’s gaze and the continuous movement of her massaging hand; for Kyle, the changing shades in his line of vision. Corin notes: “He’s got this thing on the wall by his change table and ... I’m not sure he can really focus on it, because it’s further than I think he can see ... but he certainly spends a long time looking at it.” Symington’s (1985) description of some of the ways in which the baby strives to hold himself together in the face of extreme panic is pertinent here. Continuous movement, either initiated or sought, may serve to provide the feel of a continuous membrane, its cessation accentuating the sense of there being a perforation out of which one might spill. Helen’s father walks the stairwells with her till late into the night to quell the crying. Sharon notices that “motion seems to distract her from whatever she’s feeling, whether its colic or fear or anxiety, motion and singing, my voice and touch.” Carolyn and her spouse relieve each other of the continuous rocking motion that calms Al when she is really upset. Muscular tightening, the clenching together of muscle groups to the point of rigidity in order to squelch out gaps is another primitive means of quelling fear. Occurring also within the smooth muscle of internal organs, it results in the spasm seen for example, in colic or constipation, which may occur as transient phenomena or become more entrenched (Symington). The extent of the baby’s reliance on primitive survival tactics appears to be linked both to the degree of vulnerability felt and the nature of the holding.

An infant in the early weeks of life is vulnerable to experiencing the loss of his mother’s attentiveness as a feeling of being dropped through space, the ensuing panic leaving him with but two concrete options: either finding a means of holding himself together or not surviving at all. It is an immediate all or nothing experience. Helen’s latching onto the light and her mother’s singing and swaying ushers in an observed vigilance to background sounds which at times, occupies her full attention. Held together by being so transfixed, she keeps one eye on the camera and jolts to the sound of a passing truck or the ring of the telephone, while her mother protectively ‘carries’ her over such disruptions. Athanassiou (as cited in Quinodoz, 1993) noted that the attention “carried” by the mother to the baby is experienced concretely by him as a physical “carrying” and that it is this which brings about and confirms his sense of existence. Conversely, being let go may be experienced momentarily as “a fall which abolishes his existence” (ibid., p. 179). The neonate is seen to fluctuate quite rapidly between feeling gathered together in one piece and feeling himself to be in pieces. Losing the mother’s attention even momentarily, may lead him to recoil and withdraw his own attention from her, thereby “disavowing her existence” (p. 179) and shutting off access to the very holding that could
potentially alleviate his panic: Offered her mother’s open palm to hold onto, Sara, at three and a half weeks, declines as she closely watches her mother’s expression. There follows a chase and dodge situation whereby Rae offers her hand and withdraws it again before Sara gets a chance to latch on. Searching her mother’s face, Sara grows more peeved and a resentful cycle ensues, whereby she rejects her mother’s next move at connection by poignantly withdrawing her own hand. Growing more resistant, Sara contorts her face, pushes her arms down by her sides, jerks her head back and shrieks when lifted.

Each of the four women sought to find a reliable means to enable their baby feel ‘held.’ Unique to each relationship and each situation even, it required moment to moment negotiation. It is important to differentiate here, what may look like the baby’s relatively passive experience of being initially held together, encircled by a supportive boundary, from the mother’s active engagement in the process. The term ‘holding,’ as defined by Winnicott (1960b), denotes not just the physical holding, but the mother’s active efforts to keep external impingements to a minimum. Although experienced by the baby concretely as a physical holding at this time, it is brought about through a great deal of active attunement and empathy on the mother’s part, including her close attentiveness and detailed observation of the particulars of her baby’s activities, her endless problem solving to clarify their meaning in a particular context and her receptivity to experiencing their full impact within her--what Sorenson (1995) understands as essential aspects of the “containing process.” The infant’s sense organs might be said to act initially as organs of contact, the eyes for example, initially used more to make contact than to perceive, the urge to make contact considered developmentally prior to the sense of there being an inside, although in health--in the infants presented here--we observe the two develop side by side. At the point at which I first observed the four infants, it was apparent that they had achieved varying degrees of psychic boundedness and were already engaged in immersions and re-immersions into the mother’s psyche.

It is primarily through the reassuring contact with the mother’s body--his mother’s skin at first experienced as an extension of his own--that the baby acquires an awareness of an enveloping surface, engendering a sense of boundedness and primitive cohesion. Her holding becomes the reliable scaffold that averts the premature experience of the full impact of unmediated “primal organismic panic” (Grotstein, as cited in Mitrani, 1993, p. 327). Lured by

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1 This was considered by Winnicott (1960b) to facilitate the integration of the psyche with the soma, and thought to promote a sense of personal continuity in the baby; the term, ‘psyche’ earlier defined by Winnicott (1949) as the “imaginative elaboration of somatic parts, feelings, and functions, that is, of physical aliveness” (p. 244).
the baby’s need for comfort and contact, the women were drawn in to encapsulate and enfold, to tide the baby over the tumultuous adjustment to life outside the womb, which they saw as their first and foremost function. It is the magnitude of the baby’s need that resonates in her. Whatever he lacks, she feels she must provide, in order to complete him. It is part and parcel of what she sees as the pre-verbal physiological hook-up, involving the necessary re-patterning of the rhythm of their bodies: “He’s comforted by hearing me breathe and being close to me and he seems to know my body sounds ... He remembers being back in the womb ... He doesn’t like when I put him down. I think he just wants to feel the comfort ... the soothing ... the security more than the food ... Being born was a big enough trauma!” (Corin-1). The baby is for the most part, lulled by the mother’s physical presence that serves first and foremost as a protective shield.

From the start, this maternal “protective envelope” is seen to function not just as a boundary—the flow of milk in the oral cavity providing “the first experience, brief and intense of distinctive contact, of a place of passage, and of incorporation”—but also to provide repletion, affording “the more extended and diffuse experience of a central mass, a fullness, a center of gravity” (Anzieu 1980, p. 26). The evoked sensation of primal cavity and volume lends to the emerging distinction between surface and interior, not just of edgedness, but the emerging sense of inner space. Anzieu’s “skin ego” is at once the barrier that protects and “the sack that holds the goodness and fullness that accumulates from being suckled, cared for, and bathed with words” (p. 30). The mother’s scooping up the baby’s fragmented sensory and bodily experiences through her thoughtful attunement and handling lends strength and flexibility to his sense of boundedness, his ‘psychic skin,’ its pliancy correlated with the degree of maternal resilience (Symington, 1985).

The most primitive fear witnessed—the fear of catastrophe—with its threat of annihilation, against which the baby vehemently defends through bodily manoeuvres, is experienced in its extreme, according to Grotstein (1990), as an “implosive centripetal pull into the void” (p. 257), an infinite falling into gravity’s depths. Fueled by two opposing tendencies—on the one hand, the tendency to hold fast to the as yet, unintegrated state, for fear of bursting asunder “and becoming scattered for ever in the darkness of infinite space” and on the other, the forward thrust toward integration, which brings about change, and which itself may be felt as threatening—such primal fear impacts the developmental process of integration (Gaddini, 1984,

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1 This felt state of un-integration is captured in Winnicott’s (1962) ‘unthinkable anxieties,’ which he describes as the fear of “going to pieces ... falling forever ... having no relationship to the body ... having no orientation” (p. 58); Tustin’s (1981) fear of dissolution or liquefication, or the terror described by Symington (1985) of suddenly spilling out into space (Mitrani, 1994). It is described by Mitrani (1994) as “the threat of being gone” (p. 352).
A discontinuity, initially observed in the body, is set in motion. Forward movement is impeded by both forms of anxiety, the baby oscillating between them. These are the opposing forces of growth and anti-growth that are seen to come into play from the beginning, as observed here in the push-pull bodily movement of the infants interacting with the world with which they have come in contact. Referring to the bodily push-pull in terms of tissue elasticity, Kestenberg (1985) described “free flow” as the facilitation of movement unrestrained by antagonistic muscles, and “bound flow” as the inhibition or cessation of movement promoting a discontinuity (p. 139). Here, a parallel playing out of ‘psychic’ tension is inferred. Further to Darwin’s (as cited in Kestenberg, 1985) observation that the body exhalés deeply when expelling something unpleasant, Kestenberg observed the more subtle narrowing of the chest when either ejecting something bad or inhibiting entry of something unpleasant, examples of which are seen here in the baby’s hunching the body, while simultaneously holding one arm across his mid-line in a manner that blocks out the mother.

Primordial panic manifests as either fleeting or more enduring, intense or more diffused, but remains nonetheless in the background, re-surfacing in times of stress. Each of the women struggled to ascertain what amount of contact would not threaten her baby’s already fragile sense of self. Also observed, was the women’s own transitory panic, engendered by the very experience of holding a baby in mind. Bick (1986) had noted that until even a rudimentary sense of psychic boundedness is established, each developmental step forward is fraught with a tentativeness that breeds conservatism and a demand for predictability and external support. The changes incurred at each transition were met here with varying degrees of enthusiasm and trepidation, each of the participants in this study seen as having her own reaction to change.

The fact that the first encounter with the unknown has already been undergone outside of the infant’s control threatens his existence with the possibility of a recurrence (Gaddini, 1984). To avoid vulnerability to another ‘catastrophe’ with its foreboding annihilation of the self, the infant’s omnipotence becomes a matter of survival. Imbued with the magnitude of the baby’s passions, the mother is the sought anchor, who becomes at once the bountiful saviour who rescues and inflates him with all things good and the persecutor who withholds and impinges, imagoes that are for now kept separate in his mind as an active defensive manoeuvre in the service of development. It is the infant’s phantasies, initially bodily based and expressed via bodily communication with the immediate care-giver, which serve this function: When Rae withdraws her hand from Sara’s grasp in the example above, Sara turns more inward before facing her mother head on; then blowing out excretory breaths, she lines her fists on her chest as
if creating a barrier between she and her mother, in whom in that instant, her trust has waned. But hope is not so easily lost. In the face of another withdrawal she latches on again, more potently attempting to excrete the uncomfortable feeling through a wincing movement that reflects a desire to expel something untoward, her open hand fanning out around her face. Perhaps there is at this time, a parallel in a mother’s tentative appreciation of change, born of maternity. What is the origin of the varying degrees of depressed affect observed following the birth? What is the mother’s experience of her infant’s struggle to hold and be held together?

**The Partial Diffusion of Boundaries**

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"I’m no more your mother
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow
Effacement at the wind’s hand."

*Sylvia Plath*
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This second sub-theme, which subsumes the *maternal* experience of boundary permeability, self definition and identity, comprises three inter-linking dimensions: maternal space, maternal identity and the maternal experience of ‘balancing,’ termed here, ‘walking the tight rope.’

While the baby is pulling for closure and boundedness, there is a complementary loosening of personal boundaries in the mother, a loosening of the definitive edgedness of the boundary between self and other, which began in pregnancy and persists for a while following the birth, enabling her to ‘fuse’ with the baby, to ‘slip in and out’ of his world to intuit what he needs. Physiologically aligned, she is drawn into the infant’s wordless world, wherein somatosensory experience, not reason predominates. Feeling more *in* the experience than contemplative of the experience, Carolyn speaks to it being “a bit difficult to verbalize, to capture exactly how I’m feeling.” It is a ‘falling in’ that goes with the territory that is marked by ambivalence. At once embraced and opposed, it evokes on the one hand, an observed pleasure in immersing oneself in the warmth of the maternal pool, and on the other, a fear of dissolving in its waters.

Domash (1988) found that postpartum women experience a state of heightened sensitivity, including a loosening of psychological defences that outlasts the physiological changes of pregnancy, allowing the mother a “richer access to her feelings and intuiting” (p. 133). Marked by a greater propensity to attune to nonverbal cues, and an acute sensitivity to mood and feeling, it arouses a type of communication described by Arieti (as cited in Domash)

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1 From the poem, ‘Morning Song,’ in *Sylvia Plath: Selected Poems* (1985, p. 31).
as "endoceptual"—a form of sensory perception that is somewhat amorphous in which fantasies, both visual and kinesthetic proliferate. Her sensitivities awakened, mundane experiences taste different. Waves of emotion that peak and fall envelop her: "I would be feeling just wonderful, like I was high, and then just, 'Oh God, I can't deal with this!' I felt completely overwhelmed by her and by what I was trying to do" (Carolyn-1). The women expressed their difficulty in putting words to an experience, which in these early weeks felt more body-bound. Their experience coincides with Winnicott's (1956) description of the mother's "primary maternal preoccupation," her almost complete absorption with the baby, which he compared to a withdrawn or dissociated state that evolves during pregnancy and lasts for a few weeks after the birth, enabling a mother to identify with her baby and adapt "sensitively" to his needs. This opening up and loosening of structure—what Domash calls an "adaptive regression"—has the potential for either creative growth or breakdown in mothers. Requiring a certain degree of mental health to develop it in the first place and to relinquish it as soon as the infant cues the mother of his need to become separate, it is curiously an experience that is only vaguely remembered once one has already passed through it, as if an opening, once re-sealed, gets closed off to memory.

**Maternal Space**

"It's a whole other world and I'm finding the people who have had children understand ... When I think of my mom, I felt sorry for her and I also felt proud of me in terms of what I was able to do with all of that. I wasn't reliving necessarily my childhood, but thinking about my start in life ... I knew it was going to be work, but maybe not the emotional work ... It's consuming and nothing else really matters. I mean it does and it doesn't ... It's physically very demanding." (Sharon-1)

The undoing of the knot of one's 'prior' identity opens the gateway to a flood of diffuse thoughts and feelings from the past, inviting a splurge of unconscious impulses. Drawn inward on account of the associations conjured up by her baby's touch, sounds, smell, his helplessness and hunger, his longing and incessant movements, his expressed fears, joy and terror that remind her of her own, it is at times difficult for a mother to distinguish her baby's needs and experiences from her own. 'Being there' for one's infant in the early weeks entails not just being able to empathically identify with the baby's need, but also the complementary capacity to stand outside the experience and to see oneself as separate, and as having the flexibility to shift perspective from one realm to the other. It assumes the possession of a boundary that is flexible and pliable, one that can be both blurred and re-constituted as the situation demands. It is this capacity to shift between 'falling in' and 'standing back' that is most crucial to mothering and equally difficult to sustain. What is it that sustains one in it and releases one from it? Is it the mother's personal loosening of defences, giving way to the flood of earlier memories that allows
her to identify with her baby, or the immediate deep impact of the baby's own state of mind that
draws her in to re-visit her own needs and so intuit his?

The present data suggest an inter-linking of both. With the bounds of structure
temporarily lapsed, a mother is more susceptible to emotional impact, whilst the intensity of the
baby's passions and need invariably penetrate and call forth a response. But the space into which
she temporarily falls—what I am calling the maternal space—is constituted not just of her baby's
primitive state, but also the pooled experience of her own infancy and the mothering she received
therein. I am referring here, to the mother's inner world, now collapsed, with these three layers
of experience superimposed. Experienced primarily in the body, its focus is essentially maternal
and dyadic. It is very much in the realm of the pre-verbal. The daily task of mothering an infant
evokes memories both of one's own infancy and of being mothered, which are not necessarily
brought into awareness, but are nonetheless internally reworked. Much less regression, than a re-
evocation in the present, it is a powerfully evocative time that calls forth the mother's need to be
herself contained.

It has been shown that mothers invariably re-engage with maternal figures around and
following the birth (Ammaniti, 1991; Benedek, 1959; Chodorow, 1978; Winnicott, 1971). Here,
there was a noticeable longing for maternal care and maternal presence, expressed either overtly
or inadvertently, and sought out where it was felt to be wanting in all four women to support
their being present to the child of the next generation. Long estranged from her own mother,
Sharon has come to rely on a substitute mother whom she sought out and who comes to mind
“like a good mother to me” in the throes of labour, in contrast to her actual mother whose phone-
call intrudes. With her family inaccessible, living on the other side of the country, Rae longs for
her mother in times of panic and exhaustion. Determined not to lose her cool and to give her
children a good experience, it is her mother who comes to mind when she starts to feel she is
losing her bearings. In contrast, there is a noticeable absence of specific reference to the
women's fathers at this time and a considerable blending of the partner (the baby's father) with
the maternal or idealized mother in the women's minds. The extent to which a partner either
carries or eschews the maternal role in the early weeks goes not unnoticed, especially in
situations where an actual mothering figure in the immediate environment is wanting.

There is in fact, an ongoing re-working of a new mother's internal relationship to her own
mother beginning in pregnancy and continuing into the postpartum period that is specifically
related to her becoming a mother herself (Ammaniti, 1991). The extent of her own desire both to
hold and be held instigates this internal shift. All of the women sought to see their mothers in a
positive light, not as an act of denial, but as an attempt to hold onto the good aspects of the internal mother. What might once have been seen as a 'flaw' is now seen in context, more from the perspective of woman as mother perhaps, and there evolves a sense of one's own mother as capable of providing at least some aspects of the needed containment. Corin sees her mother as now capable of providing the "food" that she needs, even though she is also said to "stress the relationship." And along with the acknowledged painful reality of her own infancy and childhood, Sharon holds onto the feeling of being at least momentarily held in her mother's mind, then, as an infant and now, as she herself becomes a mother, as she focuses on "how much joy I must have brought her as a baby." This revived seeking out of the mother, in particular the benevolent aspects of her care, has been understood as an attempt to integrate ambivalent feelings by amending one's internal mother in the service of approaching motherhood (van Dijk, 1990).

While the family ritualistically prepare the external holding environment—be it a room, a specific corner of the home—for the arrival of the expected child, there is a parallel inner clearing, a dynamic re-organization of inner space that has usually gone through a cycle before the actual birth, or in some cases even prior to conception in preparation for receiving the child within. This inner work was broached by the women in their own way, by two of the women through analysis and psychotherapy, as a renewal of faith, the only goal of psychoanalysis for Corin being, to find that "unconditional acceptance" she could pass on "by osmosis." The physical changes of foetal life in the womb is paralleled by the shifting image of the baby in the woman's mind. There is general consensus (Ammaniti, 1991; Fava-Viziello, Antonioli, Cocci, Invernizzi, & Cristante, 1993) that between the fourth and seventh months of gestation there is a rapid spurt in imagery that peaks at seven months, beyond which its vividness and specificity considerably diminishes. This is intimately linked with the woman's own developing sense of herself as a mother. Other preoccupations temporarily shelved, the baby becomes central in the mother's internal world. The women in this study undoubtedly felt that their 'being there' for their baby assumed number one priority at this time, irrespective of their life's project prior to the birth (with the exception of an other child), and despite the barrage of conflicting emotion. The maternal space as described here, is an essentially pre-verbal somato-sensory diffuse psychic area that dominates a new mother's internal world at this time.

Stern (1995) called the emergence of the transitory "psychic organization" prompted by the birth of the infant, the "motherhood constellation." Described as a unique "psychic organizer," engendering its own specific feelings, sensitivities, phantasies, fears and wishes, he
saw it as containing three separate but related “discourses” carried on internally and externally with the new mother’s own mother (especially as mother to her as a child), with herself as new mother, and with her baby. This “motherhood trilogy,” thought to occupy the bulk of her focus, is described as specific to the socio-cultural context in which a mother lives. With its own thematic content, Stern saw the “motherhood constellation” as akin to a life span phase, only more specific and neither universal, nor obligatory, an organization that remains dominant for a while, but can be subsequently evoked at any time. In this study, the maternal experience of holding a baby in mind presented more as a re-organization, entailing a re-visiting of crucial and inherently conflictual developmental nodes, experienced now in a new light as they are re-evoked in an adult mind in the context of being present to new unfolding life. It was seen to provide an opportunity for internal re-structuring. It is via an intimate engagement with her baby in arms, and a re-engagement with her infant self and the mother of her infancy that a potential re-shaping of a woman’s own inner world takes place. It is intimately bound up with a mother’s growing identification with her baby (and her infant self) and the mother of her infancy, both of which came to the fore here. It is a new phase of life through which a new mother walks that cannot be reversed. Her world, internal and external is penetrated. From here on she holds in mind an other, who has entered her world and brought forth an evocative re-engagement with her internal objects. In the months ahead, she will gradually re-shuffle her internal bits, gather herself together, (or not) and henceforth look through the world through a different lens.

The dimension of maternal space was further sub-divided into four sub-dimensions: the women’s described experience of a split world; a sense of unpreparedness; timelessness and the loosening of structure; and a re-shuffling on the inner and outer plane:

**An Experienced Split World**

“I like to have the place ... generally ordered, you know, some semblance of sort of organization and that doesn’t happen a lot now, which is okay, but if I get a minute, that’s something I like to do.” (Corin-I)

Sucked into the maternal space--a floating island both familiar and foreign, initially struggling to keep itself afloat--a new mother watches with ambivalence, her pre-maternal identity recede further and further into the horizon. In these early postpartum weeks, she resides in a transitional area, shifting unassuredly between this internal diffuse unbordered maternal space and the more structured world she has left behind, wherein she feels she can more assuredly find solid ground. Feeling at times hurled into an intense whirlpool, mapless, its parametres tenuous, with few guiding posts, a mother can find herself directionless, and yet amidst the chaos, there is a felt lifeline that connects her to her living baby, the baby’s
dependence and need itself pressing in ways pragmatic and concrete. In speaking to the earliest maternal experience of being with child, Swigart (1991) describes her own experience of these two contradictory worlds, the one “intuitive, fusional, enmeshed” and somatically related, the other rational and driven by the need to understand (p. 41). Immersed in her daughter’s world, with the capacity to think rationally suspended, she found herself sinking “into a state of mindlessness” and yet, her conscious thought alone could not direct her to what her baby needed (p. 43). A mother’s experience can feel quite split. Teetering between worlds, she can feel caught in the borderland. Experienced at times as a dream-like state on the border between wakefulness and sleep, one is thrown into a state of magical disbelief, an unreality: “Did this really happen?”

One has to be prepared to slip in and out of the maternal space with its spectral shadows of earlier life, its diffuse inner world of the mother that is at once daunting and exhilarating, its muddy waters.

**Unpreparedness**

“The first week was very difficult. I wasn’t prepared for how to manage this little baby and how tired and confused I would be.” (Carolyn-1)

The bliss and ecstasy felt in the presence of new life contrasts with an overwhelming preoccupation and sense of responsibility at the exclusion of all else that is exhausting. Despite forethought and planning, it is a “whole other world” that one steps into unknowingly. One cannot anticipate beforehand the extent of the pull of a baby. Rampant with emotion and assailed by boundless demands, both physical and emotional, an unpreparedness pervades that can trigger doubt about one’s capacity to accomplish the immediate task: “She was tiny and I felt like I was completely unprepared ... like somebody else could do a better job, like ... what am I doing? ... I just didn’t know!” (Carolyn-1). The gripping self doubt and inevitable unpredictability encountered in caring for a newborn bring a new mother face to face again and again with the experience of not knowing that fuses in the back of her mind with the larger existential unknowns in her life, unknowns which she may either contemplate or shirk. All but one of the women acknowledged this overwhelming sense of unpreparedness and unknowing. All four expressed self doubt. Facing the unknown is daunting. A mother may latch onto ‘knowing’ as a means to escape the painful uncertainty engendered both in coming into contact with an infant mind and in facing her own dependence on others for support at this time. She might accumulate knowledge to cut through the very unpredictability of her present circumstance. Corin sees her ‘know how’ as a direct outcome of the relevant experiences she actively sought en route to becoming a parent: “I don’t think there was any correlation to how it was for me ... I have a lot of
niece and nephews ... I knew just what to expect.” With her new baby in arms, Rae refers back to her overwhelming angst in not knowing, to her being “so internal, so in my brain” with her first born that she couldn’t get close enough to figure out his crying, whereas with her second, she feels more able to sit with it, having already survived the first encounter and having learned from experience that this phase will come to an end. The ‘sitting with it,’ the remaining in the maternal space is not a given, since it requires a lot of letting go of what one might have heretofore held fast; a letting go that presupposes a groundedness and faith in being able to hold onto the good within oneself. In the face of moments of not knowing how to be with her new infant, self doubt can creep in fast and out of the blue to sully a mother’s ‘ordinary devotion’ of her infant.

**Timelessness and the Loosening of Structure**

“Originally I’m thinking I’ve got all this time off work. Now it feels like it’s flying by ... There’s already that feeling like I can’t believe he’s a month already.” (Corin-1)

‘Being there’ for an infant in the first few weeks is a “full time,” “all-consuming” occupation that takes up a new mother’s every waking moment. Day becomes night. “Night becomes day.” Each moment runs into the next. Time has no bounds. “You’re in a time warp” (Sharon-1). One feels overwhelmed by the never-ending nature of a task that seems to drag on ad infinitum while one is in it, with no break or end in sight. With the sense of time collapsed, there is a yearning for structure, a gradual reaching after ritual and groundedness and yet, this timelessness, this lapse of the usual sense of structure and routine are simultaneously embraced. It alleviates one from the stress of schedules that chop up the day, issuing order. Following the baby as opposed to being tied to the external clock gives birth to an inner peace, to a pace of life set by internal rhythms. Time stands still. One can live in the moment. “Before, the structure of the day centred around work, whereas the structure of my day now just centres around her. There is no structure! It’s just whatever she needs from moment to moment” (Carolyn-1). This marked slowing of pace is at once welcomed and loathed. Timelessness both liberates and confines. One is drawn to it like a magnet and yet urged to mentally leap to the future or cling to the past in an attempt to repel its alluring force. But this time travel, this transporting of the self out of the moment, neither alleviates the overwhelming stress, nor obliterates the experienced intensity. One cannot actually leave the moment without encountering guilt, as the baby’s demands reel a mother back in. This transcending backward and forward in time are but short-lived footholds.
Re-shuffling on the Inner and Outer Plane

“I’m just about to give Kieran a bath or something, and then she really needs me. I feel extremely frustrated and scared, like, ‘My God, how am I going to do this?’ But I keep thinking, ‘Okay, she’s going to get older and ... it will get easier, but when I’m right there it’s like, ‘I can’t do this!’’” (Rae-I)

Being fully consumed by the demands of an infant forces a re-ordering of relational alignments and a re-shuffling on the inner plain that can leave a mother feeling torn. Already existing adult relationships, including the marital relationship, recede into the background as the new link with the baby leaps to the fore: “She sleeps with me. My husband sleeps on the couch now. I’m totally devoted to her” (Sharon-1). With the baby now occupying centre stage, a mother feels she is always towing the line, other relationships on hold, demands surmounting. A new mother may lament the disruption, concerned about what it might mean to her existing relationship(s): “Kyle was so fussy last night that Vince ... came out and slept on the couch ... I was like, ‘Oh God, it’s heading for disaster already!’” (Corin-1). A mother may keep her finger on the spousal relationship, but seen as a relationship based on want, not need, it remains for now, secondary in her mind. She finds herself juggling physical space as the baby competes for bodily connection: “He likes to sleep on me (even though) I’d still prefer him to sort of have his own sleeping space, away from his father and me” (Corin-1). Occupied by a new driving force, she is perpetually in the mode of trying to divide her self. The balance rocked, she tries to practically keep it within bounds and to re-align her social world to maintain some sense of inner order. The baby at her centre, pushing pulling, ever present, all consuming, whose needs come to the fore, crowd out a mother’s own. “Being there for her is a 100% of me. I’m not speaking on the phone!” (Sharon-1). An external link is temporarily weakened.

The women saw themselves as central to the baby’s world in the early weeks either by choice or default. While they encouraged their infants’ emerging relationship with their fathers, there was an underlying expectation and desire on their part to be everything for the child, the sense of pride in being identified as the primary comforter confirming her own sense of having what it takes to ‘carry’ this baby through babyhood. And yet, there was an equal and opposing desire to share the task with an other, willing to give around the clock to the same degree, to “trade back and forth;” someone who could temporarily take over in her absence. The women wanted the best of their partners’ efforts, while not expecting them to match their own. For Sharon, it is linked to “the whole physical connection, the breast feeding, but also the baby being inside of you and coming out and that whole business of you’re one and then you’re two.” It takes time for a mother to reckon with the different world of opportunity that a father can provide for his child. Seeing herself initially as the primary one, she desires genuine support and
a helping hand, but the demand of a newborn is always more than one expected on the emotional plane. She could not have anticipated being so ensconced in the maternal role, nor feeling so torn.

With the coming of a second child, there is a vying for a share of that inner space, leaving a mother more split in her devotion. Torn by the competing demands of a toddler and a newborn, Rae feels stretched to her limit, “extremely frustrated,” split in two and “very out of control sometimes.” Constantly weighing one need against the other, she tries to draw on her experience and grasps at the prospect of imminent change, feeling nonetheless exasperated. At the same time, she feels disappointed that this new relationship hasn’t yet gripped her with the intensity of the first. Already with a fully-fledged child on her mind, she finds it difficult to “think” about the new relationship of just three and a half weeks. Sensing Kyle’s feeling displaced—ousted out of babyhood and the maternal fold and his fighting for a corner in her mind—feelings of guilt and sadness rush in, the experienced loss of the intimacy and exclusiveness of the first relationship felt by mother and child alike: “As soon as she was born, suddenly there was a separation that I guess I anticipated, but I didn’t realize how emotional it would be.” There is a sudden split in the relational alignments within the family, a boxing off that accentuates real possibilities for exclusion. No sooner has she begun to get her bearings and reclaim some of her former identity, than she is thrown again into the frenzy of infant care, which leaves her clamouring for respite as her freedom is once again usurped.

**Maternal Identity**

“When George comes home, I want to ... talk while I breastfeed so that we can at least have a conversation not about the baby, because we only have about 45 minutes and then it’s show-time again.” (Sharon-1)

This second dimension of boundary diffusion, which refers to the maternal experience of identity in the transition to motherhood in the context of holding an infant in mind, subsumes the women’s experience of their own bodies in maternity.

Taking on the maternal identity is like stepping into a garment that envelops, but does not fully enshroud. It accentuates a woman’s new role—the maternal role—but does not fully define her. A first time mother walks in new shoes with familiarity and strain. She feels she has lost her identity as an independent and capable adult in control of her own time and action. Assailed by overwhelming demands, she feels deprived of even basic functions, like food or sleep, functions
that were previously taken for granted. With a new lens superimposed on the picture that was once her life, her own boundaries shatter and re-group again and again. There is a marked shift in perspective. More of an adjustment for some than for others, this dislodging of identity experienced by each of the women to varying degrees, presented a developmental challenge.

Propelled by her infant’s need, Carolyn perseveres in the face of this new challenge that brings to mind, “the camping trips that we’ve done, which have been difficult and there are days when you’re just tired and frustrated with each other and with a lot of portage and you may not feel like it, but you gotta go ahead and do what you have to do. Otherwise you’re gonna be stuck there!” Experiencing less of a stark transition upon giving birth, Corin assumed the maternal role from her very first inkling of being pregnant, the desire to parent having already taken precedence over her prior devotion to her career. With her baby now in arms, Sharon identifies with her vulnerable infant self and experiences her professional identity as somewhat split: “I’m wearing two hats, whereas before I wore only the professional hat.” More easily moved by the perils and injustices surrounding babyhood, she feels a deeper appreciation for the vulnerability of infancy and the precariousness of a reality that make her more susceptible to emotional impact, more empathic and more protective.

The Maternal Body as Carrying Vessel

“When I go to sleep I’m thinking, time enough to grab a snack for myself and make sure I’m not too stressed out... I feel definitely a big responsibility to make sure I’m doing my best for her.” (Carolyn-I)

To hold an infant in mind is to experience one’s bodily self as a scaffold, a landscape or dwelling that gives form to new life. Taken from the Latin ‘materies,’ which means tree trunk, and ‘matrix,’ meaning womb, the term ‘mother’ represents the ‘source’ of life for generations (as cited in Bergum, 1989). Maternal presence, as described by Bergum, is a primordial relationship, “peculiar to women who carry within their own bodies the body of another... a co-mingling, an entangling, an interlocking that goes beyond companionship” (p. 53). It is described by Neumann (as cited in Bergum) as “the original situation of container and contained,” wherein the woman’s body is seen as vessel (p. 53). Derived from the Latin ‘continere,’ which means “to hold together, to comprehend... to sustain” [from the French, ‘con,’ together; ‘tenere,’ to hold], the term ‘contain’ refers to the mother’s capacity to hold the child together, to ‘enclose,’ to allot so much space to; also “to restrain, limit, confine” (Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition, 1987, p. 533). It is the female body that envelops and nourishes the growing child. In the grip of a new unquestioned responsibility, a mother feels impelled to tend to her own form, the bearer of fruit, as seen here in the manner in which the women care for the body that houses the child in
the postpartum as an extension of prenatal life: “I’ve been thinking in terms of keeping myself calm and healthy ... trying to make sure that I’m eating well, so that she’ll have enough milk and making sure I’m not too tired” (Carolyn-1). It is a full time responsibility that may on another level be resented. In the first few days postpartum, Sharon described feeling depressed, deprived and overwhelmed by the strain on her body that she had thought would have ended after giving birth. No longer seeing oneself in the singular, it is as if one acquires an extra pulse, an extra heartbeat that resonates quietly inside. Life is still felt to revolve around this new offshoot who drinks from her veins. The child, for the mother, remains forever etched in her mind. She finds herself always having to be one step ahead in terms of what he needs. At least, this is the expectation with which she sets out. Feeling she is never all she ‘should’ be for her child, she is always potentially more than her child’s ‘container.’

A new mother’s relationship to her own body changes in pregnancy and yet again, upon giving birth, in tandem with the baby’s passage from the inside to the outside, the shift a means to feeling whole again after the birth (Pines, 1993). She may experience her body as either a shrine or a prison (or both); she may feel either energized and exhilarated or trapped through the carrying process into the postpartum. Rae describes the experience of expelling her baby, including the pain endured and her capacity to withstand it, as one might an athletic feat, with pride and astonishment at her own strength and stamina: “It was really really great to be able to push her out ... I felt like superwomen, like I could do anything!” On the other end of the spectrum is the marked feeling of loss of the desired pre-maternal body. While satisfied with the co-operation of her body during labour, Sharon feels nevertheless repulsed by her perceived maternal image of the haggard vessel that bulges compared to the beauty and newness of the baby--images that stand out in stark contrast in her mind: “I look like a mom, like a frump in my mind.” She does not feel that she slipped into the garment of motherhood. On the contrary, she finds that “nothing fits!” Her negative perception of her body following the birth contributes to her feeling depressed, confined, youth eclipsed in the immediate postpartum period.

**Walking the Tight Rope**

“Because I’ve chosen this way, I don’t have a lot of time for myself ... It’s really hard, and I just get to the point where I’m like, ‘Oh my God, I need a break!’” (Rae-1)

This third dimension pertains to the women’s articulated experience of balancing the sense of abandoning oneself to ‘being there’ for one’s child with maintaining a grounding in reality. It subsumes four separate but interrelated
sub-dimensions: the experience of being cocooned and/or confined; feeling grounded in reality; gate keeping and the use of knowing as anchor point.

Cocooned or Confined?

"We were protected from reality a little bit, like all the worries of the world when you’re in this little positive room-in place with all your needs taken care of... It was like a cocoon!" (Sharon-1)

Confined to the maternal holding space, links to externality are weakened. The woman found the ‘cocooning’ directly following the birth replenishing. Providing a temporary sanctuary, it acts as a bridge, a stepping stone paving the way toward a clearing of mental space to fully enshrine the actual baby: For a time it feels “so magical,” like, “there was nothing else in the world... just us” (Carolyn-1). Here, the family meet the baby’s individuality for the first time, each member reacting from his or her own place in time, each with their own relationship to change and the unknown, the baby’s own characteristic ways of tugging, setting off a chain of reactions, at times stirring one to the extreme. There are aspects of cocooning that seem to evoke a return to existential beginnings that is at once disconcerting and comforting. Temporarily walled off from the demands of reality, one luxuriates in its womb-like waters, wanting to linger in it and yet emerge from it to return to the familiar world of convention and anti-chaos. The tone of ambiguity, the draw and the push, is a contradiction traversed at all developmental levels. At once alluring and frightening, one courts with the desire to return to beginnings and simultaneously flees from the fear it induces, as first described by Freud (1920) in his explication of the inherent draw back to “inorganic” life that is an integral part of being alive. The baby’s first coming into contact with life as yet unknown re-evokes this conflict anew in the mother with great potency, cloaked in the language of the body. Cocooning however, is short lived as reality soon begins to gnaw in ways disruptive, in ways grounding. With a second child, it is prematurely eclipsed by the perpetual tug of a toddler.

Confinement, both uplifting and dismaying, ushers in fears of being usurped by the baby and of losing one’s own sense of boundedness, one’s sense of control. With the links to the external world weakened, there is a slicing off of active life involvement that amputates aspects of one’s life as known, stirring doubt about one’s sense of wholeness, and in turn, one’s capacity to ‘hold’ new life. The feeling of being somewhat out of touch with reality, locked in an anxiety spiral that is fueled by the infant’s emotional state, to which one is attuned, can stir claustrophobic fears and panic about losing ground. A mother fears going under. Anything out of

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the ordinary with regard to the baby becomes suspect, often bordering on the paranoid, and is closely scrutinized. Suspicions regarding the baby’s health and normalcy surmount: “We’ve been to the doctor a lot!” (Corin-1). There evolves anxiety about keeping one’s loved ones safe and free from harm. A new mother monitors her infant’s breathing. Consumed with thoughts of her baby’s wellbeing, she fears for his life. They have just survived the momentous and precarious process of his entry into the world and she has just begun to feel she can hold him safely in her arms. A mother questions her own capacities, wondering how her own primitive feelings will intrude in the face of her infant’s demands. Can I keep him alive? Might I lose it? Stern (1995) considered this panic about one’s capacity to keep the baby alive, a “cardinal, independent, unique life theme” (p. 175), and not a derivative of others, nor bound up with one’s own survival. Specific to the maternal experience, it is tied up with feeling fully responsible for dependent life. The babies in this study however, were wholly experienced as flesh and blood links in the familial chain and as such, a part of the maternal self. Instilled panic forces a realization of human vulnerability that is out of one’s hands, akin perhaps to the baby’s transient fear of threatened doom. Holding an infant in mind prompts a re-visiting of the project of life and in health, pushes a mother to fight for her infant’s survival at all costs. She will follow the route to safety to tide him over the first hurdle—to keep him alive and thriving. It is that niggling sense of unease arising out of those contradictory feelings stirred within her that prompts a mother to action on behalf of her child, while questioning her own strength to see it through. Can she maintain the link in the generational continuum? Does she have what it takes?

One can feel very overwhelmed if abandoned to the baby’s inner world, now collapsed within the maternal space, without any external point of reference. Bick (1986) observed that the very same need to cling to something external that applied to the baby, also applies to the mother, as seen in her reaching out toward a beacon of light in the night time vigil. Following a crying bout in her baby, Sharon stares ahead through the window, trance-like as she holds Helen over her shoulder. A mother soon finds she has to stand poised with one foot in the collapsed space, one anchored outside with only small drifting from one to the other manageable. One observes in her revisiting this primitive mental/bodily state through her identification with the baby, her need to have her own boundaries confirmed, her identity solidified (Symington, 1985). She is a traveler stepping onto foreign soil, clapping on to what she knows in order to survive the moment. Inclined herself at this point to split her world, a mother dwells on different islands, with external stress and exhaustion exacerbating the rift. “The mother too has lost her spacesuit.” (Bick, p. 297).
Sleep-deprived, the exhaustion and the mental anguish may become so intolerable that there is often a felt need to escape. “If I’m really over-tired then ... my tolerance is less ... I’m doing what I have to do ... but I’m sort of like, oh my God ... I’m going to need to leave here!” (Corin-I). The anxiety spiral triggered, a mother will find an insecurity to hang it on, often lodged within the self, like the feeling that there is “something wrong with the milk!” There is this fine line to containing. The further the mother slips into the primitive world of infancy, the more potentially compromised her containing. It is a bit of a paradox that to be in it, one has to endure the physiological lack and face one’s own vulnerability in the face of the baby’s dependency, which can feel like being on the edge of a precipice, on the verge of tipping over. One cannot fully collapse into the maternal space; nor can one side step it. Exerting great effort to avoid going under, a mother tries to keep the relationship within bounds by following with reason and re-inventing inner and outer structure. Some of our social structures provide a grounding that help bridge and maintain the needed balance; others, bordering on rigid, foreclose any opportunity of coming in contact with the baby’s experience. Corin notices how her mother pushes her to action prematurely in a way that does not help her ‘be with’ her baby in the moment. There comes a point however, where a mother has to stand aside to exercise closure, the physical distancing, at times necessary if she is to maintain the composure required to hold him in mind. Difficult as it is at this point, to exercise perspective and to simultaneously come close enough to understand the baby’s need, it is the mother’s holding on to some sense of reality, her groundedness in the midst of ‘falling in’ that lends substance to the infant’s inner world and preserves her own sanity.

The Experience of Grounding as Containment

“Company helps a lot ‘cause I feel like there’s another set of hands. I can either pass him off and do stuff or take a nap.” (Corin-I)

Refuge is found in temporary and regular respite from the chaos induced in stepping into the effusive world of infancy. From time to time a mother finds she must raise her head from this sea of fog to catch a breath of fresh air, latch onto a raft to keep her afloat. Seeking a grounding in reality via external structure and ritual, she may need to hold fast to a safety anchor outside of the lure of the infant to avoid being sucked into the timeless void. Grounding alleviates anxiety and lessens the guilt, contextualizing the experience of being with a baby all day. It may be as concrete as listening to the radio, or reading the daily newspaper, activities that “bring back a part of my regular routine from before,” reassuring a mother that it is “not just me and the baby,”
that there is a wider world out there beyond them. It may entail clasping onto known theories of parenting, reaching out for support, or drawing on a sense of inner faith that all will be well.

In being present to her infant, a mother walks a fine line, her path for now, the proverbial tightrope, her life, an internal balancing act that requires both her full dedication and focus and yet, her drawing back and maintaining composure in the face of everyday challenges—ways of being that are learned through experience, partly ongoing. How one comes upon and carries out these maternal functions is quite individualistic. In childbirth, it is the picture of Sharon’s mentor that gives her strength at the moment when she feels most vulnerable. It is Corin’s analyst who “has done the parenting” that she “on some level felt that maybe [she] didn’t get as a kid.” A sense of groundedness might be achieved through a rational word from someone who is in the moment outside of the mother-infant orbit; for example, a word that lends composure from a spouse who may in that very moment be more objective, simply by virtue of his having to be up for work the next morning. The women felt grounded in anticipating their spouse’s return with the prospect of adult conversation, sharing the maternal task, or simply relief in handing the baby over: “I’ll usually give him to Vince so that I can re-charge” (Corin-1). Grounding as containment entails holding in mind the mother’s dilemma and making provision for the needed rest, support, encouragement, or whatever it is in the moment that would enable her not to shut down, but to stay in touch with the experience and yet maintain a grip. The mother also erects her own “safety net.” Having an established self-definition or a professional identity outside of the maternal role can either free her up to enter more readily into it or detract from such intimate engagement. Not wanting to feel so pinioned, she might fear losing herself in the maternal stereotype and thus rely on her career as a safeguard. “There is this feeling of being tied down.” It is a tenuous link, and in some cases, perhaps the only time in her life where a mother feels she can rationalize her ‘indulgence.’ “When am I going to have this time again?” Sharon asks.

Gate keeping

“For the first two weeks we kept everyone away and I’m still gate keeping to some extent, because there could be a flood of people, and I feel resentful because ... any time away from Helen I want to sleep or eat.” (Sharon-1)

Isolation and the feeling of being “trapped” can spark extreme ambivalent feelings that trigger an over-reliance on reason or the Gods. While it initially detracts from one’s overall sense of competence in this new role, it marks the territory over which one must preside. Devoid of adult contact, life can feel meaningless, empty, days dragging. “I could see where you could lose yourself and just end up eating ... and you’re watchin’ the soaps, just trying to cope, ‘cause it’s a
very insular kind of experience” (Sharon-1). It can also be inspiring, opening up new possibilities for a life as yet uncharted. Here it was seen to evoke both joy, in having the time to live life outside of the confines of societal restraint, and longing for a piece of adult contact to confirm one’s existence on the social planet. Company contains, helping to keep a new mother on an “emotional even keel,” by bringing relief and promoting an identity function. On the other hand, external social contacts, both needed and abhorred, may be experienced as a hindrance to the new evolving relationship. The women reached out to other women both in phantasy and in reality for reassurance and support, while simultaneously engaged in gate keeping. They both relied on and felt burdened by company at different times in these early postpartum weeks. Company both provides the needed support and grounding in reality that saves her from losing herself completely in the infant’s passions, and engenders resentment with respect to the felt intrusions into the maternal space.

**Knowing as Anchor Point**

“I don’t think I’ve really, to be honest, felt a lot of challenges in becoming a mother ... I’ve been very around kids and very involved with them and see I work with kids too, so ... I don’t think I was delusional about what to expect.” (Corin-1)

Hurled into this overwhelmingly unpredictable experience, a mother may latch onto established philosophies of parenting or sometimes slip into relying on her own theories that pre-date her entanglements with the actual baby now present--a reliance that potentially forfeits the very experience of muddling through to figure out what is workable in the context of their specific situation. There are no shortcuts to understanding. There is no shortage of ‘advice.’ Everyone who has been through the experience has a different story to impart that may either impinge or support a mother in her own struggle. Endless “remedies” are extolled, each one supposedly better than the next; generalized recipes that ignore context and the uniqueness of a given situation; frustrating, conflicting “opinions,” none of which work in isolation, but which generally lead to a form of “information overload” that itself induces guilt, undermining a mother’s own competence, and short circuiting the very challenge that may lend itself to more creative problem solving.

Reeling herself to shore in the midst of chaos in the hope of finding solid ground, a mother may look to the ‘experts’ for some kind of solace or wisdom. Sometimes she will find that listening ear which will support her in her struggle. Rae felt supported and somewhat relieved in feeling she was “not alone” when the women at her La Leche group “started talking about their experiences.” More often than not, a mother will be dished out advice that itself may
place a new demand on her. Feeling impinged upon by the barrage of opinions, Sharon throws her hands up in exasperation and resolves to “go with what works!” Too often, she will be passed on from one expert to the next and left to carry the unbearable anxieties that can surface in being emotionally present to a baby, anxieties that are sometimes felt as too threatening to contemplate by those outside of the mother infant loop. “Many people cannot tolerate living with paradox” (Dillard, 1999, p. 197). Emotionally fed by the family and the larger community around her, a mother can more readily wade through such murky waters and let go of tasks that draw her energy away from the baby. Dipping in and out of these grounding strategies enables a mother to temporarily gain perspective, re-immers herself in the ‘holding’ process and carry on.

**Transactional Looping: The Beginnings of Mutual Exchange**

“I’m in the milk and the milk’s in me.”

* M. Sendak

This second core theme describes the mutual back and forth rhythmic exchange between mother and infant that perpetuates a transactional exchange cycle. Very much bound to bodily experience and to the feeding experience in particular, it was found during this first transition period to comprise three related sub-themes: the experience of self as seen in the other’s expression; competence and doubt: the exigencies of the maternal feed; and the pull of reciprocity: maternal desire.

Beyond reaching out for contact to attain a primary sense of boundedness, as seen here in the infant’s looping movements towards the mother’s body, either with the arms or the whole body curling inward towards the breast, there is an observed mutual looping towards the inside in a pull for exchange, the nursing situation seen here as prototypical of such an exchange cycle. Below, I will describe the nature of this exchange--what was batted back and forth in the transactional cycle in these early weeks.

The pull for exchange with a reliable other who will receive the baby’s impulses and remain available and whose responses he will for now try to tailor to meet his own need, is not solely confined to having his immediate frustration quelled, for the baby is seen here to continue to gravitate towards his mother both when satiated and at times of relative quiescence. One observes here in the infants’ gaze, an inherent curiosity and wonder that at times appears more tentative, perhaps bordering on vigilant, and at times, reflective of a wider openness to what might be found. It is his sense of being bound within a permeable membrane that enables the
infant to reach out with openness to what might be found. Meltzer, Bremner, Hoxter, Weddell and Wittenberg (1975) outlined the gradual emergence of a sense of inner and outer space as developing over time in relation to the maternal figure that is based on immersions and re-immersions into the mother’s psyche and her returning to the baby in good time, his psychic life broken down into manageable doses. What is put out and what gets returned over and over again sets the tone of the projective‐introjective loop that in turn, shapes the infant’s internal world, his sense of self and other and his general expectancy and feel of relationship.

The beginnings of this exchange cycle, seen here in the infant’s nursing at the breast, his gazing, facial imitations and mouthing, are indicative of the existence of a rudimentary relatedness at all times, the baby’s trial actions bound up with this relationship with his mother and his absorbing aspects of their joint experience, to which he has been actively contributing from birth. It is the baby’s inherent curiosity that brings him in contact with the maternal mind. It is not an image of mother that is swallowed whole, but aspects of her manner of being with him in the moment that are taken in, pieced together and continuously acted upon both in reality and in phantasy. He takes in not just her maternal function, but its emotional shape, which resonates within, and colours inner life. It is as if mother and baby are continually casting out something into the maternal pool, each subsequent move predicated on what gets hauled in. In their transactional looping, discrete moments of experience are understood only in the context of the flow between them. Emphasizing the baby’s proclivity toward “imitation” (reflecting his need to experience his mother as an extension of himself), along with his taking inside himself her maternal functions (in an act of possession), Gaddini (1969) saw both actions at this infantile level as “lived in the ambit of the only reality possible: that of one’s own body” (p. 27-28).

The mother for her part, experiences the tremendous pull on her body and the tension within it on many levels. Observing her newborn, Carolyn intuits that even “to eat and take in the environment” is for Al, an adjustment that poses a challenge for mother and baby alike. Even though the baby takes control of his breathing from the first intake of breath—his body growing in inhalation and shrinking in exhalation—a mother’s own breathing continues to have a soothing, regulatory effect as she supports him on the outside (Kestenberg, 1985). Without necessarily being consciously aware of it, the women tried to adjust their holding and physical space to accommodate this transition: “He likes to feel very secure. He doesn’t like when I put him down. I think he just wants to feel the comfort. I think that’s just it, the soothing, the comfort, the ... my voice, he, my sound, I think he ... the security more than the food” (Corin-1). Together, they choreograph movements that at once accentuate their rhythmic harmony, while emphasizing
their individual beat. “Inhaling, they grow closer to one another; exhaling they separate, leaving a minute intermediate space between them” (Kestenberg, p. 144). It is a physiological re-patterning that is indelibly linked with how a mother holds her infant, which, if he is to breathe freely, must be pliable, lest the concave compression of the abdomen exacerbate any discomfort he might already be feeling.

‘Holding’ as described by Kestenberg (1985), is “an act of taking possession, of being there and being available” (p. 142). It is a two-way action. When the hold is of the form that enables the baby to use his own reflexes, the baby can trust it more, more readily take possession, and receptively mould his body into hers. The rotund maternal image of the slumbering baby protectively and securely held upright on Corin’s chest comes to mind. With his limbs and body relaxed, he can trust the hold, although is not passive in his quietude. Isolated “tension spots” on the other hand, where part of the body remains in high tension, often located in the neck and shoulders, make it more uncomfortable for a mother to hold her baby. Each picks up the points of tension in the other, the less constricted the postural tonus, the more permeable the boundary for the flow of feeling. With one eye on guard, Helen’s face holds a perpetual frown that seems to maintain an internal balance, that to shift might be experienced as a disintegrative spilling out. Darwin (as cited in Kestenberg) had noticed that discomfort in infancy manifests in a “series of frowns” passing “like shadows” over the baby’s face (p. 146). Helen’s body posture has a tenseness to it that her mother cannot but notice: “I can tell she’s not calm ... tense, tense, tense! ... You hold all your tension in your face!” (Sharon-1). Helen’s tension, her wariness of the unfamiliar, reverberates in her mother who fears for her infant’s safety.¹

Attentive to her baby’s vigilance to her own coming and going, she tries to assuage Helen’s fears through reassurance of her presence. And although she related that Helen “really loves contact” and that she herself “loves to hold” her, there is an observed struggle to find a workable rhythm, specifically when nursing, be that related to colic or the mother’s own internal infantile system kicking in. Suffice it to say that overlapping and mutually influencing points of contact between mother and child converge to form the building blocks that make and re-shape the inner world. Kestenberg found that the way people naturally hold their babies is similar to the way in which they were held by their mothers in infancy, this “maternal kinesthetic imprint,” remaining somewhat resistant to change (p. 148). Partial misalignments are ubiquitous.

¹ Working with adults, Ekman, Levenson, and Freisen (1983) demonstrated that matching the facial expression of an other produces a similar physiological state in the onlooker. And in studying infants, Davidson and Fox (1982) have shown that by 10 months, the mere perception of emotion in an other induces a resonant emotional state in the perceiver that alters the latter’s internal state.
Through her studies of mothers and infants, Kestenberg (1985) dismantled the myth of the empathic mother, who is ever calm and patient, providing solace without panic, impatience or irritability even with an infant with colic, by demonstrating that the mother actually resonates her infant’s tension, the peaks and the valleys and not just the more gradual tension shifts. When attuned, she becomes excited along with the baby, but does not remain so. In the face of the baby’s inconsolable crying, Carolyn feels “like screaming myself,” Rae, “like just throwing the baby out the window” and Sharon, “like shaking the baby till she stops,” but they don’t. In these instances, they stay with the panic long enough for it to have an impact and then with their adult minds, figure out a way to respond that tempers it, containing their own panic and in turn, the baby’s. Attending to the peak of her baby’s panic, a mother takes it inside and feels overwhelmed by it, but she can potentially turn it around by gradually lowering it in a way that makes it safe for the baby to follow.¹ Both mother and baby actively partake in the exchange, their influence mutually impactful. It involves neither complete synchronicity, nor comparable tension. Nor is a mother ‘globally’ empathic. At times, the natural inclinations of mother and baby work against each other; the clashing, part and parcel of their ongoing negotiating; their exchange, a dance that rapidly changes tempo.

Being present to an infant involves in these early weeks, an attention to nuance that is not so much calculated, but occurs almost subliminally in that borderland between phantasy and reality that is experienced more on a bodily level. The extent of an infant’s reaching out is a matter of trust, his sense of his mother’s immediate response, further inviting or curtailing his forward moves. More physiologically attuned at this time, a mother is more inclined to intuitively pick up on her baby’s inhaling and the bulging, lengthening or widening of his body as seen when he anticipates something good, and conversely, his exhaling, hollowing, narrowing and shortening as he shrinks or withdraws from something experienced as unpleasant. There were many examples in this study of the mother’s accommodating to her baby’s internal shifts on the physical realm, be that shifting her position in response to a subtle change in the baby’s facial expression, or persisting in massaging in response to the relaxed feel of a limb. Sometimes they dance in harmony:

Like the violin and the bow in continuous contact, Carolyn envelops Al’s foot in her palm, and skin to skin, amidst intense mutual gazing, smoothly trails her hand across her body,

¹ This form of resonance matching has been documented in the infancy research to illustrate the interplay of self and mutual regulation in determining the nature of engagement between infant and adult (Beebe, Lachmann, & Jaffe, 1997; Beebe & Lachmann, 1998).
following her baby’s gliding in and out of the shared space, their contact unbroken. Held in her mother’s look and her hold, the baby is spurred on to explore. Here, Al absorbs her mother and the world in one breath, while Carolyn absorbs her every move regardless of her perceived position in her baby’s mind. In observing, one gets the sense of a stillness into which the mother does not feel the need to intrude, but which seems to contain both mother and baby in this moment, the timing and the sequencing poised, as if their movements are choreographed. It is an example of ‘smooth looping,’ wherein both parties move fluidly in and out of each other’s space in relative synchrony, dove-tailing each other’s moves, their needs matched. Although examples across participants are many, they are generally brief and interspersed with the more frequent mismatched, off-centre forms of negotiating. A mother cannot always respond to her infant’s spontaneous gesture. She will at times, misread her baby’s cues or cut him off as their immediate needs clash or her own need in that instant come more to the fore: When Kyle’s attention wanes, while watching his mobile at six weeks, Corin beckons; he ignores; she stimulates; he writhes; she persists; he diverts his gaze. It is a staccato-like chase and dodge rhythm with frequent breaks and starts. Ignoring her efforts at engagement, she remains out of his orbit in this moment because he did not place her in it. Joy is in inadvertently finding what one is looking for. Sometimes a mother must wait to be found.

Moment by moment, she struggles to comprehend her baby’s need. Dipping in and out of his world, she learns to discriminate his cries. She watches, she feels, she thinks, making note of what works. She comes to realize that “there’s nothing written in stone right now” (Corin-1). She does not feel she is on familiar soil. The earth feels slippery. It is not an intellectual analysis of her baby’s shifting moves that directs her to what he needs, but her attention to the deep emotional resonance within her. It will not always be a place she can go. Guided by her baby’s feelings of discomfort, she may persevere in holding him in the face of his protests--repairing a break in the loop—in order to bring about a calm. Both Carolyn and Corin swoop and swaddle their wrestling baby, ushering in a more locked-in circular hold that enables the baby to reach a much needed sleep. Her swift response attests both to a mother’s confidence that she can settle her baby and her baby’s trust that she will contain him. A break in the loop can be instigated by either party. A mother may try to accommodate to an observed tension in her baby: When Al scrunches up her legs and comes off the nipple, Carolyn thrusts her body forward to encourage her to latch on again, upon which Al quietly resumes sucking until her body gradually grows limp as she falls into sleep. Or she may raise a certain expectation, offsetting the baby’s immediate inclination: Mooching frantically to face the breast, Sara latches onto the nipple with
her hand half covering her own face and her mother’s breast, breathing heavily as she sucks. And as the sucking wanes, Rae intervenes: “Come on! ... You know how to do it!” to which Sara raises her head and restlessly groans. It is the feel of the interaction that impacts. Averaging out over time, the clashing and the matching, the back and forth breaking of the loop and its repair fall into the overall give and take pattern, wherein harmony usually prevails, the initial nursing situation, generally allowing their bumping up against each other, their “getting to know one another via the unobstructed transmission of the proper doses of safety and caution, facilitation, and inhibition” (Kestenberg, 1985, pp. 142-3). While their experiences are felt in the body--the women speaking to the physical at this point--the psychological is never far behind.

**The Self as Seen in the Other’s Expression: The Metaphor of the Mirror**

This first sub-theme of transactional looping pertains primarily to the infants’ experience and was derived primarily from the observation data of the four participant dyads.

The mother’s face, said to act as a mirror, reflects back to the baby her experience of him at a time when she is experienced by the infant as an extension of his nascent self (Winnicott, 1971), the infant’s sense of self evolving out of how he experiences himself as reflected in her eyes. She is his window to the external world, her eyes and her nipples, portals to an interior that may be experienced as either inviting or revoking of exchange. The infant reaches out not just for nourishment to satisfy his appetite, nor solace to quell his fear. There is from the start an observed pull for something more. When lifted over Carolyn’s shoulder, Al poignantly hunches her body in a pull for more distant holding, cueing her mother to return her to her lying position on her knee from where she can fully view her face. Reclined now, her body relaxes as she gazes at her mother, their mutual absorption resembling a mutual feed. An infant will smile at a distance to a facial resemblance and “it is particularly the eyes--spontaneously animated, sparkling reflectors of personality--which fascinate his gaze during feeding” (Eigen, 1993, p. 56). In the instances of nursing observed here, the babies not only latched on to the nipple, but at times, became simultaneously absorbed in ‘reading’ the mother’s expression, or struggled to do so when the positioning was less conducive. Outside of the nursing situation, infants’ eyes readily latch onto another’s, as was observed here in their quietly hooking the observer in throughout the interviews. Captivated by his mother’s face, the neonate peers into her eyes, this more distal sense having an arm to play in the interplay of closeness and distance. For the infant,
the presence of the face indicates a presence of an other who is as yet out there, in the world beyond him and yet an extension of himself, his observing, facilitating a more distant imitation of breathing. Eigen suggests the human face is initially experienced as "self yet other ... a dual unity, in which both areas of distinction and union bring each other into existence" (p. 58). There is an observed pull to have different hungers satiated—the hunger for solace, the hunger for inspiration—the different parts of the mother's body evoking different areas of longing. In seeking out and initiating eye contact, the baby appears to be searching for a point of entry into which he can pour his nascent fears and out of which he can yield idealized inspiration to overcome his deeper anxieties. Eigen wonders if it is perhaps the link with the maternal face (in particular the mother's eyes) and what he sees reflected back that serves the idealizing function, and provides the inspiration that draws the baby into the world, while his feeding at the breast serves the complementary need for closure, containment and the integration of a cohesive self. The baby reaches out in anticipation of being found.

The metaphor of the mirror works only if conceptualized as a mirror with infinite recesses, capturing the effusiveness of the ongoing transactional cycle, the infinite embeddedness of the baby within the self and the self within the baby that come to bear on the mutual gazing of mother and child. What we see in each mother's face is considerably more than a reflection of what her baby places within her. We see in addition, her own mood and internal struggle, specific to her newly fledged role that is part and parcel of what will shape the baby's inner world. What she sees in her baby far transcends his fledgling state. Perhaps there is a pull for more than a re-working of what the infant places within her. Lingering to catch the gleam in his mother's eye, he seeks her hope, her sense of aliveness that serves perhaps, as the beacon of light that at once rescues and inspires, fueling the tone and the pace of their exchange cycle. Beyond 'mirroring,' it presupposes a more transactional interchange, whereby the mother's emotional response reflects the baby's infantile phantasy and feeling, along with her capacity to rework it, which he in turn, internalizes (Bion, 1977), along with the impact of her side-stepping certain aspects of psychic life that induce pain. The baby's emerging sense of self and relationship rests on how he experiences her experience of him.

In this study, the infants' overall toleration of disruptions to the flow of their internal rhythm,¹ along with examples of the mother turning herself inside out to cater to her baby's

¹ Gianino and Tronick (1988), and Tronick (1989) demonstrated that infants, who continued to try and engage their mothers in a situation where the mothers were instructed to maintain an immobile expression, were more interactive with their mothers in ongoing play than their counterparts who arched their bodies away from the mother in the experimental situation.
egocentric demands were observed. Resilience was reflected in the infants’ persistent and repeated efforts at winning their mother’s attention, while insisting on her continued presence on their own terms and also in actively shutting her out when her pursuing was experienced as intrusive.¹ A more subtle watchfulness was also observed in the infants’ serious facial expression as they followed their mother’s face to gauge perhaps, when they could follow their own spontaneous gesture and when they could not. An infant holds onto his mother’s look to ascertain the extent of her receptivity. He relies upon being seen to confirm his existence. Carolyn refers to Al’s “serious look,” “her furrowing her brow” both as “her body just kind of testing its muscles” and her more active “seeing everything and taking it all in.” Darwin (as cited in Kestenberg, 1985, p. 145) had observed that “frowning occurs regularly when one encounters obstacles in the train of one’s thought.” It appears that as long as the mother remains engaged in attempting to meet the baby’s need, his own subjective rhythm will not be significantly curtailed. As long as he feels held in her mind!

How does a mother experience this transactional looping? How is her sense of herself as a mother related to how she experiences his experience of her? On the one hand, there is the ongoing experience of the back and forth, mutually impactful, co-constructing of a rhythm that sets the tone and the pace of the flow between them, wherein mother and baby influence one another moment to moment, albeit to varying degrees.² On the other, there is the painful realization of the non-reciprocal nature of their exchange that engenders the kind of conflict that is not easily voiced, for it is a mutuality based on the mother’s “capacity to make real” what the baby is reaching out for (Winnicott, 1970, p. 250); a mutuality that in fact, accentuates their psychological difference: the mother’s identification with her baby and her baby’s dependence on her (Winnicott, 1956).

**Competence and Doubt: Exigencies of the Maternal Feed**

"It makes me feel good that I'm giving her something that she enjoys and that it's helping her to grow." (Rae-1)

"It was puzzling me, that her kid had gained so much ... I just start thinking about maybe there's something wrong with the milk!" (Corin-1)

¹ Tronick (1989) found that in situations of maternal depression, where infractions were not 'repaired,' infants became preoccupied with regulating their own distress states. Beebe and McCorrie (as cited in Beebe & Lachman, 1998) found a continuum of responses, ranging from excessive monitoring of the partner at the expense of self regulation at one extreme, and a preoccupation with self-regulation at the expense of a sensitivity to mutual exchange at the other. In health, they found, infants respond in the mid-range.

² This is the form of mutual influence documented in the infancy literature that refers to the contribution that each member of the dyad makes to the ongoing exchange (Beebe & Lachman, 1988; Tronick, 1989).
Both this and the next sub-theme of transactional looping were derived from the verbal descriptions of the four women.

The nursing situation—prototype of the give and take exchange cycle—entailing mutual incursions into an other’s emotional sphere, was experienced by the women as at once gratifying and draining; gratifying in the sense of enhancing her felt competence in sustaining life; in being able to meet her baby’s need and further his growth outside the womb; in feeling *she* is the one needed to provide comfort and nourishment: “That’s a big piece too, that he’s feeling the security from me” (Corin-1); and draining in the sense of feeling usurped and infinitely in demand, with no end in sight, irrespective of how much she gives or how she feels: “I was having some discomfort and here’s this crying baby and ... when the naturopath gave me this huge list of what I can and cannot eat, I was like—and this is really basic—I can’t even have a cup of tea now!” (Sharon-1).

A mother experiences her baby’s competence as a source of pride and demarcation, as a direct reflection on her: “Right from the beginning ... she latched on right away. She knew what to do” (Rae-1); and conversely, her baby’s struggle to nurse as a major setback that is bound up with her own sense of competence: “The low point was the first time she really went colicky for a couple of hours and nothing we could do calmed her down. I just felt like a failure ... so when she finally latched on well and had good jaw motion, it was like the biggest accomplishment of the two weeks” (Carolyn-1). The nursing takes precedence, seen as the answer to all woes, and yet it snares one in time in a trap from which there is no felt escape: “Sometimes she’ll just fuss and fuss ... but there’s nothing I can do ... I give her to Marc, but ... he often has to give her back to me. I almost feel like I’m trapped because of the nursing” (Rae-1). “There is a feeling of being trapped a little bit ... this feeling of being tied down. You are!” (Sharon-1). The maternal task of sustaining a baby, in particular the physical demands of nursing can be felt as “an incredible burden.” There is a described felt pressure from within and without to breast-feed and “to sacrifice” that can trigger a host of resentments, and may prompt a mother to question why it is *she* who has to carry the load. A mother herself can feel deprived at a time when she needs most to feel contained. She can feel rage and despair, her sense of autonomy snatched away from her, in having to put her own basic needs on hold at a time when she anticipated getting a break: “I’ve changed my diet, eliminated a lot ... and now I have to do more!” (Sharon-1).

A mother’s competence is itself a double-edged sword. To be wholly attuned—‘fall in’ and lose perspective, making one less sure-footed in the task—triggers doubt that she can
continue to get it right, give enough: “Is she getting all the physical needs met?” (Carolyn-1). On the other side of competence is the fear of not being able to sustain dependent life (the phantasy of not having enough inside to keep her baby alive), so all-consuming a responsibility is this; so great the pull of the baby. In the face of the baby’s crying--so extreme and yet so fragmented--her role as sole comforter is easily compromised in not being able to exercise her own physical function to settle him. A mother is taken aback by the sheer physicality of the experience, by how aligned with the body this shared mental state is. Her skills borrowed from the matriarchal line, she perseveres, snared in the sway of the mother idealized: “When I first had Kieran, I wanted to breast feed, because my mom had nursed my sister for such a long time” (Rae-1). She imagines that somewhere out there is a mother who is ever present, ever calm, who can assuage all of her baby’s fears with ease, and she tells herself that if she didn’t have to contend with juggling a career, school, financial restraint, another child, or a spouse who is not home enough, or a spouse even, she could be that mother. The experience is guilt inducing, for she cannot live up to the mother in her idealized, who tugs like another toddler on the tail of her shirt. Joining the baby’s ‘all or nothing’ state, she witnesses the other side of her competence: “Am I not able to nourish him enough?” (Corin-1).

What a mother strives to attain is always out of reach, despite her exhaustive efforts. Parker (1995) described the maternal ideal--the picture of the all-giving, all-loving paragon of plenitude--as casting a “sort of sadness over motherhood” (p. 41). Evaluating herself against an internal standard, a mother berates herself for not even coming close: “I’ve got tons of support and I’m losing it ... I’d like to think I know better” (Sharon-1). Swigart (1991) ascertained that no matter how hard a mother tries to aspire to the ideal, mothering inevitably exposes women to their most “destructive urges,” their “deepest hopes, longings and capacities for love” (p. 7), and their “deepest ... rage, fears” (p. 16), because of the absolute dependency of infancy and its non-reciprocal nature: “In this relationship, it’s the need from her and in every other relationship there’s a choice. You can always walk away” (Carolyn-1). The essence of the maternal experience, according to Parker, is “its irreconcilably contradictory nature,” the maternal ideal, a defence against an awareness of its inherent ambiguity (p. 55).

It is the intensity and magnitude of a mother’s love and the attendant panic surrounding imagined loss that renders the contradictory feelings that arise within her at this time so difficult to contemplate. Rae aligns herself with La Leche league--a doctrine to latch onto--that leaves her with a split view of parenting that she can nevertheless call her own. ‘Being there,’ immersing oneself in the maternal space, evokes feelings and conflicts so intense and so personal--touching
on areas where one feels most fragile—that there is a persistent attempt to keep them out of mind because of their propensity to induce psychic pain, the attendant anxiety commonly projected outward. Mothering is no sooner idealized than it is denigrated as a means to create distance from the felt dependency and vulnerability of one’s own infancy and the power attributed to one’s own mother at that time.\(^1\) The idealized mother, born of the repressed longing for her and erected as the cultural stereotype by men and women alike, becomes, according to Swigart (1991), the instrument of her own oppression.\(^2\) Perhaps, as Swigart suggested, the act of maternal nurturing re-awakens in a mother the intensity of her own longing, that to resent its non-reciprocal nature might trigger guilt about wanting too much in return.

**The Pull for Reciprocity: Maternal Desire**

"We’re waiting for that first smile where she’s actually looking at us. I think about how she might be when she gets older; about having conversations with her."(Carolyn-1)

To be so urgently needed, to be the primary one who sustains and meets the baby’s demand is itself a fulfillment, but is it enough? Is her desire subsumed in his? The archetype of mother as fountain of plenitude militates against a mother’s acknowledging her desire to receive anything in return, and yet the narratives and the observations here, reflect a pull for reciprocation, but not without its proverbial pang of guilt. In as much as she might want to give herself over to her infant, a mother is left with her own conflicting need and the realization of her human limitation. As long as her own subjective pulse still beats, her own wish and need—now revived as she enters the maternal space—continue to press forward. Bick (1986) had noted that the mother’s need to be herself held is reflected in her observations about the pleasure of her baby’s touch: “I love sleeping with the baby ... It’s just great to have that instant contact in the morning” (Rae-1). She does not want to be deprived of this form of mutual pleasure, even though the infant in the early weeks is engaged less in trying to please, than in being given to.

The mother feels gratified in being the one on the receiving end of her baby’s smile. Luxuriating in their shared moments of togetherness, she describes her pleasure in their sensual contact: “He’ll put his hand on my skin ... and as soon as I try to move away to try to have my sleeping space, he’ll start to rouse and wants to be touching somewhere” (Corin-1). There is a growing infatuation, their deepening intimacy bringing forth fears of imagined fatalities, and

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1. See Chodorow (1978) and Dinnerstein (1977) for a fuller discussion.
2. Both Swigart (1991) and Parker (1995) and others writing in this vein, have taken Virginia Wolfe’s character, Mrs. Ramsey from her novel, “To the Lighthouse” as a case in point.
inducing fears of loss: “I’ve been nervous ... that I might fall asleep and let go of hiːm and he’d just roll out of my arms” (Corin-1).

Their transactional looping invites a response in which a mother foresees the traces of true reciprocal exchange, her own need sometimes leading her to project reciprocality into seemingly non-reciprocal moments, pre-empting rather what they will become rather than what they are. While there is an expressed desire to be a dependent figure for the baby at this time, the women speak also to looking forward to a more give and take exclusive relationship wherein experiences are verbally shared and confidences held. ‘Being with’ propels a mother into the future, to a time when they will converse, mutually express inner thoughts and negotiate in language back and forth to reach understanding. Carolyn anticipates conversations they will have. There is an expressed desire on the mother’s part to re-create what she once had or longed for with her own mother that is somewhat gender-linked in her mind: “I wanted to have a girl because I really have a very strong bond with my mother and I really want to have that kind of a bond with a daughter” (Rae-1). Noting the mother’s tendency to blur the boundaries more with her female children, based on a stronger gender identification and a desire for replication, Chodorow (1978) suggested that mothers are generally warmer and more intimate with their female children in comparison to their male children on whom she said, they impose greater opportunities for autonomy from an earlier age. This does not apply to the present data and does not appear to give ample weight either to individual differences or to what a particular baby represents in a mother’s mind. There is no intent here to either substantiate or refute this claim. What is highlighted is the extent to which at least two of the women sought to replicate a strong mother-daughter bond and how all of the women looked forward to a strong intimate relationship with their child in the years to come, irrespective of gender. Moreover, it will be seem later how Corin both embraces and feels at times, slighted by her son’s (Kyle’s) growing physicality in the world. She may accommodate to his need, but at no time does she strive to be less intimate in her contact. Gender issues aside, a mother’s sense of gratification in tending to her dependent baby’s very immediate physiological needs rests for now, on her sense of accomplishment in doing “a good job.” As long as her baby is satisfied, she feels that she’s “doing okay as a mom” and can resign herself to the task of getting through “this stage of just eating and sleeping and burping!” But does her own sense of gratification spring from gratifying her child alone?

An important paper by Likierman (1988), which explicates that the love of a mother, beyond receiving her infant’s projected state, includes her projecting her own loving emotion into the baby, is pertinent to the discussion in terms of the findings. Not only does she respond to
her infant’s need and his projected demands, not only does she enter and exit his internal space to
intuit what he needs, but she also ‘pours’ or projects right into it, based on her own need to
“express the good loving parts of herself, and have their value confirmed and appreciated” (p.
29). Speaking to maternal desire, Likierman stresses how the mother’s need for self expression
can actually contribute to, rather than intrude upon the evolving inner world of the infant. She
describes the containing mother as transmitting to her infant, not just the “psychical quality” of
her caring, but also that of her own feelings, unmitigated by her thinking or modifying functions
(p. 31). She states that a mother wants not just to have her competent caring registered, but the
way in which she personally gives, appreciated. Contrary to the abounding cultural stereotypes, a
mother is not a pure altruist; nor does the infant need pure altruism. On the contrary, Likierman
suggests that the baby can benefit from positive ‘intrusions’ into his psyche. What she calls “the
mother’s primitive transferential love for her infant,” serves the important function of
transmitting to him positive feelings which are not of his own making, the accompanying
pleasure, an “unexpected gift,” ‘fed’ to the infantile psyche much in the way her milk is (p. 31).
It gives the infant the experience of receiving, as opposed to demanding pleasure; of being
“wanted rather than catered for” (p. 31). As an object of her desire, she seeks him out, her
projected maternal pleasure--her life force--concretely felt by the baby as a good experience
penetrating him, the mother’s enthusiasm and joy experienced concretely as an intensely
motivating presence within:

Looking to and fro as he wiggles his feet, Kyle responds to his mother’s beckoning and
her embrace by looking up at her. And as she lifts his wrist, excitedly snuggling in close to his
neck, kissing his hand and his head and caressing his cheek, he smiles profusely with pleasure, as
if her projected pleasure were felt as something good concretely received. There is a fine line to
such positive projecting however, in that it can quickly slip into what might be felt as an
intrusive ‘spilling into’ the baby’s domain, to which he will develop his own characteristic
response. Growing tired of his mother’s persistent expression of her affection, Kyle shrugs her
off and turns away. The baby’s volatility demands a mother’s close attentiveness, spontaneity
and resilience. In the early hours of the morning, it is his agenda that rings loud and clamorous to
be heard, irrespective of the mother’s energy level or emotional well-being. As he reaches out for
what he needs, be it food, comfort, or stimulation, and recoils satiated until another need re-
surfaces, she can feel usurped of her goodness. She may long for a piece of utopian care herself,
but more typically pushes herself to be her infant’s all-embracing pillar of strength. Willing to
sacrifice her need for his, she seeks out some recognition that will sustain her in her role: “When
I get a response from him I just feel like it’s much more like I’m interacting with him, and talking with him, ‘cause he’s interacting back” (Corin-1). Sometimes it is the mother who pulls for a smile. Sometimes the baby’s own spontaneous gesture is curbed.

**The Co- mingling of Union and Dysjunction Experience: The Unitive Moment**

“What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.”

T.S. Eliot

“What’s amazing is it’s a fresh life—a brand new baby and that overwhelms me at times with joy ... that overwhelming feeling of the newness, like the way she looks at everything and it’s like a whole new hope I guess ... It’s almost like having the baby has tied everything together.” (Sharon-I)

The unitive moment refers here to the momentary experience of fusion with one’s infant against a backdrop of acknowledged separateness and generational continuity to which the women alluded. This transitory experience, while moving into the existential realm, was seen to serve both/either transcendent and/or defensive functions and was present to varying degrees in all of the women. Two sub-themes--the experience of transcendence and the desire for stasis--were derived.

Two images of maternity leap out from a first glance at the data of these early weeks; the one, embodying the curved rotund maternal figure embracing the fruits of pregnancy, the mother weighed down by the ball of the baby lying upright on her chest, representing the proverbial closed loop—the fused image of Madonna and child, foreclosing any hint of ambiguity—wherein the mother protectively encapsulates the baby from external onslaught; the other, capturing the mismatched mutual struggle to find a rhythm, ranging from mild discordance to blatant rupture, reflective of the push-pull clamouring to adjust and to relate to a real other that does not as yet bring forth a fittedness. While both images pertain to some degree, to what is observed here in the early weeks of life, with both mother and baby seen at different times as instrumental in initiating and severing contact, it would be an error to view them as polar experiences in development, for upon closer inspection, union and dysjunction are seen to go hand in hand from the beginning, the one coming to the fore because of its co-existence with the other. The neonate is no more ‘lost’ in what was originally considered by Mahler (1968), a developmentally prior ‘symbiosis’ with the mother than is the mother with her infant. In fact, Mahler’s concept of symbiosis as a normal developmental stage, depicting psychic depths in terms of isolation as
pitted against fusion, has been discounted in the infancy and autism research (Beebe and Lachmann, 1988; Trevarthan, 1979; Tustin, 1994). The self is seen rather, as “participating in both areas of union and distinction at all levels of awareness, whatever the imbalance may present itself at any moment” (Eigen, 1993, p. 57), the sense of self and the sense of other arising contemporaneously. It is the imprint of the projective-introjective cycle, the ongoing transactional looping between the inner world and the outer through relationship, the one impinging upon the other that creates the link (Klein, 1959).\(^1\)

While the self is always experienced in reference to the other, be it an internalized or an external real other, conscious awareness of separateness on the part of the baby in the early weeks of life is not in any way implied, the baby, not yet the subject of his own experience. It is in part, through the active, albeit defensive process of circling states of anxiety through an other and re-absorbing them modified, that the distinction between the ‘me’ and the ‘not me’ is temporarily blurred, with aspects of the projected self initially experienced concretely as part of one’s own body, and the internalized maternal functions experienced as part of the infant self (Klein, 1936; 1952). But while one’s sense of cohesion is continually threatened by polar tendencies toward union and dysjunction, this does not discount the existence throughout the course of development of “genuinely harmonious and unifying moments” which “function as reference points for and nourish faith in a sense of one’s ultimate integrity” (Eigen, 1993, p. 73). Tustin (1981) described the baby’s sense of beauty as “associated with moments of bodily completeness in which there is an experience of ecstatic fusion with the earth-mother” (p. 224, italics added). But why the ubiquity of the oneness experience? And why is it held up as the ideal, infiltrating the cultural stereotype of mother-infant relationship?

Parker (1995) actually found that it was not oneness, but ‘at oneness’ or mutuality that was the sought ideal in the women she interviewed. The women in this study alluded both to the desire for reciprocal exchange and to the alluring nature of the experience of oneness, be that a function of their dipping into a merger phantasy—the inherent draw to quietude and a state in which conflict is kept to a minimum—or a more defensive return to a phantasized state of self sufficiency—the closed loop—wherein one can control and fulfill one’s own need and that of the other. Also reflected in some of the women’s experiences were moments of transcendent unity in which they poignantly experienced themselves (and their babies) as links in the generational

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\(^1\) Mahler herself (as cited in Tustin, 1994) acknowledged the importance of projective and introjective mechanisms, which presupposes some differentiation between the ‘me’ and ‘not me,’ which she did not initially allow in the early weeks of infancy; but it wasn’t until later, that she herself in a lecture given in Paris just before her death, acknowledged the difficulty with her ‘dual unity’ concept.
chain. Below, I will recount dimensions of the women’s experience of momentary ‘oneness’ that emerged as a direct outcome of holding an infant in mind.

**The Unitive Moment as an Experience of Transcendence**

“Life and death: they are one, at core entwined.”

_Rilke_

“In the moment that she was born ... there was just the doctor, the nurse, my husband and myself and I felt like there was nothing else in the world, like there was just us ... I had her in my arms and she was looking at me. I was overwhelmed ... that she was there ... outside of me now.” (Carolyn-I)

This sub-theme describes the women’s transcendent experience of being part of a greater whole in being present to the infant and subsumes two dimensions of experience: being part of the matriarchal line and the experienced timelessness of ‘being with’ in the lived moment.

The experience of maternity in this first transitional phase invites a circular closing of the gaps of time and generation. With the boundaries lateral (current and between) and generational (across time) collapsed, this broader perspective, rather than marking a discontinuity of existence, integrates life and death—as brought to the fore through the experience of giving birth—into an extended continuum, with all the attendant change and impending separations interspersed, the forward thrust and the return to beginnings seen as but two sides of the same coin. Freud (1930) had described “the oceanic feeling of oneness” as “a sensation of ‘eternity,’ a feeling of something limitless, unbounded—as it were” (p. 11); “a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole” (p. 12), which he saw as a regression to an earlier “phase of ego-feeling ... something like the restoration of limitless narcissism” (p. 20); in short, as a place we generally leave behind in infancy. He envisaged this oneness experience as occurring only in the infant, potentially between lovers, or in pathology, in which cases he acknowledged a collapsing of ego boundaries and its related sense of merger. Not otherwise allowing it in adults (or mothers even), he viewed it pejoratively, leaving its potentially integrative and transcendent function unacknowledged. While this vision paints well the phenomenological picture of the experience, its inherent determinism does not account for example, for the growth-promoting aspect of Carolyn’s transient capacity to both transcend and

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1 From ‘The Poems Praise,’ written in 1922, in _Rilke on love and other difficulties_ (1993, p. 69).
2 Based on her assumption that Freud’s cancer had “built up a wall within him against merger with the archaic mother,” Chasseque-Smirgel (1994) pointed out the blind spot in his thinking on this subject: “We can certainly not believe Freud when he pretends that he has never experienced the oceanic feeling, when the inspiration underlying his writings implies the (momentary) ability to lose the ego’s limits” (p. 122).
live in the moment as she looks into her baby’s (Al’s) eyes; nor her awesome feeling of time standing still that runs concurrent with her sense of being transported outside of the moment to witness life as larger than their felt two-ness cum one-ness. It does not capture the mutually inspiring quality of momentary fusion that was witnessed here in the intimate relationship between mother and child.

Eigen (1993) equates the ‘oceanic feeling’ with an experienced sense of wholeness—a felt sense of infinite perfection—propelled by the experience of vibrancy and “glowing aliveness,” as first encountered, he proposes, when the baby looks into his mother’s eyes, the accompanying idealization preserving a sense of hope and possibility, providing a source of ideal inspiration. Experienced non-defensively, the feeling of oneness reflects the acknowledged root of our past and those origins, to which we shall in the future return. Within the unitive moment, as experienced to varying degrees by the women in this study, one sees one’s child both as a separate new life unfolding and as a link in the generational chain. One senses one’s own smallness in the general scheme of things and yet one’s largeness in the life of this baby at this point in time. This felt continuity, this felt linkage with others who have embarked upon the same journey across eons is not confined to an in-the-body experience, even though it presents as such. With a child on one’s mind, one is in touch with “the cycle of life,” experienced according to where one is on the developmental journey. It is not just the baby in arms that captivates, but generativity exemplified, as extended backwards and forwards in time, from the infant within the self to a connecting with the lives that have gone before—their joys and their pain—and those of the projected generations to come. In her baby’s eyes, a mother sees the lives of her forebears and potentially a glimpse of the next generation. A mother feels moved and forever changed by this kind of experience, even though the unitive moment itself is generally brief. Two further dimensions of the experience of transcendence were uncovered:

**The Matriarchal Line: A Link in a Chain**

“I feel a bit more in touch with my mother ... and other mothers. I see my mother differently. I think of what she went through and have a different appreciation and a whole lot more respect for her now.”

*(Carolyn-I)*

Entering the mother sphere is marked in the women’s minds by the capacity to carry inside an other. Joining hands with the mothers of the world, a women enters “a whole other world”—the matriarchal line—for better or for worse, with its focus on re-generation, continuity, linkage. She finds herself conceding to what she might heretofore have renounced: “A part of me abhorred this kind of stereotype, like its not gonna happen to me! There’s this bond now with
mothers which is new, ‘cause I think for the longest time, I’ve pushed it away and I’m embracing it now” (Sharon-1). To have carried within new life presents an opportunity to acknowledge the wondrous, yet simple generational continuity of human existence, the realization that we are each unique and yet, “ordinary beads on a never-ending string” that is life, as so vividly described by Dillard (1999, p. 31). Unlike the stark polarity of opposites, the experienced clasping of the hands of birth and death encompasses life as moving like the seasons in a revolving cycle: “To have gone through that experience of carrying and giving birth to a child makes me think of a life cycle” (Carolyn-1). There is an acknowledged connection with humanity as a whole—the sense of we-ness transcending culture—a deeper indwelling. A mother professes feeling “more human” as she contemplates “other cultures and how they raise their kids” (Carolyn-1). Both a sense of connectedness and a sense of separateness co-exist. In becoming aware of patterns as they potentially get replayed, one wants to preserve a tradition without repeating it in its entirety. Transcending culture and yet feeling bound by it, the women were aware of the dual need for continuity and change.

‘Being With’ in the Lived Moment

“Everything is so rush, rush usually. You don’t have the luxury to enjoy the moment, to enjoy a conversation with somebody ... because in the back of your mind is ... we have to do this and this! But with her right now, I can just enjoy the moment and not worry about what’s coming next.” (Carolyn-1)

‘Being with’ sucks you into the moment and yet blinds you to it. Time slips through one’s fingers like pearls through sand, its unswerving lapses only fleetingly capturing a mother’s attention. Time, now out of her hands, is usurped in large unpredictable chunks. Vanishing like vapour into thin air, along with the space for potential projects, it inhibits doing and suddenly transports a mother and baby to a new realm: “Just being with her brings happiness, as opposed to doing something concrete. Just the time is enough to bring a deeper or a more complete sense of happiness ... It’s simpler in some ways, but it touches in a deeper way” (Carolyn-1). Being so intimately bound, it is difficult for a mother to observe the passing of time, to notice change in the making. Even though she is watchful of his every move, vigilant of every detail in the space of each day, the baby makes leaps unchronicled. Too close in fact, to witness such change, it more typically hits her out of the blue that they’ve ‘turned a corner.’ And yet the lived moment stretches out before her and lingers, each second savoured, like the rolling gaze of a child upon discovering a new toy, its texture, its angles, its curves accentuated: “I think of when we were in Mexico on the beach and there was this family ... and the kids were just playing with themselves ... and had no toys, just a chair, and they just seemed so incredibly happy ... just enjoying each
other and enjoying life and ... right now, I’m just enjoying the moment more and somehow I feel more human” (Carolyn-1). Drawn into the moment, a mother in these early weeks, drifts intermittently into what Meltzer (1975) describes as three-dimensional space,\(^1\) encompassing a circular relationship with time, in which time is experienced as infinite, cyclical. Being so intimately present to one’s child opens up vistas of time, accentuating the felt nature of one’s existence: “While we breathe, we open time like a path in the grass. We open time as a boat stem slits the crest of the present” (Dillard, 1999, p. 203).

**The Unitive Moment as a Desire for Stasis**

“We close a circle by means of our gazes and in it the tangled tension fuses white.”

*Rilke*\(^2\)

“I didn’t want my mom’s visit to end. I just wanted that whole time to be captured and to stay like that.”

(Rae-I)

This second sub-theme pertains to the experience of holding on to what is familiar, including the tendency to perceive ‘sameness.’ It was explicit in some of the narratives and implicit in others.

Luxuriating in the experience of oneness is also seen here to reflect a mother’s wish to steal time, to capture the moment with her baby in arms, to keep the world at bay. Forward moving, experienced as bringing one closer to the end, to the unknown, is momentarily split off, wished away. Can one so readily imagine oneself out of the picture with the provenance of human dependency curled into one’s breast? “Are we ready to think of all humanity as a living tree, carrying on splendidly without us?” Dillard asks (1999, p. 119). How many of us can envisage a future that excludes our very existence? Sometimes we cling. Hurled back through the experience to her own infancy, the felt oneness may reflect a mother’s longing to return to an earlier time of quietude, to swim in the waters of her pre-birth, to be sheltered from the world of responsibility she now faces, to be herself contained by the mother of her own infancy or an idealized version of her. Momentarily anticipating growth as a loss of intimacy, Rae reflects on the sadness that accompanies change and expresses a desire to freeze this moment in time, to linger in the immediate physiological space surrounding birth that is filled with excitement and raw passion: “I’m almost sad that she’s growing up already ... I liked having the newborn, being so close to having given birth, and now that exciting feeling surrounding the birth is slowly

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\(^1\) Four-dimensional space on the other hand, entails an appreciation of time as linear with a definite beginning and ending (Meltzer, 1975). Undoubtedly, a mother also dwells in this realm.

\(^2\) From ’The Seven Phallic Poems’ [iii], written in 1915, in *Rilke on love and other difficulties* (1993, p. 47).
fading away.” The thought of moving out of this state foreshadows the loss of pleasure and pain as known, evoking an element of fear. A mother might temporarily prefer to stick to what she knows, to linger in this phase of her child’s life where she feels capable of fulfilling his physiological need; to dwell in this time of cradling, embeddedness and mutual rapture. At the same time, life sucks her in and she looks to the future with an avid curiosity: “I’m also ... really looking forward to seeing how she’ll change” (Rae-2). Is this not bound up with the push-pull trend observed in the baby’s moves? Does not her adult reflective capacity potentially bring a mother closer through this experience, to the meaning of human existence?

One sees here, in the midst of forward moving, that draw toward quiescence, to which Freud (1924) alluded. But Freud’s (1920) consideration that “the dominating tendency of mental life ... is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension” (p. 329), with the regressive urge “to restore an earlier state of things” (p. 308) described as working in opposition to an inherent push forward toward change, provides but one level of meaning for the observed pull towards stasis. The post-Kleinian elucidation, emanating from the work of Bion, which describes the simultaneous reaching toward experiences of transcendence as a spontaneously unfolding human capacity in its own right and the anti-growth forces within that oppose it, reflects more fully the breadth of experienced tension witnessed in the participants in this study. Eigen (1993) described faith in the unknown is a ‘wholling attitude’ that evolves through the pain incurred in experiencing the inevitable divisions and disruptions of psychic life, with an openness to the emotional reality of experience seen as being in perpetual conflict with the internal forces working against it.

For the baby’s part, imbuing the mother in these early weeks with his extreme passions, leaves him feeling that he is in continuous existence with her, which on the one hand, may lead him to feel that he is the source of his own satisfaction, while on the other, wont to experience the absence of satisfaction as ‘goodness’ externally withheld. Taken to the extreme, this omnipotent sense of self sufficiency may very well militate against growth by prompting the baby to push the mother away (Segal, 1997). Here, the tension was observed in more subtle form in the infants’ growing frustration around a feed, where they at times, wanted and yet, denied wanting. This is the cycle into which the mother is deeply drawn, her own dependency and omnipotence re-visited. Entering the maternal space as fertile thinking ground invites one to return again and again to those contradictory forces within that both push forward toward change and simultaneously hold tight to a closed loop existence.
Resemblance: ‘The me in her’

A mother searches her infant’s face for resemblance to confirm the continuity of their existence: “I can see his family in her, but right from the beginning I’ve seen more of me” (Rae-1). Also observed were residues of a mother’s need to see her baby as still part of herself, enclosed within her in that omnipotent self sufficient loop that forecloses an immediate experience of differentiation. Rae describes Sara as being still part of her in a way that makes it difficult for her to stand outside the experience and think about it.

The image of Kyle asleep on Corin’s lap, her stroking his hand between her fore-finger and thumb while watching him closely; her slowly inching her thumb into his half-closed fist and stretching her forefinger up along the length of his fore-arm, her little finger reaching to span the width of his chest, is one of ‘blending’ with shades of a mother attempting to close the gap of their separateness by simultaneously enclosing and being enclosed: ‘I am in you, you are in me. This is the we-ness, the circular us. I enfold you back into me through burrowing my way into you. Encircling you in my palm, we are one.’ One wants to preserve such a sheltered space. In this moment of unitive experience there is perhaps, an underlying longing to linger in the pre-birth state wherein the mother through her very existence, sustains the infant and the infant in turn, leans on her for sustenance. Nothing is challenged. With the past and present momentarily merged, a mother may recreate in phantasy, the fulfillment of her own infancy, where she is at once the receiver and instrumenter of nurturing. It reinforces in her mind, the infant’s dependency and is linked to that desire to be oneself contained, or lost in the oceanic feeling that we again and again re-create in sliding over slippery slopes, in intimate sexual encounters, in warm baths, in enveloping ourselves in music, in basking in sunshine. It is the human condition.

The Felt Exigencies of Inner Space: From Ecstasy to Terror

“*My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves and blissful gratification.*

Adrienne Rich (1976, p. 21)

“It’s a really intense experience and it’s learn as you go. It’s frightening, but at the same time, it’s really powerful. It’s beautiful ... like nothing I’ve ever experienced before. It’s overwhelming.” (Sharon-I)

“Some days I feel real emotional and mushy about anything and some days ... it’s gone ... and then I start crying again over nothing.” (Corin-I)

Here, the phenomenology of maternal space as derived from both the first person accounts and the observation of the interactions in the first transition is described. It comprises the infants’ experience of the holding mother and the mother’s experience of the evocative impact of the infant’s state of mind, with
awe (in response to perceived beauty) and panic (in response to perceived terror) representing the two predominant dimensions of experience.

With the external world experienced as precarious, the baby's inner world remains for some time volatile, at times turbulent, veering toward ecstasy and terror at the extremes. His rapidly shifting states—ranging from the bliss observed in his gazing at his mother, his curling at her breast, momentarily unwanted, to the contrasting exasperation heard in his cries, at times panicked—take their toll on the primary care-giver. With the baby always on the brink of falling, the mother is always on the verge of gathering him together, without always knowing it and not always knowing how. And with her nuanced attunement—physiologically and emotionally dipping into the baby’s extremes of mood—both sensations of pleasure and pain run havoc. What is a mother’s experience of housing her baby’s infantile state through the illusory cycle of self-sufficiency, of lending him her mind until such time as his own can carry the magnitude of his passions? What is her experience of the pull of the baby for the ‘perfect loop’ in the face of countless instances of inevitable de-railing of the process, which leave her in doubt as to what she can or should do? A mother’s own infantile neediness is evoked in ways that make the process—including the identification with her baby’s nascent self—both easier and more difficult. What is the nature of the baby’s mental and emotional state with which a mother must contend at this time?

**In Awe of the Maternal**

"... beauty is not a need but an ecstasy.
It is not a mouth thirsting nor an empty hand stretched forth,
But rather a heart enflamed and a soul en-chanted."

_Kahlil Gibran_

Not only is the infant primed to cue his mother to attend to his immediate need, but also to engage in communication for its own sake (Trevarthan, 1979), to revere, to gaze in wonder and to experience awe (Bion, 1992). Searching intently her mother’s fully attentive expression, gaze-locked, A1 rounds her lips and blows her an ‘O’ shape, cooing. Watching her mother imitate her moves, A1 draws her hands up slowly to her face and punches them out in the air again, continuing to watch her while turning her head side to side, the way in intense conversation, one hangs onto every last word. “Oh!” Carolyn exclaims, moved and wholly entranced, with that furrowing of the brow that belongs to an enraptured breath-taking sigh. A1 juts out her chin and

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sticks out her tongue, her leg stretching up Carolyn’s body; then turning bright-eyed towards the camera, her tongue turning in her mouth, her head suspended in Carolyn’s palm, issuing direction, she emits a half-yawn and turns her head back, wide-eyed and receptive, to face her mother. Here is an example of mutual awe. Observed closely, one can see in the baby’s eyes, avid wonder and entrancement at the subtle changes of expression that sweep over her mother’s face in the space of a moment or less, the mother’s awe, wonder and amazement here unquestionable.

The capacity to find beauty awesome according to Grotstein (1998), is formed as a preconception in the womb, its main characteristic, being symmetry, the mother’s physical, emotional and mental attributes impacting the baby pre-natally on a sensuous level (Mancia, 1981; Meltzer & Harris-Williams, 1988; Mitrani, 1998; Paul, 1998). At birth, the “beauteous womb”—“provenance of symmetry”—is left behind and “projectively assigned to the mother,” who is experienced not just as breath-taking, but as saving the infant from his first ‘fall’ into a reality unknown (Grotstein, p. 275). Not yet having developed the capacity to perceive perspective, the newborn may see her as awesome (absolutely beautiful), or terrifying (absolutely horrifying), binocular vision, according to Grotstein, apparently not evident until three months. The world encountered by the infant is experienced in black and white terms, the universe as a concrete either/or. He does not merely split it defensively out of a confused sense of self and other. Nor is the baby’s awe of his mother’s beauty mere defensive idealization, for it is seen to run deeper and as linked to hope (Grotstein) and an “enduring faith in the existence of goodness and beauty” (Mitrani, 1998, p. 123), for which the infant needs a means of expression (Bion, 1959).

The mother is considered somewhat of an enigma to the newborn. According to Meltzer and Harris-Williams (1988), “every baby ‘knows’ from experience that his mother has an ‘inside’ world, a world where he has dwelled and from whence he has been expelled or escaped, depending on his point of view” (p. 21). Mothers intuitively know this. Describing the “aesthetic conflict” facing every newborn at birth, they write:

*The ordinary beautiful devoted mother presents to her ordinary beautiful baby a complex object of overwhelming interest ... Her outward beauty, concentrated as it must be in her breast and her face, complicated in each case by her nipples and her eyes, bombards him with the emotional experience of a passionate quality ... but the meaning of his mother’s behaviour, of the appearance and disappearance of the breast and the light in her eyes, of a face over which emotions pass like the shadows of clouds over the landscape, are unknown to him. He has after all come into a strange country.* (p. 22)
The baby’s natural wariness is observed in his averting his gaze, in his momentarily turning away from his mother’s offered pleasures. He cannot as yet trust one whom he does not yet know and whose ministrations, even when nurturing, cause uncomfortable rumblings in his immature digestive tract, bearing the mark of ambiguity. He must reconcile in his mother’s presence, the “aesthetic impact” of his perception of her and her “enigmatic inside,” the unknown dark corner imaginatively construed, fleshed out by whatever qualities the baby discovers in his encounter with her (Meltzer & Harris-Williams, 1988, p. 22). His suspicion and his distrust are thought to emanate not just from his first encounter with an unknown reality at birth, but now from the painful impact of the mother’s aesthetic in arousing his passions,¹ as well as from the experience of separation in her absence. The very experience of apprehending beauty, according to Meltzer (1973), can be split into its idealizing and persecutory aspects as a defense against its very impression. Only gradually does the infant come to trust, not just that his mother will keep him safe, but the extent to which she can open up the world of possibility for him, else hope be truncated or split off (Tustin, 1981). Relying on his mother to contain his overwhelming passion, the baby looks to her to find his own awe and wonder reflected in her expression and may feel at times overwhelmed and need to recoil from it:

When Corin enthusiastically pursues Kyle for a smile in the observed encounter at five and a half weeks, he turns the other way, to which she asks forlorn: “Does Mommy get a smile?” Pulled closer, his arms flail as he persists in looking to his side with a serious expression. A few moments later, when Kyle’s eyes meet hers for the first time, Corin responds excitedly, almost ecstatically. This is what she was waiting for! Her voice elevates animatedly as she rubs his stomach with her flat palm and Kyle’s head rocks side to side as he watches her, smiling. “Hi my boy!” she says looking into his eyes and he gurgles. Then growing restless, his expression turns serious, not letting go of her glance. As she rubs his stomach and lifts him into his overalls, he looks up at her serenely. In her eyes he sees her joy, her excitement, his presence embraced. Though somewhat wary, he is nevertheless excited and stimulated by it. It spurs him on and perhaps permits him to have his own agenda that he expresses so buoyantly in the months to come.

All of the women acknowledged their immeasurable importance in one way or another, to their baby’s development at this time: Corin, in having what it takes to sustain Kyle; Carolyn, in being the scaffold that holds Al up to explore the world from the safety of her arms, her awe

¹ Through working with the psychotic portion of personality, Meltzer (1973) discovered a failure to apprehend beauty through the emotional response to its perception.
encouraging her baby’s curiosity; Rae, as Sara’s ‘good feed,’ who fills her up on demand; and Sharon, as Helen’s safety net who protects her from the world’s potential assaults. Their individual capacities to cherish their baby’s need are seen here to breed hope and facilitate forward movement. It is after all, partly the mother’s awe of her baby that spurs him on to take the next step into a future that is by nature unknown.

**Maternal Awe of the Infant**

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

Keats

“It’s mostly awe—awed at her and at the whole process of her growing and becoming. The fact that from day to day I can notice a little change in her, that’s what amazes me ... I just want to absorb it all in.”

(Carolyn-I)

Initially in a state of suspended awe, a mother looks into her baby’s eyes, searching for that first trace of humanness, of bodily intactness, of new life unfolding before her. Struck by the sheer intensity of the experience, she is moved by its originality with which in her mind, nothing compares. Captivated by the newness of life, she is stultified by the stark possibility of its interruption. In her baby’s eyes and breath she sees both a continuation of her own life and the stark beginnings of life anew, forming outside her now. It has a miraculous quality to it: “It made me think of God in the sense that it’s a miracle when you see the baby” (Sharon-I). Before her lies potentiality unfolding. How open is she to embrace the unfolding outside herself of her beautiful buoyant baby who is as yet in the beginning stages of life’s journey?

So taken aback is the new mother by the concrete presence of her baby in arms, that she is thrown into a state of awe and disbelief. She sighs. She finds herself wondering: “Has this all been a dream?” She feels the need to blink again, lest this new presence, to whom she already feels so aligned, disappears. When first encountered, it all feels a bit unreal, almost too good to be true, to have already given birth to a perfectly formed human being. With a tear in her eye, Corin wonders: “Did I really have this baby, and he’s fine, and I’ve been through all of that?” Amazed at having the baby outside herself now, she has to reconcile the reality of who he will become with her own phantasized vision of him, two images to which she at first holds fast, as a novice water-skier holds on tenaciously, keeping both ropes taut to assure her safety in skimming the surface tension. At times, she leans more in one direction, impelled perhaps, to project specific attributes as a means to momentarily digress from the feared confrontation with what is ultimately unknown. Describing her first impressions, Rae projects: “I just think she’s going to adore [Kieran] as a big brother ... She’ll probably be a lot like him.” At times, she rides the crests
of the waves: “After giving birth to this person, I’ve yet to find out what she’s going to be like” (Carolyn-1).

So captivated is she by the baby’s inherent beauty that the banalities of life recede into the background, her experience of a sense of wonder and of the beauty of the world coming more to the fore in the moment. How receptive is she to the beauty she now beholds? Does she see herself in the baby? Does she lose her beauty to the baby? Does she feel the need to recollect from the beauty that confronts her, fearing its more shaded under-side? One’s capacity to attribute beauty to one’s offspring originates in part, in one’s own sense of feeling received in infancy. Did she light up her mother’s life? Her father’s? Her grandparent’s? The experience of apprehending beauty assumes a characteristic hue of its own for each mother, at times more vivid, at times more watered down. Carolyn describes her awe of a baby whose perceived beauty takes her breath away. Ecstatic, Corin is in disbelief that her “dream (has) come true.” Rae is somewhat disappointed with her own subdued passions, compared to the intense emotions she felt with her first child; and overwhelmed with her baby’s panicked crying, Sharon feels her own beauty somewhat displaced, as she looks her baby’s beauty straight in the eye. There is perhaps somewhat of a “price to pay” for this kind of unadulterated joy. Below, I present the women’s experiences in their diversity as suggestive of the overlapping experience of awe, into which one might be seen to dip from time to time.

**Beauty that Comes Full Circle and Takes your Breath Away**

“Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror but you are eternity and you are the mirror.”
Kahil Gibran (1923, p. 76)

“I feel an enormous kind of overwhelming ... unconditional sort of ... love ... for him ... I love his little looks ... He’ll crinkle up to his face and he has the cutest little face.” (Corin-1)

“When she looks at me I melt and I feel like she’s my baby ... just the expressions that she makes.” (Rae-1)

In the sweep of an eye, small details of the baby’s unfolding momentarily indent on the life of a caregiver. Amazed at the immediacy of new life unfolding before her, a mother is captivated and wants to absorb her child’s every move, not wanting to miss an iota. Attentive to the need to draw the line that demarcates her life from her child’s, past from present, Carolyn acknowledges her baby’s newness and separateness from her and yet, feeling caught in the thread of their continuity that loops, she is drawn in as if they are still part of the same terrain. Every observed turn, every uncovering is honoured as sacred, a “step along the way to her becoming a person” with a life of her own. There is a lingering watchfulness as she attempts to
see the world from the baby’s eyes: “I try and picture what she’s looking at, seeing everything and taking it all in.” Noticing the varied shades of her baby’s becoming, all the firsts surmount as one leaps into the future of this now shared life: “I feel privileged to witness her developing.” Carolyn watches Al all the while she is speaking, absorbing her becoming, while Al “absorbs” the world for the first time. “I feel like I’m watching something very special.” This is sacred ground.

Taken aback by inherent beauty that is breathtaking, a new mother is no sooner awe-struck, than her protectiveness rushes in, fearing its transience, it being prematurely cut short by some tragedy that might befall her baby. The furrowed brow observed in the mother as she watches her baby in moments of awe reflects both intense pleasure and pain. It is she, as revealed by Bergum (1997) who gives birth to pain. “The child represents it and henceforth it settles in, it is continuous” (Kristeva, 1976, p. 313). Pain seeps through the very nostalgia that breathes joy: “She’ll never be this small again ... We will look back on this and maybe we’ll wish for these days again” (Sharon-1). Bergum traced the origin of the word ‘birth’ to the old English, ‘forberan’ meaning, ‘to endure,’ ‘to bear,’ or ‘to carry on.’ It portrays an image of carrying inside an other—holding a baby in mind—along with the force of endurance. The term ‘suffering’ is actually derived from the Latin, ‘ferre,’ meaning ‘to bear’ or ‘to carry’ (Tustin 1994, p. 18). Following Rich (1976), Bergum asked: “How can the space in which women give birth aid them to transform their experience of pain into something more useful for their lives?” (p. 49). There is new growth to be found in the realizations that come to light in the moment in which an apprehension of beauty and its under-side meet in a mother’s mind.

In his inspiring paper on “aesthetic reciprocity” Meltzer (1987) asks, do not all mothers see the spark of beauty in their newborn’s eye, beauty residing within that is, and not in appearance, we take it. And what is it that either encourages or inhibits one from seeing the newborn as beautiful? In the background, he contends, are the pooled factors inherent in the parents—the quality of their “relation to one another, the degree of passion of their sexual union, ... the extent to which a child, and one of this sex, was yearned for” and factors inherent in the baby: his perceived “helplessness and vulnerability ... family resemblance and the absence of blemish” or damage” (p. 13). Each of the infants in this study was conceived as a culmination of

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1 In situations where the baby is marred, or seen to be, it is often this that is reflected in the mother’s eyes, leaving the child to wonder in the years to come, was he an error of fate? (Meltzer, 1987). Charles (1998) further noted that “children ... who carry upon their eyelids the imprint of the mother’s image of them as fatally flawed” are “unable to hold on to the mother and to also survive intact.” (p. 373), leaving the child in the perpetual quandary of not being able to fully separate for fear of destroying the mother, and not being able to form a realistic connection with her for fear of losing the self.
parental desire and perceived by the women as reflecting strong familial resemblance, each mother seeing herself to some extent in her infant. Following the birth, the women were able to put the marital relationship on hold to some degree, despite the ensuing conflict, knowing they could re-engage it at a later point, in order to focus on what they experienced as the more pressing relationship. Lurking in the shadows too, is the mother's sense of her own perceived beauty in infancy—the felt sense of her own parents' awe.

Over and above such reality factors, Meltzer (1987) asks, what is "the essence of baby-lishness which makes of it such a powerful evocative aesthetic object?" (p. 13). And he replies that it must be the baby’s interior qualities, his potentiality to become someone of importance for example, or potentiality in general, that draws the parents in. "Baby-lishness," he says, "impinges directly on the imagination and sets us peering into the future" (p. 13). But more! The extent of a mother’s own curiosity as to what lies beneath the surface, awaiting exposure, directly impacts her capacity for awe. With the baby teeming with potentiality, the cycle of life is temporarily re-set at the beginning and each parent presented an opportunity to re-engage it from a double perspective: "What’s amazing is, it’s a fresh life. It’s a brand new baby and that overwhelms me at times with joy... like the way she looks at everything and it’s fresh, it’s like a whole new hope, I guess!" (Sharon-1). Touched by this brush with ‘new beginnings,’ a mother may be enticed to pick up a dropped stitch in the fabric of her own life and to weave it into something more elaborate, yet more contentedly simple: "We made a lot of mistakes and we were sorting out a lot of things and ... she sort of is the culmination of it all" (Sharon-1). It is another chance for reparation. 'Being with' an infant invites one to re-define one’s place in the project of life, less in terms of being at a definite point on a linear map, but more in terms of one’s integrative part in an ongoing cycle. A mother is moved in being called upon to play such an intricately intimate part in her baby’s coming to be: “This is the very start of her life and there’s nothing else that she brings to the relationship from another relationship ... She just is. Everything that we build is what will be her experience. It’s very moving that way” (Carolyn-1).

Not only does one’s awe of the newborn set one “peering into the future,” but it also inspires a re-visiting of the past in a way that grounds one in the present by virtue of the baby’s immediate need, his dependency. Nudging one to stop and take stock, it potentially opens out a space for wondering that can create room for change, forward movement and growth, forestalling anxiety that may be associated with stepping into the unknown. Embracing beauty presents a challenge to surrender one’s prevailing truth for another as yet, unknown, which in the long run, may offer greater opportunity for growth. It is not just about becoming, but about
lingering in the present and noticing life’s transience, its phasic shifts. A mother does not tire of watching her newborn. Drawn in to observe life at the very beginning of its cycle, she is touched by its relative purity and is drawn to dwell in it. Carolyn quotes her mother as saying of her grandchild: “I could stand here all day and just look at her!” And with regard to herself: “Sometimes I just stare at her-- and I’ll say to my husband, ‘Come, just look at her!’” Rae expresses her disappointment at the loss of that undivided time and the intensity of passion that she experienced with her firstborn: “It’s different I find with a second baby. With Kieran ... I felt every second I was always looking at him going, ‘Wow! This is my baby!’ ... whereas with her ... I guess I’m torn two ways ... It’s nothing like having all the time in the world for this one baby.”

There is something profoundly compelling about a newborn’s ever-changing expression, the translucent skin, the lips puckering in slow motion, the uncurling fingers that draws one’s gaze like the first crocus pushing upward through the last of the winter snow to meet the first blush of spring. Its riveting beauty, its rawness reaches down to the soul, transcending the moment. The mother, unlike the baby, has a world of experience to draw on. She can both see her baby as the most beautiful baby in the world and at the same time, realize most mothers think likewise. The baby’s naiveté, perceived fragility and innocence contrast in her mind, with her own lost innocence, responsibility and wisdom. Time passes and cannot be reclaimed. In a moment of awe innocence rediscovers itself.

**Beauty’s Under-side**

Perhaps it is its very rawness, its perceived purity and its vulnerability to fate that also sets one turning on one’s heels when one encounters beauty head on. Perhaps it is so riveting as to evoke a fear of its under-side, impelling one to turn one’s head the other way to recoil from its awesomeness. The saying, ‘beauty is only skin deep’ belies a mother’s true experience, for an encounter with beauty penetrates deep; so deep sometimes that one meets its under-side, decay (all the way down to the grotesque), for beauty and decay--youth and aging/birth and death--are but two sides of the same coin. For Sharon, the baby’s beauty highlights her own perceived lost beauty: “I’ve got this beautiful baby and I’m delighted, but I’m looking at my body and looking at me and going, ‘What happened to you?’” To observe beauty can evoke pain, its dazzling presence reflecting its very “unattainableness” that seems “to mock our own felt imperfections” (Meltzer, as cited Grotstein, 1998, p. 281). I recall, upon observing one of the women locked in mutual gaze with her baby, the urge to turn my own head away, which I felt at the time was out of respect for the felt sacredness of their union. It was only upon later reflection, that I realized it
had also struck in me a painful chord, from which I momentarily needed to flee: the passing of my own youth, its associated longing, and the passing of the flawed aspects of mothering my own live babies, which I would never have a chance to re-do and with it, the chance of the perfect reparation. Beauty can evoke at once feelings of awe, envy, distrust. Always lurking in its shadow is the fear of its darker side, until one transcends the fear of loss, the fear of one’s dependency and the unknown. Sharon holds onto the beauty she finds in her baby, even in the face of Helen’s panic and her own overwhelming exhaustion. In the midst of her baby’s crying, she rocks her rhythmically as she chants mantra-like over and over again, “Helen is a beautiful baby, yes she is!” almost wishing in that moment, the dark side away. And yet, she alludes to knowing only too well beauty’s flip side: “I could see how immurely you could think, ‘Oh a baby will make me happy!’ [laughs] because they’re beautiful, but then there’s all the work that goes with it.” Perhaps she has already met the undertow!

**Fear of Mother, the ‘Dark Continent’**

The second dimension of experience related to being emotionally present to an infant’s state of mind was seen as characterized by fear/panic/hostility, the infant’s inconsolable crying experienced as a provocative emotional trigger. Derived from the observation data and the women’s narratives, it comprises sub-dimensions of experience, which include the phenomenology of infant panic and the maternal experience of living closely alongside it.

Given the relative lack of differentiation between the infant and mother and between the infant and the world at large in the child’s mind in these early weeks, the mother, as first contact and primary caregiver, is experienced as both source of love and plenitude and of destruction and withholding. It is precisely because of his total dependency on her for survival that she is attributed “god-like” and “demon-like” status, becoming the one into which both the best and the worst in the baby is projected (Chassequet-Smirgel, 1994). A mother (even a relatively well attuned mother) will at times be felt by the infant as the source of his frustration, should she fall sick for example, become exhausted, or should he feel physical pain or even be constitutionally endowed with a voracious appetite (ibid.). Woe is she in the child’s mind, the harbinger of all ills, the hoarder of all pleasures. With the mother’s body felt as both alluring and threatening, the baby may seek at once to re-enter her private domain (to return to the safety of the womb)—either for shelter or perhaps to possess her very goodness—and to flee from its felt danger, fearing
engulfment, for the mother, particularly the mother’s body represents both the Garden of Eden and the “uncanny” (Freud, 1991), Freud’s (1926) “dark continent.”

A mother is taken aback by the magnitude of her love, frustration, resentment, intolerance, her expressed hate and anger, her fear of losing control, essentially the humanness brought out in her in being emotionally present to her baby, and the confrontation with its primitive roots which such an encounter engenders. It is difficult to reconcile such extreme and often contradictory feelings without enduring guilt. At the same time, as Swigart (1991) proposes, being with young children creates an opportunity to “hold up to the light” those very untoward aspects of ourselves in order to contemplate their impact on the lives we lead, on the relationships we hold dear (p. 255).

**Panic in the Infant’s Cry**

“The worst crying, the worst upset he gets, the one that bothers me, is in the car seat. He, he gets ... more screaming, like really screaming and you know, turning around, and he just does not calm down ... well, not until I pick him up, which in the car seat, I can’t do.” (Corin-1)

Panic, reflected primarily in the baby’s cry, is at this age, a total body response. The term ‘cry,’ derived from the Latin, ‘quiritire’ meaning, to cry out for help, or the utterance of the emotion of affection or distress especially when inarticulate (Oxford Dictionary, 1971, p. 547), raises for Hewat (1992), in her phenomenological study on the experience of living with an incessantly crying infant, the question of whether the primal cry (the cry at birth) is primarily an indication of distress. Unlike adults, she notes, young infants appear not to cry out of happiness or sadness, but more out of distress, pain, or discomfort, as seen in the tightening of muscles, the pained grimace, the narrowing of the eyes, the uncontrolled quivering of the chin and the tightening of the fists. As the baby grows more frantic and the crying escalates, breathing becomes more noticeably irregular, motor movements become more jerky, the limbs flail, and the infant is seen to switch off and draw inward, severing further contact until such time as he feels contained and able to re-organize and ‘hold himself together.’

The infant’s cry demands an immediate response, which for the women in this study, intuitively meant providing solace and comfort. Perceiving her baby’s escalating cries as a manifestation of anxiety and panic, Sharon tries to close the perceived gaps, to ‘plug the unplugged’ when Helen awakens with a shrill cry, lest she become more undone and her emotional unraveling contagious. With her arms and legs bunched up, her fists clenched, restlessly rocking her body back and forth, Helen turns inward to face the back of the couch, while Sharon retrieves the pacifier and places it in her mouth, reassuring her that “Everything’s
okay!” There is almost a magical wishful quality to the mother’s trying to console an infant who seems to feel temporarily unbound, her own exasperation held in check. After a momentary calm, the whimpering grows louder, the pacifier lost and replaced. “Helen is a good girl!” Sharon reassures, perhaps longing for similar assurance. And as the pacifier falls out yet again, Sharon offers solace by way of swaying her to her singing, perhaps with an element of self-soothing. Helen catches the camera from the corner of her eye, a frown on her face and starts to cry again, her face reddening as she pulls her legs up, opens her mouth wide, and emits loud shrieks. Still singing, Sharon wipes her own brow in exasperation. An infant’s incessant crying stirs that fear of slipping into the darker side of humanity that one is forced through this very experience to (re)-visit, yet required to remain impartial to, but abandon neither. A mother is primed to remain vigilant.

Out of her nuanced observation, she learns to differentiate her infant’s cries, based on a hypervigilance that is at times on the cutting edge between life and death, fueled by guilt and an underlying self doubt about whether or not one can even keep this baby alive. Mothers can recognize their own infant’s cry at three days and can differentiate between the cry of pain, hunger and boredom at two weeks (Boukydis, as cited in Hewat, 1992). Not always being able to calm the baby however, can leave one feeling redundant, incompetent, “a failure” even. The cry that stands out as frustrating, at times, intolerable, is the one that renders her helpless in the moment, leaving her with no means of appeasing. The frustration in not being able to bring the crying to a halt can instigate a sense of helplessness and anger, generating further guilt and feelings of inadequacy.

**Holding on to the Baby’s Terror**

“When she’s crying a lot it upsets me, because I don’t understand it ... It’s just this huge mystery ... unexplained.” (Rae-I)

But it is the traumatic cry, the incessant inconsolable pitch that penetrates deeply, churning fear; the cry from which one eventually has to have respite in order to think, in order to survive the moment. This is the cry that brings one in contact with that terrifying uncertainty of being totally in the lap of the Gods, an uncertainty one treads carefully around, not wanting to lose ground, replicating perhaps, on an adult level, the baby’s underlying primal fear of falling through endless space, of not being. Breaking the links between one’s thoughts, it ruptures one’s sense of knowing, ushering in a sense of losing control and the attendant fear that itself is more terrifying than being rendered helpless. The world for mother and baby alike, becomes momentarily precarious. Nothing feels containable. The fear is that all will disintegrate and keep
on unraveling. This is not like anything one could have anticipated. One is overwhelmed by its unexpected concreteness, its immediate capacity to dramatically narrow one's existence, yet amazed that "nobody is shocked by it!" Sharon describes the dissonance into which one is hurled: "Colic is minimized, as if it just sort of comes with the territory, but when you're watching a baby, it looks like the baby's in distress. It's not that different type of cry where just nothing's going to make her happy ... It's when she's just beet red and she gasps and cries so much, it doesn't stop. It's frightening! You wonder if she's going to make it, if she's going to die!" It takes a lot to hold onto terror, from which one is normally inclined to flee.

Living with an incessantly crying infant is, according to Hewat (1992), "an endless endurance" (p. 164). With the baby constantly arching his body away from his mother's countless efforts at providing solace, a mother feels the tension in her own body. Sharon compares it to the depressing aspects of the flu she had while pregnant, where she "just slept and coughed and was incontinent," with no relief in sight. One lives in a constant state of answering to the baby's call, the baby almost a permanent fixture on the mother's chest; and there is the fear of stirring, reflected in that tentative tip toeing away from the crib, lest he budge. Feeling spent at the end of the day, a mother despairs, sometimes sinking into hopelessness. Waiting for relief, time stands still. The experience is one of continuous preoccupation amidst inescapable exhaustion: "She's always on my mind!" A mother feels isolated, imprisoned. "I'm afraid to go anywhere with her ... If it starts what am I going to do?" (Sharon-1). One's home is no longer a place of refuge. The incessant crying draws one in, yet pushes one away, the cessation of crying itself, felt as a reward, a confirmation that one has done a good job, the feel of a quieting baby molding into one's arms, bringing reassurance and relief (Brazelton & Cramer, as cited in Hewat). One of the women in Hewat's study equated the endless crying with "an alarm going off," with its ceaseless ringing, ringing, ringing, boring through one's eardrum until one gets up to turn it off (p. 169). It has a numbing effect on the body. And yet, one braces oneself to face the day, grounded by the felt link to the baby, albeit oblivious to one's own state of mind while one is in it: "I feel very responsible for her, protective and frightened at the same time ... but I feel connected to her" (Sharon-1).

In the Face of Infant Panic
"Sometimes she'll just fuss and fuss ... but there's nothing I can do and that's the hardest thing." (Rae-1)

Witnessing a baby's escalating panic arouses extreme feelings of frustration, anger, helplessness and guilt. Identifying with the baby's terror and rage, one fears losing control and
may feel urged to protect the infant at all costs. While not all of the infants in this study cried continuously, all of the women described experiences of their baby dipping into panicked states, marked by incessant crying from time to time, along with their own struggle to find a resolve. In the face of the baby’s fussy inconsolable crying, a mother may feel helpless to the point that she might undermine his emotional state or switch off, short the circuit, abort the experience, pass him off: “I feel ... upset for her, but then at the same time, you think it’s just a normal part of her development or it’s because of their immature system and maybe it’s not all that bad” (Rae-1). Internalizing her baby’s frustration, she may either feel the need to flee, to discard the baby in that moment or rationalize her experience by searching for answers: “I go through everything and think there should be an answer, though sometimes it doesn’t look like there is” (Carolyn-1). The crying presents to her rational mind an unfathomable “mystery” that she “can’t figure out,” but one that is inherently upsetting to witness. She pushes herself to keep her bearings, looking to the future as a stabilizing hold. Fully acknowledging her impact on shaping her baby’s world, Carolyn plants herself solidly in the equation: “When she’s upset, I think about her future. I think everything that I can do now to show her ... that the world is a good place ... will help her to grow to a secure person.” “Propelled” by what she feels her infant needs and how she “want(s) her to be as she gets older,” she pushes herself to be as “flexible” as she can and perseveres.

But the more a mother attunes in an effort to understand her baby’s panic, the more it seeps into her veins and the more difficult it is to remain calm, for the intensity of the fear and anger underlying a baby’s incessant crying eventually creeps under one’s skin to the point that one feels “like screaming” oneself. Sharon recounts: “My husband reached his threshold last week. He was walking her for I don’t know how many hours and he started crying.” The endless crying grates on the nerves until one eventually reaches a point of no return, where one can either take it on or split it off and turn away. It is the sheer frustration upon realizing that “even though you give more and do more, nothing seems to work!” One feels one’s hands are tied, that there is no way out. Reaching the darker corners of one’s psyche--primal aggression, rage, confusion, despair--one feels the need to latch onto safe ground for fear of drowning: “You feel totally helpless, angry, frustrated and yesterday I got frustrated with her, even though in my rational mind I know it’s not her fault, but ... incessant crying for 3 hours straight just makes you crazy!” (Sharon-1). A mother is shocked upon meeting her own potential aggression head on, floored by just how close to the edge she can be pushed. “For the first time .... I could see where people lose control.” And even though she may not act on it, it is in that very moment that a mother comes to “understand the darker side of people, how you can be violent ... if your coping mechanisms are
shot and you don’t have that rational mind” (Sharon-1). It flies in the face of every standard she has ever set. She feels nothing will make it stop. After trying everything she knew to appease her baby, Rae came to the point of feeling, “You just want to shake the baby ... I can’t do this any more!” It is the felt “rage” and “that feeling of helplessness” that triggers a mother’s guilt and anger at herself for even “feeling like losing it!” Upon reaching one’s threshold—the bottomless fear—one feels the need to remove oneself from the situation. Wondering is there something amiss, a mother feels for her baby. She fears for her baby’s safety.

**What the Baby’s Perceived Vulnerability Invokes**

“It’s never experienced anything like it. You feel totally helpless, angry and yesterday I got frustrated with her ... it was like, I can’t take it anymore!” (Sharon-1)

The baby’s perceived vulnerability and fragility is pitted against her own perceived responsibility in a mother’s mind, invoking feelings of culpability, fear of harm and loss, protectiveness, and guilt. Whatever pain her baby feels, it is somehow indelibly etched on a mother’s mind that she is responsible. Describing her experience in being caught in the grip of uncertainty the first time her baby “went colicky,” when nothing they could do “calmed her down,” Carolyn’s first thought was, “Oh my God, what did we do to change this baby? She was so good!” Is a mother’s sense of culpability bound up with the baby’s projected blame? her own idealized notion of parental responsibility? the baby’s pull for perfect containment? her own guilt in falling short? In a mother’s mind, her baby’s panic is related to something she did or failed to do, even when there may by no good reason why this might be so. Rae recalls feeling culpable and guilty when Sara’s head went so far back she looked like she was going to choke: “Oh no! What have I done to her?” she thought. Feeling at fate’s door, the women were inclined to take it on.

Identifying with her newborn’s vulnerability to a perceived dangerous world, a mother treads carefully around him, fearing she might puncture his perceived rawness: “I don’t want to do anything invasive to her” (Sharon-1). Having a child on her mind, Sharon now finds herself feeling “super protective,” fearing that the interventions that are supposed to help may in fact harm her baby. The world postpartum is temporarily tainted with a persecutory edge: “The first time we went shopping we put her on the cart and I was thinking, ‘Oh is somebody going to grab her? Is she going to fall?’” (Sharon-1). It’s that feeling of being totally responsible for someone “so tiny, so fragile,” whose life at the end of the day remains out of one’s hands.

While on the one hand, a mother finds it inconceivable to imagine harming her baby, whose raw state epitomizes innocence and vulnerability, on the other, the ongoing irritation of
the crying and screeching and the inability to quell it, can evoke extreme feelings. Most difficult
to bear—even worse than the endless crying—is the reality of being pushed to the edge and the
realization of the possibility of harming one’s own child. Contemplating her baby’s ongoing
fussiness, Rae commented: “I’ve heard women say that they feel like just throwing the baby out
the window and I’ve felt like, I want to get rid of this baby. I don’t want to deal with this any
more, but I don’t.” It is the mere thought that a mother finds unconscionable, its recurrence
intolerable.

It is the intensity of a mother’s felt attachment to her baby that stands apart in her mind
from all others that triggers the fear of pending loss, her own anxieties around this time,
bordering on the paranoid. She might find herself worrying: “What if she gets sick? What if she
dies?” (Sharon-1). She routinely checks her baby’s breathing. “Your mind just goes crazy!” She
fears that this new begotten baby might just slip through her fingers, or that she “might fall
asleep and let go of him and he’d just roll out of [her] arms” (Corin-1). Struck by the intense fear
of loss at this time, anything untoward raises a mother’s panic level: “What if she has some
horrible disease and I lose her!” (Rae-1). So great is the felt responsibility that her vigilance is
heightened—vigilance in the face of fear! Guilt churned by the alarming possibility of losing
control, a mother berates herself, which, if contemplated, can potentially evolve into a more
integrated acceptance of her own humanity: “I really dislike seeing myself out of control
emotionally ... but I have to recognize that I’m human too and that we’re all capable of that”
(Sharon-1). Parker (1995) had found that when the women in her study realized the impossibility
of being perfect, they developed a greater tolerance of paradox and ambiguity, which in turn
promoted further psychic integration and the emotional wherewithal for creative problem
solving.

The maternal ideal, against which a mother measures herself, has its origin in the infantile
pull for all-encompassing containment, a yearning that is carried or miscarried as the case may
be, through the generations and based on a deep-rooted phantasy, with which a mother is again
confronted as she holds her newborn child in mind. Much as she might wish to expose her child
to the emotional truth of existence, a mother’s protectiveness, born of her fear for her baby’s
survival, instigates her joining the parents of the world in the socialization process, wherein an
encounter with truth is temporarily short-circuited. But while she focuses on providing solace,
and on balancing pleasure and pain, the infant also orients himself towards her as his source of
hope and inspiration. Being called upon to house at once, her infant’s pain and joy is a tall order.
On re-thinking her understanding of autism before her death, Tustin (1994) set out to dismantle
the romanticized notion of maternity, emphasizing that “the craving for a superhuman mother can never be realized and that an important part of early learning is the gradual coming to terms with this frustration and all that this disillusionment implies” (p. 18). That said, the world in these early weeks is experienced by mother and baby alike as both wondrous and precarious and it is the very capacity to find pleasure in her baby that opens up for him the world of hope and possibility, which is not to say that in vulnerable moments, we are not all inclined to hold fast to what we know.

Table 1. Themes of Holding and Being Held in Mind in the First Transition.

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The co-mingling of union and dysjunction experience: The unitive moment

As an experience of transcendence
| The matriarchal line: A link in the chain |
| Being with in the lived moment |
| Resemblance: ‘The me in her’ |

The felt exigencies of inner space: From ecstasy to terror

| In awe of the maternal |
| Maternal awe of the infant |
| Fear of the mother, the ‘dark continent’ |
| Holding onto the baby’s terror |

Beauty that comes full circle and takes your breath away
| Beauty’s underside |
| Panic in the infant’s cry |
| In the face of infant panic |
| What the baby’s perceived vulnerability invokes |
Chapter Five: The Three Month Transition

Social Awakening, Curiosity and the 45 degree Outward Head Turn

This time marks the dawning of the baby’s smile, his growing trust and manifest joy, his socially reaching out, initiating dialogue and the beginning of his head turning outward to embrace the world. It is paralleled in the mother’s avid engagement of her infant, along with her awakening to the call of life outside of the maternal fold to taste its more tempered flavour. Feeling herself to be in the transition, she is on the verge of integrating the reality factor, stepping back onto solid ground, her enthusiasm at times comparable to the baby’s excitable gulp that could swallow the world whole. It is the dawning of her re-erecting structure, the rudimentary beginnings of separating out to reclaim some inner space, although with regard to the world external, there are as yet no great leaps, for still mutually engrossed, mother and baby are both just testing the waters. What is it about a three month old that entices a mother to constantly re-cycle his talk? What does his expanding vocality and his more determined gaze induce in her? And in encouraging his absorption of the world, does she get carried away by her own new-found buoyancy as she zealously flies the baby in the air, the baby whose expressed exuberance belies his novice state of just learning to hold himself together by virtue of feeling held in her attention. The four core themes extracted from the data at the three month transition include: 1) emerging sociality: reaching out for social exchange; 2) lived curiosity; 3) falling into a pattern: the birth of routine; and 4) the resurgence of anxiety upon feeling torn. The themes and sub-themes of this transition are presented in Table 2. at the end of the chapter.

Emerging Sociality: Reaching Out for Social Exchange

“I’m moved by his smiling, his laughing, his giggling, his talking, his gazing into my eyes. It reinforces just how special this relationship is to both of us.” (Corin-2)

This overarching theme, derived both from the women’s narratives and the observed interactions, pertains to the experienced shift in the mode of interaction, as described by the women at three months postpartum, and incorporates six separate but interrelated dimensions of experience: the shift from physicality to sociality; dawn of the first smile; the three month burst of delight; becoming known; the look and the touch, and the vocal dance.
Noticing a shift in the nature of their relationship from one based primarily on physical holding to one incorporating verbal dialogue, reflective of a more give and take exchange, what stood out for the women in their interactions at this time, was the baby’s growing awareness, intense eye contact, the back and forth social exchange, the evolving conversation: “The part where we’re talking and interacting (is) all relatively new. He’s just started talking up a storm” (Corin-2). The baby’s growing interest and perceived curiosity in her person fuel the mother’s own desire to engage in verbal dialogue. Struck by the look in her baby’s eye that makes her feel seen, she is avidly drawn in. Moved by his socially reaching out, as evidenced here in his searching expression and wide open smile, she embraces his communicative gestures. The engaging baby, whom she now sees as having vivid motivational intent, is now seen more as a separate person “with her own needs and wants and woes!” There is a felt sense of having more definitively arrived at the point of reciprocal exchange, of having landed more squarely on the social planet.

From Physicality to Sociality

“I think she just needs me to socialize with her as much as possible ... She likes to look around and when I do get her attention, I can really get her going.” (Rae-2)

The women in this study noticed a definite shift in how they felt needed by their babies at this time: “When I think back to the first month, it was just the basic physical needs, feeding, changing, whereas now I feel more responsible for the social needs, the interaction” (Carolyn-2). ‘Being there’ is now considered in some ways “more tiring,” but “it’s a different fatigue,” the mother feeling more in demand because of the constant pull on her attention. Perhaps it is the baby’s growing communicative explicitness that is more difficult to walk away from. Feeling even more on the go with less time to herself than before, a mother sees herself nevertheless as instrumental in ‘getting her baby going.’ Rae sees Sara as becoming so socially aware and engaging that she could trip up on her own excitement on crossing the threshold of stimulation if not sufficiently monitored. Gaddini (1969), who spent a considerable portion of his working life exploring the way in which the mind comes to understand the body, had documented how the baby gradually comes to develop a sense of self and a sense of other out of earlier sensory and oral relating, the physical mode being incorporated over time into the mental. Rhode (1997) questioned formulations concerning the mind’s development out of bodily experience, based both on the growing evidence from the infancy research, attesting to the baby’s early competencies, specifically with regard to cross modal integration (Meltzoff & Barton, 1979; Negri, 1994) and her own ongoing infant observations that portray the extent to which mental
and physical experience evolve in tandem. It is not that the bodily connection is superseded by the mental, but rather its nuance remains more in the background perhaps, as language—the more consensual form of communication that opens out the possibility for thinking about experience, including bodily experience—comes more to fore. The baby, hungry for meaningful interaction, is now seen as reaching out to the world of people with more explicit communicative intent. The interchange accentuated, a mother notes that her baby has "started to smile." What spurs on this new dimension and what does it stimulate in the mother?

Dawn of the First Smile
"First thing in the morning when we go get her, she's all smiles." (Carolyn-2)

The most human expression of bodily movement according to Buytendijk (1947), is "the joy of being in the world," wherein body and mind intertwine (p. 15). Exploring the 'lived meaning' of the infant's first smile, he highlights two situations that induce smiling, the "friendly encounter" and the "threat of being tickled," the essence of the former consisting in "the discovery of a 'Thou' who engages with me in a relation, and who, so to speak, enters the threshold of my inner life and whose own inner life reveals itself to me" (p. 18). The term 'encounter' portrays a sense of (re)union, a meeting face to face, wherein one "beam(s) with pleasure," as expressed in the facial expression, particularly the eyes and the mouth; and yet, the smile is considerably more than mere expression, for "it is also a response to the person or object to whom our heart has affectionately opened" (Buytendijk, p. 18). The relational link is self-evident. There is something about the human smile that endears and unwittingly demands a personal response, drawing the other more readily into the inner world.

Comparing the lived experience of joy—"exuberance"—and contentment—"a form of happiness that scintillates a well-being that invites heart-warming goodness" (Buytendijk, 1947, p. 18)—Buytendijk describes the latter as involving "more an attitude of reserve than of complete surrender," its inherent ambivalence reflected in the "polar unity of tension and relaxation ... the kind of tension we experience in expectation," as in the anticipation of a friendly encounter with its unspoken promise of what is yet to come (p. 19). Joy, on the other hand, he says, expresses itself in a "release of tension through surrender ... in one's relation to the lived body" (p. 19). It is the manifestation of a feeling of trust. The smile expresses inner pleasure of an as "yet to be kept secret that already within us begins to scintillate," the smile externalizing "a sunny, silent surrender by a broadening of the face, by the expression of the eye," the whole encounter offering possibility (p. 19). As Rae goes to pull Sara up from lying, a wide dimpled smile darts
across Sara’s face and as they come into closer contact, it stretches even wider out of sheer excitement, mirroring the resonant smile that instantly breaks wide and even across her mother’s face, like a wave spontaneously creasing the shoreline. The wide smile, unequivocally receptive, relays an invitation to enter the other’s domain, containing a promise of immediate continued contact. It is particularly poignant between a parent and infant. Essentially heart warming and hopeful, it opens out an infinite horizon of unbound possibility.

The social smile of the infants as observed here, reflects—sometimes separately, sometimes together—both a sense of quiet contentment and a more exuberant expectation of active engagement. Compared to the cry, the smile appears effortless, welling up from an inner sense of containment and quiet well being that pervades one’s being in the moment. Requiring no willful action, it emerges like the feeling of plenitude following on the ingestion of a good meal. [An image of the baby laid back, legs dangling limp, with perhaps a rhythmic tap of the foot and the subtle smile and receptive eye absorbing the world comes to mind.] There is no need to beckon, neither to actively draw one in, nor hold back. One is contentedly relaxed in a state of receptive restfulness, though not passive. Such autonomy, Buystendijk (1947) notes, is as “true for the infant who quietly lies there awake and watching his or her world,” wherein the evenly distributed tonal quality of the muscles may be so slight as to go unnoticed (p. 22). What is paradoxical about the smile, however, is its automatic “activation of certain facial muscles which are nevertheless experienced as the beginning of a relaxed, active, restful state” (ibid.). The smile then, “is the expression of a threshold situation, of a yet-to-be-contained burst of exuberance, of a closedness that is opening itself, of a self-satisfied, immanent sense of well being as well as an anticipated joy that transcends it all” (ibid.). Incorporating both a sense of instability and aliveness, characteristic of joy and a sense of stability and permanence, characteristic of restfulness, the baby’s smile, as espoused by Buystendijk, externalizes “an emerging quality of humanness” along with the dawning “awareness of being shy with oneself, now that this small child enters as a vital self the threshold of the tender unity with the other” (p. 23).

Eigen (1993) considered the infant’s early smiling response as receptive and as yet, non-manipulative—an undefensive expression of vibrancy, joy, delight. Embracing the very experience of being alive, it is immediate and unmediated. Not until later does he see it as taking a seductive turn. Only with time does its full openness tone down as other motivations come into play. Eigen describes the first smile as an expression of the dawning of awareness of self and other, reflective of both a visual (mental) and tactile (bodily) growth in the perception of union.
and distinction. Perhaps it is both imitative in the sense of magically joining with the person of the mother in the moment, holding on to a sense of their indivisibility and yet, responsive to the dawning sense of her very otherness, her being ‘over there’ and yet related. Perhaps for the mother, it holds the same appeal.

**The Three Month Burst of Delight**

*I like her trying to talk, her trying to walk, sit up, smile. It’s wonderful! Just wonderful! ... I look at her now and she’s a different person and she’s changing all the time. She’s just so full of joy and happiness.*

(Sharon-2)

A mother’s delight in the advances of her three month old stem not just from their own deepening link, but also from witnessing her baby’s growing awareness—the growth of a mind that is opening up to the world of relationship and the world external—his deepening humanity. The baby’s wide open smile—his ‘joie de vivre’--is an invitation to drink from the chalice of life that gladdens the very soul: “I’m moved by his smiling, his laughing, his giggling ... his gazing into my eyes ... It warms me inside ... I just sort of could eat him up. I love him to death!”

(Corin-2). To witness that wide smile break suddenly across her baby’s face is as moving, as heart warming as the first glimpse of the setting sun spread evenly across the horizon, its ripple effect radiating gladness and joy: “She brings out my sense of joy and admiration and my undying love [laugh]. Suddenly I’ll be in the kitchen ... and feeling hum drum dragged and then I’ll just look at her or I’ll just think of how I feel about her and I’ll express that and then Kieran gets kind of excited too” (Rae-2). A baby’s beaming smile instantaneously breaks tension, dissipating anger, outweighing frustration, upturning exhaustion: “If we can get a smile out of her it makes it all worth while” (Carolyn-2). Like mini sun bursts, like a dash of ginseng, it injects instant energy, zest--life force--confirming one’s sense that there is good in the world and that it is shareable. In her baby’s smile a mother reads gratitude, confirming her sense of having given and of having something worth giving. It is goodness externalized and exchanged. A first time mother basks in its enveloping pool of delight. It is a phase to be savoured, but rarely so much as when accentuated by the contrasting pull of a toddler who is raring to exert his autonomy: “I’m trying to take advantage of this time with her as just a baby, you know, just a three month old, who’s starting to smile and socialize and just enjoying that aspect of it” (Rae-2). Knowing how swiftly this experience will turn into yet another, Rae relishes it, feeling that “it’s nice just to have a little baby to enjoy and love and not have to deal with!”

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1 Spitz (1965) took as evidence of a rudimentary sense of self-other differentiation, his discovery that the baby from at least two months smiled coherently in response to his mother’s face while feeding.
**Becoming Known**

"I think she knows who I am now." (Corin-2)

"Like if there's other people around and I come in, she'll just light up." (Sharon-2)

"I feel very connected to her when ... she's really looking at me and recognizing me." (Carolyn-2)

By this time, the earlier months are retrospectively considered more “intense” in that “you’re just getting to know your baby and it’s just busy, busy, busy!” (Rae-2). By the third month, the women felt that they had arrived at the point of coming to ‘know’ their child and of feeling known, the growing familiarity and interest in the other re-fueling the ongoing endeavour to penetrate the other’s mind. Here, the women describe their experience of being ‘seen,’ the evidence of becoming ‘real’ in the baby’s mind felt as a reward in itself, surpassing that earlier feeling of being primarily a function. On the other hand, knowing one’s nurturing is less transferable is binding: “There’s more responsibility now, ‘cause she definitely notices when I’m not there” (Carolyn-2). With the more definitive pull on her attention, a mother may attribute specific intent to her baby’s demands, about which she may also feel torn: “If she wants to be picked up, then she wants to be picked up and I’m not reading anything more into that” (Carolyn-2). At the same time, not wanting her baby “to get too used to” her immediate response, nor to feel abandoned, Carolyn wonders if her current cry could be the dawning of her “recognizing being alone.” And yet, their growing familiarity allows her to respond with less urgency, having learned through experience that “a little bit of fussing isn’t going to hurt her!” This is a time when a mother tries to reconcile the baby’s demands with her own needs, but the tables have turned. With the baby now squarely in her orbit, pangs of doubt momentarily erupt as to where she is in his. Beyond feeling indispensable, a mother’s deeper fear of feeling replaceable churns pain.

There is something in the baby’s expression now that bespeaks his growing recognition of his mother and his desire for her specific attention, their growing familiarity itself a comfort, calming mother and baby alike. Already familiar with the contours of her baby’s body, her attributing more explicit meaning to his gestures defines him more sharply in her mind. Through their interaction, mother and baby are continually forming a sense of the other that impacts their social linkage on an ongoing basis.

Based on two infant observations that took place in Moscow, Dubinsky and Bazhenova (1997) explored the role of ‘interest’ in the manifestation of the other’s mind as it impacts development with respect to the baby’s earliest relationship to the mother, body and mind. In health, they suggest, reciprocal gazing and smiling is “characterized by a spirit of inquiry, a sense of wonder and delight at having access to the other’s mind” (p. 100). The passionate
inquiry into the other's mind carries its own personal stamp, as witnessed in the idiosyncratic facial expressions, tone and rhythm of the voice, bodily moves, physical manipulations, sound, and the vocal play between each mother and child in this study. It was observed in the turning towards the mother's eyes, which in turn fixed their attention on the baby's, and towards her voice which, according to Maiello (1997) is associated postnatally with the familiar sound of the mother's voice as heard in the womb.¹ The baby's intuitive sense of the mother's mind is considered to be based on an inherent curiosity about what emanates from her depths, although Dubinsky and Bazhenova do not in any way see this as an abstracted concept of mind at this point. The link from early on, they propose, is between two minds appearing at times, more sensuous, at times, more emotional.

The dawning awareness of inner space may be gleaned for example, from Sara's clamouring to engage not just her mother's body, but also her mind. Presented with her mother's finger, Sara sidetracks, and kicking her leg, lifts up Rae's clothing around the breast in an effort to get closer. Raised upright, she jerks her head and cries, her legs stretching out like cement blocks, her face reddening. Lifted more upright to face her mother, she cries and when her face is kissed, a striking verbal dance that sustains her attention ensues, leaving the observer with a strong impression of a three month old who delights in the pleasures rested on her and who actively pushes for more integrated exchange. Dubinsky and Bazhenova's (1997) research raises a number of questions that are relevant to the interactions as observed: Can the mother imagine a mental life in the baby? Can she relate to it? Does she try to engage him? Does the baby try to catch attention in the mother's eye? On what do their moments of intensity focus? Does their relationship go beyond feeding to include looking and listening, or is physicality the main shared interest, a means to avoid new experience?

In entering the observed interaction at the point where Helen follows the trajectory of her own hand, one might wonder, did she feel dropped from her mother's attention in that moment and hence feel the need to turn to her own resources, or is she perhaps demonstrating curiosity about the movement of her fingers, as a direct transfer of her curiosity in her mother, whose functions are now internalized? With her mother in this instance fully attuned, we might be inclined to rule out the former. When able to emotionally relate, a mother is seen to delight in her baby's growing mental capacities, which reassure her of his wellness and her own goodness. It

¹ Tomatis' neurophysiological research (as cited in Maiello, 1997) demonstrated the fully developed hearing capacity of the human foetus by four months gestation, with low frequency sounds (e.g., the mother's heart beat, breathing, gestational sounds) perceived even earlier.
enhances their engagement and diminishes her anxieties (her fears for her baby’s survival). Attentiveness to the manifestations of the other’s mind are seen here to sustain the relationship and to promote development via the mother’s pride and joy and the baby’s growing autonomy and competence in sustaining her attention, the baby’s interest in the mother seen as “the source of his interest in the world” (Dubinsky & Bazhenova, 1997, p. 111). The desire to know the other’s mind may be innate, but it is fostered by the other’s desire to be known. All of the women were particularly attuned to their babies during the three month taped interactions, drawn in above all at this time, by their baby’s direct pull for social exchange.

**The Look and the Touch**

"I think it’s neat that she’s trying to reach out to me somehow, touching me too. When I sleep with her, she tucks herself right under my side almost and her hand comes over to touch me and when I get up she notices. She’ll look around." (Sharon-2)

Grumet (1983) emphasizes the “essential asymmetry,” the dialogical nature of the mutual gaze of mother and child that is normally considered reciprocal (p. 46). As in conversation, “the look,” she says:

- can be given and received, returned or refused, but only in those fleeting moments of fusion, those instants in the lives of lovers, parents and children ...
- can the look contain the complete reciprocity of which the poet dreams ... for only in asymmetry is there movement. (p. 46)

And so we see here, in the glance that passes between mother and child, the gathering of pieces of experience—bands of light in a prism—that colour the inner world and in turn, the nature of what gets refracted. The manifest sociality of the three-month-old is contiguous with the history of his bodily/emotional exchanges, whose underlying meaning bear psychic significance. Holding onto each other’s gaze, mother and baby are now seen to engage in an elaborate dance that more clearly defines each partner, their rhythmic moves having evolved out of their conjoined primitive choreography. Swaying Sara to soothing music, Rae swirls her around to face her, to which Sara responds with held gaze, lips pursed, fixed grin. “Do you want to talk to me now?” Rae asks, as Sara’s arms flail and she gurgles, momentarily touching her mother’s face. “It was like we were having a real conversation!” she reflects. Under normal conditions, the stillness of the neonatal gaze, so curiously receptive to the inquiring gaze of the mother, becomes the bold gaze of the three-month-old who now initiates and responds out of a more potent sense of having arrived.

“The baby,” according to Alvarez and Furgiuele (1997), “has plenty of experiences of its mind ... producing effects on another mind,” the infant’s sense of agency experienced from the
beginning not just on the physical plain, but also on the mental (p. 123). To support their research, they cited the work of Broucek, which highlighted the baby's joy in discovering his instrumentality in making things happen, irrespective of the nature of an event, along with the empirical work of Papousek and Papousek, which demonstrated infants' undulated pleasure in an experimental situation wherein they were given an opportunity to cause an event to take place and conversely, the unresponsiveness of infants under two months when deprived of this opportunity. In Papousek and Papousek's study (as cited in Alvarez & Furgiuele) infants over three months were found to be significantly more autonomous in avoiding situations which prevented their active involvement.

It is the infant's sense of being instrumental in affecting the (m)other's reactions however, that is crucial to the development of a space for thought and most relevant to this discussion. Alvarez and Furgiuele (1997) focused on the caregiver's interest (or lack thereof) in the baby's initiatives and sense of agency, specifically, the capacity to keep the baby in the background of one's mind even when something else assumed foreground position. In addition, they explored the caregiver's capacity to stand aside and wait with interest while the baby set his attention elsewhere, which they found, granted the baby the opportunity to experience agency in being held in mind, irrespective of what he was doing. The latter, they linked to an experience of plenitude--the sense of there being ample space in the other's mind to hold onto the thought of him, even when other ideas are more pressing; replenishment as linked to the notion of a mind full of ideas, which take their turn and do not crowd one another out, as in Bruner's (1968) concept of the "capacity to think in parenthesis," i.e., to hold something in reserve, or to manage more than one train of thought at a time. In pointing out how Kyle, at thirteen and a half weeks, peered up at his grandmother's painting while nursing, Corin demonstrated a certain vigilance and ambivalence with respect to her baby's growing split attentions.

While Alvarez and Furgiuele (1997) explored the conditions under which the parent either facilitates or inhibits this developmental capacity by asking, "How willing is the caregiver to follow the trajectory of her baby's gaze and to interest herself in his interests?" (p. 128), I found myself exploring the mind of the baby, and wondering, does he feel he can count on her return or does he feel the need to hold onto her gaze for fear of her disappearing? With a toddler constantly in tow, Sara has good reason to track her mother's attention, as witnessed in her

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1Bruner's (1968) strictly cognitive developmental scheme depicts the baby's one-track thinking mode at the neonatal level--wherein the baby is said to be able to either suck or look, but not both--as gradually developing into a more coordinated process of two-trackedness at around four months, as marked by the baby's capacity to do both simultaneously, at times alternating sucking with looking.
immediately darting her gaze after Rae as the latter turns mid-interaction to take a gulp of coffee. Alvarez and Furgiuele suggested that the baby’s capacity to deal with two thoughts at once might be facilitated by the parent’s capacity to follow the baby’s interests. Thought to evolve out of the way in which singular experiences were earlier entertained, (notwithstanding the baby’s own inherent capacity to sustain his parent’s attention), we might speculate perhaps, that Al’s growing capacity to test the waters and wait for her mother’s response as she beckons in a graduated call for attention, has its source in the earlier observed capacity of this mother to follow her baby’s gaze at three weeks, when for example, she lifted Al up to see the picture on the wall that had captured her interest. Here, the specific trajectory of the maternal glance is seen as linked to the way in which the baby acquires a space for thought. Does a mother see herself as an important object of interest to her growing infant? Does she experience the world as replenishable? Does the baby?

Significant as is the quality of mutual gaze, it is touch and sound—bodily sensations considered developmentally prior—according to Grumet (1983), that initially shape relationships and furnish the inner world, for only when the link to externality is mediated through touch and feeling, she says, can the full significance of ‘the look’ be assumed. Granted. Notwithstanding, Rhode’s (1997) infant observations demonstrated the extent to which the coming together of mental and physical experiences in the mother’s mind facilitate the integration of emotion and sensation in the baby. Roughly equating the mind and eye contact on the one hand, and the body and mouth contact on the other, Haag (as cited in Rhode, 1987, p. 143), emphasized the importance of “the interplay between touch and vision ... the ‘jump into the eyes’ (le saut dans les yeux),” as it were, providing “the necessary condition for overcoming the infant’s terror of falling into space,” the balanced integration of nipple in mouth on the one hand, and mutual eye gaze on the other, seen as underlying healthy bodily integration.

The infants in this study clearly sought out positions that provided an opportunity for optimal physical and emotional integration, the mothers for their part facilitating it. For Kyle, intense pleasurable interactions involving the interplay of mind and body, including the experience of a sense of agency, were seen to occur during his involvement with his mother on the change table; for Helen, it occurred while lying on the couch in full view of her mother; for Sara, in face to face encounters held upright in her mother’s arms; and for Al, lying on her mother’s knee in full view of her face. Rhode’s (1997) observations demonstrated how the “communication and containment of feeling” facilitate bodily integration and in turn, the capacity to integrate mental and bodily experience (p. 151). Temporary disruptions into the
baby’s capacity to integrate were seen to occur when there was a break in emotional contact between mother and baby and conversely, the balance restored when the mother resumed open communication of feeling: Lying limp, while looking straight ahead with a serious expression, Helen momentarily turns towards Sharon and pulls up her hand as Sharon instructs her to push down with her feet. Then, as Helen stares at her fingers, Sharon leans back, all the while remaining watchful as she reflects: “You just want to look at your hand now,” to which Helen clenches her fist and brings it to her mouth, her eye still on her mother. Here, it is the mother’s reflective communication that facilitates the making of a link in the baby’s mind.

Noticing her baby’s evolving sense of effectance that sets them apart can induce split feelings in a caregiver that may go undetected. Chewing on her hand, Helen’s groaning persists as she shrugs her mother off when the latter goes to wipe her face. Turning away and arching her body amidst cries, she scrunches up her face and stretches her legs adamantly, to which Sharon responds: “Okay, okay, over the shoulder you want, then that’s what you’ll get.” And as Sharon succumbs, Helen’s expression relaxes instantly, now that she has succeeded in exerting her will, now that she has effected a response in the other that enables her to peer into the world at large. The baby’s expressed potency demands realistic negotiation, which a mother may or may not feel ready to deal with in a given moment.

A mother’s intuitive linking of the physical and emotional aspects of their relating is seen to draw her baby more fully into engagement, facilitating his own integration of experience. Lying on the change-table, mesmerized and captivated by his mother, Kyle kicks his legs, not taking his eyes off her. Then, as he grows still, his arm reaches out while Corin asks: “Where’s Mommy’s smile?” to which he excitedly draws his hands together. “Mommy loves your smiling. Mommy loves everything about you,” she says, as she touches his belly and he watches her face, his arm flailing. And as she kisses his toes he watches closely, his leg shooting up in the air with glee, his sense of potency apparent. Their observed physicality belies a deep sensuality that surpasses corporeality. While she has responded to her baby all along as a person, she has on another level catered more menially to his physical needs, and it is at this time that one sees a gradual move towards integration. As Kyle nurses, Corin comments: “He’s always snuggling in. I love ... when ... he has his little hand on me and sort of strokes very very light like a feather ... That’s why I don’t want to give up breast feeding. The physical part has been very hard, but the emotional part I don’t want to give up at all.”

The sensual pleasure in relating to a young infant, to which the women alluded, takes the relationship into the unspoken realm of desire and spirituality, wherein arbitrary divisions
between body and mind temporarily blur, where bodies and spirits intertwine. Reflecting on their sensual attachment, Sharon remarks: “When I sleep with her, she tucks herself right under my side almost and her hand comes over to touch me and when I get up, she notices.” Their bodily link bespeaks an emotional interdependence. Attention reciprocated, the manifest mutual exchange brings forth the sense of a genuine meeting of inner worlds that brings a mother face to face with her baby’s humanity and her own: “When I’m just holding and rocking her it’s a comforting feeling ... but when I’m actually talking to her, I feel like I’m actually communicating with her soul” (Rae-2). Nursing evokes a similar depth of feeling: “She’ll look up at me and then I feel like I’m looking deep into her eyes and into her soul.” It is in genuinely looking deeply into the other’s eyes, eyes that are at once familiar, and yet unknowable—pools of infinitude—and meeting ‘otherness’ head on, quirks undefined, that one is enticed to face uncertainty and look at the world anew.

The Vocal Dance

“When we have the little conversations ... she’ll look right in your eyes, so it’s really like a connection and she’ll start gabbing. Sometimes she’ll do it in response to something you’ll say and other times she’ll just go on ... her own little story.” (Carolyn-2)

Although the nature of their exchange was seen to shift by the third month, “vocal interplay” between mother and infant was seen as pervasive from birth, with the mother’s “singing and swaying” (Maeillo, 1997, p. 159) finding a parallel in the infant’s “lalling and babbling” (Meltzer, 1986, p. 185). While it is still the rhythmic quality that conveys an emotional message and sets the tone of the exchange in the third month, there is by this time more back and forth vocal exchange.

In the vocal dance, it is the other’s expression that elicits sound, inviting further exchange. Maeillo (1997) had suggested that the baby’s pull for vocal exchange might also stem “from its pre-natal auditory experience of the mother’s voice” (p. 162). Maeillo’s proposed link between sound and meaning in mother-infant interaction from early on was confirmed by Piontelli’s (1992) longitudinal research that attests to the continuity of action patterns from pre-natal through to post-natal life, the alternation between the sound of the mother’s voice and silence at the prenatal level thought to pre-empt the later differentiation between the presence and absence of the other.¹ Maeillo’s research demonstrated the extent to which the emotional

¹Tomatis (as cited in Maeillo, 1997) demonstrated the foetus’ capacity to distinguish between the presence and absence of the mother’s voice.
quality of relationship is influenced both by the baby’s and the mother’s own prenatal auditory experience; the fact that there is already much impinging on the relationship at birth.

The mother for her part has her own desire to draw from her baby “a story” that weaves meaning into their shared lives. Encouraging her baby to bring forth sound, it is her genuine interest that spurs him on, the intensity of their eye contact holding the world temporarily at bay. Receptive to his sounds, his gaze, his smiles, his protests, she carries an invisible banner that reads, ‘Engage me,’ her enthusiasm welcoming him onto the social planet. The taped interactions reveal two striking examples of vocal dialogue, during which each mother engages in drawing forth a personal narrative in the making:

“You tell Mommy a story!” Corin asks of Kyle, as she leans directly over him, to which he responds with a loud gurgling sound, and taking his hands out of his mouth, looks directly at her. As she encourages his talk, he vocalizes. She imitates; he repeats, all the while laughing, his chin raised with glee. Becoming locked in each other’s gaze, a vocal dance ensues, in which the mother follows her infant’s sound-making as he remains transfixed, arms outstretched, his enthusiasm assuring her of his happiness and her own competence. In a similar vein, Rae imitates Sara’s sounds as they engage in a face to face encounter that is interspersed with gurgling, laughter and an open body posture, maintained by close eye contact. “You love to talk, don’t you?” she comments. Fully focused on her mother, Sara smiles profusely, her hands waving, as they continue to ‘dialogue’ back and forth. Sara gurgles and directs a sound at Rae, to which Rae, overcome with joy by her baby’s initiating contact, jerks her own head back in delight. And as she passes another sound back to Sara, Sara gurgles, still focused, and their ‘conversation’ proceeds with Rae encouraging her to “talk some more,” until Sara tires and turns away with a bewildered expression, interrupting the flow.

What stood out for Rae during the interaction “was the talking,” the impact of their communication, inducing “a very warm feeling” that made her “feel very connected” and “loving towards her.” The evolving ‘conversation’ between mother and child can induce feelings of being very present in the baby’s mind, very central to his world. Sustaining her interest, the baby’s ongoing chant reassures her of their connectedness and the continuity of the life script they are mutually weaving. A mother talks as if she and her baby are having a real conversation: “Oh! ... Is that right?” (Sharon-2). It is the baby’s vocalizing, along with his gaze, his smile, his reaching out, that draws the mother in at this time as she pulls for reciprocal exchange: As Sharon gets up to move, Helen’s eyes immediately turn to follow the sound of her voice, and as she glances away again, Sharon’s beckoning brings forth a beaming smile. For Sharon, “what
stood out was the eye contact ... the comfort level." Seeing her baby as "trying to communicate," as "acknowledging," she is moved by the genuine feel of their dialogue that bears an integrity of its own. "Tell me more!" a mother prompts, in an attempt to prolong the sense of connectedness whose essence feels pure and as yet, unmarred.

Carolyn experiences her exchange with Al as a conversation in the making, a relationship seen as inevitably changing over time, while preserving its essential nature. It is the baby’s whole orientation towards the mother, including his reaching glance that seduces: “There are times when she’ll catch your eye and we’ll have a little conversation where she’ll coo” (Carolyn-2). At this time, Carolyn equates their vocal dialogue with being one with nature, their resonating sounds set against a lush silent backdrop that envelops: “The other night we sat out on the porch and it was just a beautiful night ... and we had a little chat and I felt so at peace.” It is as if their felt connection in the moment, brings the world to a stand-still, their peering into each other’s eyes accentuating the depth of their union, their mutual contentment in each other’s presence---the kind inspired by feeling at one with nature with its cyclical rhythms, its earthy groundedness---evoking a sense of harmony that embraces solitude. “The closest thing it reminds me of would be being out in nature ... like when we’re on our canoe trips and it’s just us ... looking up at the stars ... ‘cause she looks right into your eyes and there’s just you and her and she’ll just gab!” Holding each other’s gaze, the whole world momentarily collapses into those black wide-open pools that lead to the soul, a sense of plenitude resounding as if their union in that moment could encompass the world.

**Lived Curiosity: As the Baby’s Head Turns**

"Just the way she looks at things, like that first time she sees her hand or the first time she looks at the trees ... The innocence, the beauty, it’s awesome, just to see her checking everything out." (Sharon-2)

This second core theme describes phenomenologically the infants’ curiosity at three months as it pertains to the women’s experience of their infant’s growing exploration. It comprises four dimensions of experience: the baby’s perceived split focus; the maternal urge to feed the baby’s curiosity; a hint of hostility and the maternal experience of buoyancy.

The first tastes of autonomy create in mother and baby alike, joint feelings of “exhilaration and rage, joy and betrayal, loss as well as delight” (Swigart, 1991, p. 58). A mother feels freed and yet dismayed upon first realizing she is not the appendage she thought she was. As the baby’s head turns to face outward, his gaze following something that catches his eye, a
mother may feel both pride and relief in his growing alertness, tinged with shades of being let
down upon sensing that she is no longer his soul source of joy. Sara’s desire to find the world
underlies her striking bright-eyed alertness upon being carried into the room at thirteen and a half
weeks after her nap. Following a yawn, her focus instantly sharpens as she hungrily takes the
world in, her mother noticing her every move and inclination. While the mother’s own gaze is at
times drawn outward, she is still readily seduced by her baby’s inquisitive expression to abandon
her desire for anything external to their relationship. It can be difficult for a mother at this point
in their shared lives to reconcile her baby’s desire for her and his growing desire to absorb the
world at large.

In the interaction between Helen and her mother, one observes in their facing in opposite
directions, their pursuit of separate interests: Helen’s expression reflects her inquisitiveness
about what lies beyond the safety of her mother’s arms, while what stands out in Sharon’s mind
upon reflection, is their intimate contact and engagement. As Helen ventures her gaze elsewhere,
Sharon’s gaze is seen to either grow more internal, inadvertently freeing her baby in that instant
to follow her immediate desire, or to follow vigilantly, pleading a response.

**Perceived Split Focus**

"He loves to giggle with me now ... and talk and look around, so I am always trying to find him something
interesting to keep his attention ... Sometimes while he’s eating he stops to smile and take a break and
say, ‘Hi mom, I still love ye!’ He can’t decide sometimes whether to eat or to play." (Corin-2)

This dimension, derived primarily from the observation data, pertains to the
women’s perception of their baby’s curiosity as split between the mother and
the world at large. It subsumes the infants’ phenomenological experience of
curiosity within the holding relationship, including the observed desire to
draw closer to the mother’ body, and is closely inter-linked with the
dimension that directly follows: the maternal urge to feed the baby’s curiosity.

“Curiosity”--the desire to see or know--according to Phillips (1998), “depends on a
receding horizon” (p. 17), the baby’s ‘lived curiosity’ itself an acknowledgment of wanting and
loss. Curiosity, as manifested in the baby’s researches into the pleasurable link between novelty
and absence bespeaks an unarticulated pleasure following on a desire to be fulfilled and a desire
to know. Amazed at Al’s intrigue that prompts her avid exploration of specific aspects of an
activity centre, Carolyn is awed by her persistence and her suddenly coming to know. In
addition to loss, there is for Freud (as cited in Philips, p. 15), “an imaginative plenitude,” the
child’s “paradoxical resilience” born of reality and lack. Only over time, he asserts, when the
baby’s pleasures become thwarted by the constraints of reality, are their inarticulate nature relegated to an equally impassioned desire that must in a given society be either suppressed or sublimated. Following Freud, Phillips paints a picture of the child as “the virtuoso of desire,” whose appetite for pleasure “is under threat from within and from without” (p. xx).

The baby’s curiosity is observed here in his avid absorption of his mother’s gaze, his turning his head to explore the world around him, along with his taking his hands into his mouth, which is thought to symbolize his playing out in phantasy the discovery of maternal space. Perez-Sanchez (1990) had described how the baby of three to four months relates his own body parts in a manner similar to how relationships are represented in his mind. It is around this time too, that the women noticed the baby’s “just start(ing) to become more aware of [her] hands.” One sees at this time in the baby’s physical manipulations, both the embracing of the maternal function and the eschewing of any need for it, the baby turning toward self satisfaction as a way to create the world without having to endure the wait or tolerate the gap.

The smiling baby, desirous of the mother, is seen to more actively explore her having an inside into which he might project, the immediacy of his desire reflected in his vividly climbing into her bodily space. “Hello little butter ball,” Corin addresses Kyle, as she kisses his hands and he feels her face with one hand, while visually exploring her upper features with intent. Enclosed in her mother’s arm, Sara strokes her mother’s body, thrashing her leg about as she lifts up the clothing around her mother’s breast in an effort to get closer to the object of desire. There is on the baby’s part, a sensuous desire to draw closer to the source of pleasure, an inherent inquisitiveness about the other’s ‘insides.’ Phillips (1998) describes the child as having “an astonishing capacity for pleasure ... with an unwilled relish for sensuous experience which often unsettles the adults, who like to call it affection” (p. 18). For the child, he says, there is no purpose to life “other than living it” (p. 18). Living in the moment the child is a “natural phenomenologist.” With a passionate enthrallment with life and a thirst difficult to sustain, his delight goes beyond omnipotence, beyond triumph, his pleasure rather, an “ecstasy of opportunity,” an exuberance (ibid.). The child’s relationship to the world however, is riven with conflict. His avid interest in bodies--what they contain and what enters and exits them--will in time, through acculturation, require re-channeling into something more culturally ‘fitting,’ the cost of which is “an increase of anxiety about life and a fear of death” (Freud, as cited in Phillips, p. 24). How could a mother, who herself is caught in the sway of ‘socializing’ her infant know this? The child, for Phillips, “is an ecstatic, an aesthete” (p. 27), whose “unwilled inevitable
momentum for curiosity," whose love of life, he must learn to moderate (p. 28). In short, he must learn to comply lest risk survival. Does culture then kill curiosity, Phillips asks.

Does the baby’s experience of pleasure and desire re-awaken primordial desires in the mother? Can she fall into pleasure and indulge or does she readily pull back to order his experience and give it the stamp of the culture into which they have fallen? What are the forces at play within her that might dampen his appetite? How much is she seduced by the demands of socialization? How open is she to the truth of existence? At this stage in their lives together a mother dwells in a different borderland, wherein practicalities tug. At this time, the felt tension is between impassioned experience and the pull of civilization to conform, routinize, and create order. The counter forces now at play are those that curtail the relaxing of boundaries, the emerging structures paving the way toward an awareness of separateness. The mother is more apt at this time to see the baby’s budding curiosity as split between she and the world at large, her habitual response ultimately linking up with the baby’s proclivity to either find pleasure through intimacy or autonomous pursuit, or varying degrees of both.

**The Maternal Urge to ‘Feed’ the Baby’s Curiosity**

"Now that we’ve passed that three month mark, I know she’s changing in a way that I know I’m looking forward to and I’m sort of ready to ... start to teach her and watch and encourage her to grow and change and learn ... I have a little book called, “Games to Play with Young Babies” and I would try to ... remember and do them and would always feel afterwards, I haven’t been doing them enough.” (Rae-2)

A noticeable urge to stimulate and educate was observed in the women at this point, instigated perhaps by the baby’s bounding energy and desire to explore, or perhaps their own returning appetite for worldly contact, the rush to stimulate seen as an attempt to meet the baby’s perceived curiosity head on. With the maternal ideal still lurking in the shadows, a mother is now more inclined to berate herself for failing to adequately introduce ‘the world’: “Everyday I’ll be thinking of how I can stimulate her and oftentimes think I’m not doing this enough!” (Rae-2). It arises in the context of the contradictory pull to luxuriate in the emotional/physical entanglement of the preceding months, the mother feeling a pang of guilt, a sense of loss in disrupting their intimacy by introducing artifacts or by feeling usurped by the call of practicality: “I think, got to do the laundry! No, laundry can wait! I want to interact with her as much as I can, even if it’s just holding her” (Rae-2). And yet, the mother’s eye is more fixed on the clock, lest she miss a critical window of opportunity: “Now that we’ve passed that three month mark ... I’m sort of ready to start to teach her and watch and encourage her to grow and change and learn” (Rae-2). What is seen in their interaction on the one hand, is a push to action--prompted by the birth of
routine, the forces of culture—and on the other, a recoiling to the timelessness of the sensuous embrace. A mother’s inclination is now reversed, the face of her ambivalence inverted.

Carolyn finds she now has to be more active and on the go to catch up with Al’s moves, the baby’s desire to venture, albeit from the security of her arms, becoming more prominent. Having difficulty settling, Al fusses and squirms as Carolyn makes swinging rhythmical sweeps, the baby held securely in her arms: “The most challenging thing is just keeping her entertained ... She just needs to be movin’ around, changing positions.” While a mother may like the taste of her baby’s will, it is nevertheless exhausting, requiring equally boundless energy and patience on her part, the frantic quality of the baby’s moves at times catching. This mother looks on the bright side as she perseveres in the face of the baby’s restlessness with its subtle irritating undertones, justifying the energy spent by seeing it as a “work out,” an activity carried out amidst rhythmic panting and configured as, “killing two birds with one stone.” It is not however, until Al takes the nipple fast in her mouth and sucks vigorously that her body fully relaxes and her restlessness ceases. It is still the finding of maternal riches that satisfy.

The attempt to assuage the baby’s restlessness by introducing yet another stimulus, instigated by the mother’s sense that what the baby now needs is quantitatively more, is seen to create resistance in the baby and a feeling of exasperated futility in the mother. It is observed here, in the baby’s arching away from toys—rattles, rings, soft toys—introduced as a way of feeding his appetite for novelty. Lifted onto her mother’s knee and shown a soft butterfly, Al pushes it away, as she whimpers and kicks in protest. And when the mother manipulates the baby’s body in an effort to stimulate, the baby displays discomfort: As Sharon takes a hold of Helen’s feet and goes to cycle her legs, Helen lies limp and looks straight ahead with a serious expression. “You don’t like being interrupted!” Sharon remarks, as Helen arches her body and shrieks. There were numerous examples in this study of the mother introducing aspects of the world, which her baby did not wish to find. And yet, a mother feels propelled to meet what she sees as her infant’s (and perhaps her own) need for change and external stimulation at this time. “The times that I feel better about myself are the times that I’m running around like a maniac ... I don’t like to be bored ... The busier I am, in some ways, the better” (Corin-2). The frantic rush is contagious. “Do you want to play while we’re sitting here?” Corin asks Kyle, as he watches her engage in conversation.

The maternal urge to feed the infant’s budding curiosity through stimulation does not always match the infant’s immediate desire. While a mother herself may feel some of the baby’s impetus to explore, the baby’s venturing out of her orbit raises for her issues of exclusion and
inclusion anew. Therein sparks the duel between the desire for the mother and the world beyond, the one a stepping stone to the next, though not necessarily seen as such. How a mother experiences her infant’s curiosity is paramount. Does she hold his curiosity for her and for the world side by side? The baby’s facing outward may feel at times threatening, abandoning even, instigating a tightening of the reel. She may not feel ready to walk out of his orbit, even if he demonstrates an inkling to exit hers. Much as his interest in exploring the world beyond her brings joy, providing a mother with a sense of pride, she seems more enthralled at this stage by his interest in her and intuitively more sure of its significance: “As he’s getting more interactive I’m really enjoying it, not as much entertaining him with objects, but the me and him interaction time” (Corin-2). This will be seen to change by month six, when she will more readily embrace his split attention as her own need for separate space becomes more prominent.

The felt inner tension between what the baby is seen to want (desire) and what she can provide (fulfill) shifts here in terms of there now being a competing source of pleasure. The baby, sometimes ruthless in his demands, tantalizes as he carves his path. Still central in his mother’s world, the baby feels he has created the world, his desires seemingly spread further afield. As he glides in and out of engagement, other potential feasts beckon and win his attention. Does a mother embrace or feel threatened by her baby’s broadening mind?

Vigilant to her baby’s perceived split focus, a mother is seen both to take pride in his evolving external interests, as witnessed in her pointing out his alertness, his obvious brightness, while at the same time experiencing his turning away as somewhat of a brush off that she would gladly turn around: “There’s nothing in the world like him smiling and talking ... He’s got his needs of when he does all this stuff, but I could do it all day!” (Corin-2). The women were seen to clearly embrace the baby’s emerging autonomy, while simultaneously feeling somewhat let down. There is some relief in being afforded the opportunity to reclaim aspects of one’s own inner space. A mother expresses joy in “encouraging some independence,” now seeing herself more as a scaffold, a stepping stone. Embracing change, Carolyn gives Al a slight nudge to move forward: “She likes change. She likes stimulation ... I like thinking that she’s going to be a strong person. I like seeing that in her when she makes demands. It’s hard on me, but at the same time I like ... that she’s curious. She seems to take an interest in the world.”

While a mother can speak to her baby’s split need at this time—“He enjoys our times together and he enjoys sitting in the chair looking around and exploring his environment”—and her determination to meet that need—“I want to make sure I’m there when he needs me there or wants me, but also to recognize that he needs me to not be there when he doesn’t want me there”
(Corin-2)—it is something with which she is just beginning to struggle. Along with noticing his desire to explore and play, she is also becoming aware of her baby’s growing capacity to satisfy himself, as evidenced in his evolving preoccupation with his “tasty hands.” The baby is seen to be “at the stage of sucking (her) fist!” It can feel both exhilarating and heartrending, the gain and the loss, which the mother in turn must re-work as she revisits it here, in the context of holding her baby in mind, for one witnesses here, the very beginnings of letting go—the return to solitude—that accentuates the ever changing nature of relationship. One has just opened up and the baby has just rushed in to test the waters.

Still keenly sensitive to her baby’s pleasure in the nursing, a mother may feel suddenly dropped, as the baby looks the other way. “He sucks his fist over there!” Corin comments with a deflated tone. “That’s his, Okay mom, you know I want food. Don’t make me cry for it!” she interprets, emphasizing his being well nourished to assuage any underlying doubt that what she has to give falls short. “No barfing up all mommy’s good milk that she made for you!” she warns. She feels a certain sense of reward “in being the one to sustain him.” And she projects gratitude, while at the same time acknowledging his ambivalence: “He can’t decide sometimes whether to eat or to play!” Vigilance to the baby’s head turning is also demonstrated in Rae’s response to Sara’s growing restless during nursing, her throwing her head back leaving her mother feeling peeved: “You just want to chew on your hand! You’re pulling it out every time you look back there!”

Captivated by the baby’s absorbing the world, the women also genuinely followed along with interest, their mindfulness of the baby facilitating further exploration: “It’s pretty fascinating over there!” Rae comments as Sara stares at something that catches her eye. Pulled up to sitting so that she can see more clearly, Sara stares ahead more wide-eyed, her eyes turning toward the pictures on display, her mother following her glance. Similarly, when Carolyn leans over Al inquisitively, Al explores her mouth with her fingers more vigorously, her head reaching back, her eyes spanning the room behind her, her mother’s continued interest facilitating her bringing her whole fist into her mouth in a manner reflective of the well contained baby incorporating the mother as they mutually explore. “What do you see?” a mother inquires as the baby’s head turns. Impassioned and excited, Helen takes in the world from the security of her mother’s arms and upon hearing her mother sing their song, “Helen is a beautiful baby,” her expression brightens with curiosity: the bodily equivalent of discovering maternal space through being focused upon and contained. One is left wondering, was this Helen’s cue that she was being positively held in her mother’s mind?
The baby’s widening curiosity also inspires, unleashing in the mother an inherent curiosity that cuts through fears of impending change, issuing “a second chance” to experience life from the lens of a novice. The baby’s inquiring mind breeds hope in the preceding generation, potentially dislodging barriers, once immovable. Moved by her baby’s perceived “innocence ... beauty,” by the very “way she looks at things, like that first time she ... looks at the trees,” Sharon is awed by her constant “changing.” This time marks the springtime of the first year of their shared lives, the world unfolding afresh to the curious eye of the three month old, rendering its ingrained textures more palatable to the mother. It is the dawn of the mother’s emerging from hibernation—coming out from under—her stepping back out into the garden and feasting on the cornucopia of colour and fragrance that comes to life in the very moment it catches her infant’s eye.

Re-visiting alongside one’s child those early stages of discovery invokes in her a desire to create for her baby an idyllic path, while reality knocks, demanding negotiation. “I’m sure most parents must feel that desire to make it wonderful for your child ... knowing you can’t” (Sharon-2). Being emotionally present to one’s growing child is potentially “life-giving,” creating an opportunity to think twice. “It is sort of like starting over.” There is great reward in feeling “partly responsible” for enriching the life of an other, the baby in turn, providing the mother with an eye opening “opportunity to see how it could be” (Sharon-2).

**A Hint of Hostility**

Expressions of hostility on the baby’s part, are experienced still as vague irritants that the women tend to rationalize, not yet wanting to see them as intentional. Their growing familiarity breeds a certain predictability that launches the baby on his outward path, while reinforcing a mother’s sense of loss. The baby’s hints of aggression are experienced as an expression of his growing tension between pursuing the mother and being drawn into the bigger and as yet, unknown field, the mother herself residing in the transition between feeling central to her baby’s world and feeling she has to work hard to maintain that position in his mind. It is here, that her sense of fragility in perhaps not being so indispensable is heightened. It is here, that the baby’s active curiosity potentially breeds doubt as to her place in his mind: “I can just sort of sense his head’s about to whip me out of his mouth,” Corin utters when Kyle grows restless in the nursing. “Oh! Here goes! Whip it out and watch Mommy squeal! ... I can tell that he’s fidgety and sort of wanting to get food over with, so he can get on and play ... He’s more interested in what else is around him.” In struggling with the baby’s clasping a handful of her hair, one immediately
senses a mother’s exasperation, in spite of her efforts to appease. “That’s my hair!” Carolyn quietly exclaims, while still rocking Al in her arms amidst evident exhaustion and endless efforts to keep up with Al’s demand for change. But whatever its impact and however the baby expressed it, the women were seen here to push themselves to embrace the baby’s exuberance.

The Maternal Experience of ‘Buoyancy’

Is it the baby’s or her own exuberance that invites a mother to energetically swoop the baby up into the air, at times dismissive of his volatility? Being on the cusp of re-integrating external life, she feels perhaps the urge to prematurely leap ahead in displaying her own buoyancy as she sometimes flies her curious infant out of his depth. It signals perhaps, her own need for release, a rushed return to the autonomous self, or her desire to match the baby’s perceived buoyancy, her own untimely exuberance taking the wind out of his sails.

Buoyancy is perceived by Quinodoz (1993) as “a gain in autonomy relative to dependence,” that involves the “pleasurable sensation of managing to ‘fly with one’s own wings,’” having acquired the capacity to sustain oneself upon moving out of the space of feeling the need to be ‘carried’ by the other (p. 172). For the mother, it coincides with reclaiming aspects of the self, temporarily shelved. Akin to a false start, the first tastes of returning autonomy prompt that premature leap into the air. The feeling of being able to “carry oneself ... gives rise to a sense of jubilation” that is also tinged with fear upon feeling one is finally oneself, unruffled by the comings and goings of the other, for it requires an acknowledgment of change and of life’s transience with all its attendant losses (Quinodoz, p. 172). The culmination of a series of experiences of letting go, signaling on the one hand, a sense of abandonment and on the other, a vote of confidence from without in being able to sustain oneself, it evokes at once, a sense of being dropped and of being released into the universe like a captive bird given the sky. [The baby’s head turning releases in the same moment that it abandons.] It is here, that the mother re-encounters buoyancy in the context of their emotional link, the baby for his part, merely a novice on the way to acquiring this capacity.

At this point, one still witnesses in the infant traces of the fear of falling upon being startled or suddenly moved. As Corin removes Kyle’s undershirt, his face pouts, his tongue protrudes and with his chin tucked under, his limbs flail as he lies naked, covered only with a cloth diaper. The overly zealous upward-swing, whereupon the mother flies the infant up into the air is seen at times, to leave the baby with the sensation of being suddenly shot out into space: Taken by surprise in being lifted upright, Kyle’s body suddenly jerks, his whole expression
growing serious, his body turning pale. Then swooped on up into the air, an uncomfortable expression washes over his face, indicating his sense of unease in feeling out of his depth. His omnipotence shattered, he searches for the nipple to regain a sense of security.

Buoyancy runs in direct opposition to omnipotence, in the vortex of the changing and the immutable, for it rests on the capacity to acknowledge flux and recognize limitation, and on the need to depend on one’s own reliability. It is not a static, foundationary equilibrium that is acquired once and for all, but rather “a dynamic psychical equilibrium” that enables one not only to control movement, but to work alongside it, “just as a surfer draws energy from the waves” (Quinodoz, 1993, p. 176). The omnipotent baby for his part has not yet learned to swim.

When Rae lets go of Sara’s wrists as she lays her down, Sara’s arms flail as she begins to cry and suck on her fingers, pulling her head back. And as the crying persists, Rae utters, “No! Don’t get fussy! Want to fly?” with which, she swoops her into the air and down again until their lips align. Similarly, holding Al in the air, Carolyn turns her to face outward, to which Al’s hand flies out, her body tenses and her face reddens as she starts to cry. Later, to assuage her crying, Carolyn stands her on her knee and swoops her into the air. “We’re flying!” she exclaims joyously to which Al’s body clearly tenses. Buoyancy overstepped, there is an observed clamouring to hold the self together in the face of being temporarily taken out of one’s depths.

To experience ‘buoyancy,’ one must actually be able to perceive time and space; time allowing an appreciation of a sense of reality, through being able to anticipate and deal with anxiety; and space, in terms of Meltzer’s (1975) four-dimensional psychical space, wherein one foregoes the need to possess and become one with the other. The women in this study at three to four months postpartum were observed going in and out of this. The French for buoyancy, ‘portance,’ literally means ‘lift’ and is used by Quinodoz (1993) primarily in the dynamic sense of vertical lift as employed in aerodynamics or hydrodynamics, giving rise to the notion of displacement, as in the tendency of a watercraft for example, to glide in and out of contact with the water’s surface. Quinodoz equates it with the child letting go of the parental hand to venture forward, one step at a time. He uses the analogy to accentuate the growing capacity to support oneself without laying all one’s weight on the supporting other. The relationship to the other is not lost, any more than the surfboard leaves the water. What changes is the nature of the contact, the nature of the interdependent link.

Falling into a Pattern: The Birth of Routine

“I’m beginning to understand her patterns and I think she’s still trying to figure me out and I’m waiting for her to get into a bit of routine with the napping.” (Carolyn-2)
This third core theme pertains to the experienced relationship to structure as it coincides with the dawning of active curiosity. Four interrelated sub-themes were derived: routine as a double-edged sword; the gradual return of perspective; integrating the ‘real’ world; and reclaiming inner space.

The cumulative data from the three month transition reveal a yearning for structure on the mother’s part and the first real signs of establishing routine as the baby falls into a pattern and as the mother begins to stand back and take note. This dawning of order, on the one hand, desired, in that it re-defines self-body boundaries, engendering a more lucid thinking perspective, also leaves one to contend with the loss of timelessness and boundary fusion. A mother knows that if she pushed it, she could establish more of a routine, but there is still a sense of pleasure in residing in the borderland, on the verge of a transition.

A mother notices this shift in terms of being in “a different space now,” in feeling that she is “back to reality.” She contrasts her current experience of feeling “more responsible and structured” with the magical quality of the first month, where everything felt “so new and so fresh.” Less inclined to bask in the moment, she tends to plan ahead more now, in terms of providing for her baby’s future. Carolyn claims to feel “different,” having “come down a bit off [my] little high.” There is an acknowledged sense of having returned to the ‘self,’ of being more grounded, of “thinking fairly structurally,” as compared to the earlier days where “it was just ... almost like being on a cloud.” Corin on the other hand would prefer to push herself to her limit--to extend the nursing no matter how painful--to preserve the intensity of the earlier tie. Weaning for now, remains difficult to even contemplate. The women were not however, without desire for the brighter side of a more bounded relationship: the reclamation of internal space and a re-establishing of external relationships that had up till now remained peripheral to the mother-infant bond: “We’re trying to schedule more events as a family ‘cause I don’t want to feel like I’ve been cut off either from the world” (Carolyn-2). Perhaps the role of the third party has already more impact in that regard than might first seem to be the case.

**Routine: “A Double-edged Sword”**

“I anticipated before he was born having more naps and stuff, but I didn’t anticipate that he doesn’t want to go out of my arms [laughs] and then I didn’t want him going out of my arms.” (Corin-2)

The mother, by now more at home with the loosely structured life of flexible time and unpredictability, may now be loathe to trade it in for the life of order. She, like the omnipotent baby of this phase who basks in pleasure, may find herself wanting it all—the security of
conformity and the freedom to explore. Corin longs for “a little more flexibility in the day of being able to put him down,” but nevertheless voices her ambivalence: “Actually, it’s a double edged sword, ‘cause I’m not really working on it, ‘cause I enjoy snuggling him and him lying ... on me.” Striving to prolong the pleasure that she sees as short-lived, she notes that “for now, it feels right,” although some days she would like to have the choice. Not feeling altogether “ready to give it up,” a mother is still willing to “cope with being a little less organized.” At the same time, she is also “starting to feel a little bit itchy to have some more structure in [my] life right now” (Corin-2). Wanting it and not wanting it, one welcomes the agenda-free life, but it can also have a deadening effect, making one feel “lethargic,” “lazy” and confined. And so she pushes herself to action, which she feels, coincides with her baby’s growing impetus to explore. Not having had the chance to luxuriate in the lapsed routine of the early days with her second child, save when her mother was there to pick up the pieces, Rae welcomes the return of even piecemeal routine--the day time nap. Wanting to “to read the paper again,” Sharon looks forward to getting Helen into a routine, which she sees as a necessary social structure, a given: “You got to live in the society. I mean you have to function!” A mother is always contending with giving the relationship the stamp of the culture into which they have fallen.

Routine also brings with it shades of loss. Torn between imposing structure and simply going with the flow, a mother begins to feel in conflict between lifting her baby immediately and leaving him to wait, now that reality has set in, the fears of “spoiling” still emanating mainly from without. It is the third party, who for now, draws that imaginary boundary line that the mother herself is not fully ready to take up until the next transition phase, three months hence. At the same time, not wanting to feel “cut off either from the world,” Carolyn speaks to the draw of routine with its practical edge: “I’m trying to schedule things as much as I can, so that I’m out and meeting people and it’s not just her and me.” ‘Being with,’ she notes, “takes up most of my inner space.” It is not until the end of the day, when the baby is settled that a mother gets a chance to gather her thoughts and consider her own needs. At three months postpartum, the day is still invariably given over to the baby.

Regaining Perspective

“It’s like looking at somebody who’s really frustrated. You gotta stand back, try to look at yourself in the situation and be with them where they’re at and hope that eventually it will change.” (Sharon-1)

The gradual return to structure coincides with a mother’s returning capacity for objectivity. While willing to give up a lot to preserve the intimacy of their relationship, a mother is now seen to more readily engage reason, her returning capacity for perspective-taking having a
moderating effect. Drawing more on the reality dimension that perhaps steered her problem solving pre-natally, Sharon reflects: "I think now what's different is I can reconcile things a little easier. I'd like to be able to breastfeed, but can I take this pump on the sub-way and hold her? No I can't, so then I can't do it ... I'm being more realistic." She is more capable of standing outside the experience to evaluate its impact.

By the third month, all of the women felt more confident in dealing with the baby's transient anxieties, their emerging calm and emotional evenness facilitating their holding onto the sense of internal good: When Helen doubles up on Sharon's shoulder, wincing, opening her mouth and squinting with an aching expression that crescendos into a cry, Sharon now remains unruffled and calmly pats her back, quietly drawing back her own head to see Helen's expression. They each to some degree have found their bearings. A mother gradually comes to see herself as "competent and able to integrate it all somehow," her returning capacity to take things more in her stride and their greater ease of movement facilitating their next forward step. As she gradually discovers that each of her babies draws out different aspects of her personality, rendering each social exchange unique, Rae comes to realize that the knowing accrued from her first encounter with motherhood is not directly transferable to the second and there evolves a greater capacity to stand back and wait for life to unfold at its own pace.

To tide her over rough periods and to preserve her sanity, a mother anticipates turning points and breaks time into manageable chunks. For Corin, it is the eight-week mark that she anticipates will bring an end to the physical pain of nursing. Emerging out of the confines of the early weeks, Rae experiences time as racing by, wanting it in some respects to move forward, but also to stand still, in view of what she sees as coming next: "I had it in my mind that three months was the magic age, that a lot of the problems with the crying and the fussiness would come to an end then." Glad that "the winter's over," she looks forward to getting out more, which she sees as "great for my mentality and ... theirs." From time to time, a mother finds herself wishing away whole chunks of time ending up in her mind with death, the final chapter, for it is through marking change over time that one realizes life's imminent end.

The gradual return of a more objective stance brings a mother face to face with her internal critic, her ongoing self evaluation running alongside the immediate demands, at times detracting her from noticing what is really required or manageable. With her attention now more split between focusing on the child(ren) and standing outside the experience to evaluate her actions and thinking, a mother may feel she is running on empty, the frantic pace itself creating an exhaustion that breeds irritability. Juggling two children, Rae finds herself feeling
overwhelmed, her fear of losing control at times intolerable. A mother’s pushing herself without feeling herself contained takes its toll, at times negatively saturating the maternal space, precluding attunement. A vicious circle may be set in motion: “I’m almost always thinking about her, because I’m constantly evaluating myself as a mother” (Rae-2). Having a child on one’s mind is “a 24-hour job.” A mother rates herself against other mothers, which for some, brings relief in terms of “just knowing that other people are going through the same things” (Carolyn-2). For others, it evokes mixed and often contradictory feelings, accentuating that sense of being “cut ... in two.”

**Reality Knocks: Integrating the ‘Real’ World**

“I’m already thinking ahead—how I can help the day care provider structure her day ... So whenever I leave her, even here, I’ll give her my shirt and she hangs onto it and she sucks it.” (Sharon-2)

The call of reality induces a re-negotiation of one’s sense of equilibrium, both internally and externally. “Integrating the outside world again” is described by Sharon as the main challenge at this time. While circumstances differed, each of the women found themselves now contending with the task of superimposing reality onto the clouded existence of the earlier months and projecting more realistically into the future in negotiating a good (or better) life for their child down the road. As the practicalities of parenting come more readily to the fore, Sharon finds herself feeling a little overwhelmed as she anticipates juggling “work and school and extra tuition money and time” all in the name of having “your basic needs met” and guaranteeing some shred of security. As they reflect on their experience, the women note a marked shift in their priorities. Rae gradually comes to challenge her need to have everything “neat and tidy.” Still floating to some degree in the maternal space, feeling “vulnerable,” “relaxed” and “not hyped” in “not having had to deal with work,” Sharon feels for now, less razor-sharp in her thinking, her focus somewhat split. While experiencing a qualitative shift in the passion for her work, she sees herself nevertheless as “competent and able to integrate it all somehow,” rationality having stepped in and prompted her to set her “limits and hold back a little” with respect to her career, although she is resolute that she “would still want to do something part-time.” While all of the women were seen to break their confinement to engage in some form of social bridging in response to the yearning for something outside of the maternal relationship at this time, they also experienced this adjustment period as “a little uncomfortable,” in having to juggle their own desire with that of their child’s.

With a child on one’s mind, life is instrumented through a different lens and what are normally considered routine activities are now transformed into complicated tasks that require
cross scheduling with a spouse, a mother, a friend, the baby’s dependency accentuating a mother’s own. Taken aback by how much thinking has to go into the planning of everything, a mother feels identified as the repository, ‘the thinking parent,’ the organizer, who is left to her own devices with more practical knowledge to integrate: “There are a lot more decisions to make and nobody really guides you through that” (Sharon-2). Holding in mind the baby’s potential relationships even, she sees herself as the “systems person” who is now “thinking for three.”

In returning to the process of boundary negotiation (this time to expand the relational orbit), holding an infant in mind brought the women in this study into intense relational contact, while prompting them to unavoidably sever contacts. As long as the social contact was experienced as emotionally containing, it was welcomed; otherwise it was experienced at times, as somewhat of a drain. The way each mother experienced her self-body boundaries and inner space seemed to correlate with the degree of distance granted between she and her baby. Even though Sharon described her boundaries at three months as “a lot looser” generally, her fears about “getting sucked in” by her family of origin kept the latter at arms length, while it prompted her to push her baby more toward independence. By contrast, Rae’s longing for intimate contact with her own family and her looking forward to her planned visit in three months time, left her luxuriating in the dependency of her ‘delightful’ three month old, which contrasted with the frustration engendered in struggling with her toddler’s attempts to exert his autonomy.

It is around this time that the women begin to more objectively reconsider the role of the third person, the spouse, this time marking the beginnings of demarcating relationships within the family (the child inadvertently relating to the father via his position in the mother’s mind). Still inclined to hold him in mind in terms of his parental role, the return to the ‘marital’ relationship remains on hold to some degree, in her mind. While she draws on the support of her spouse around the parenting, Sharon is content to leave the marital relationship shelved for now, feeling that: “You can’t split yourself so many ways!” With the body not yet having caught up with her desire to ‘spread her wings,’ she feels she is in “a different space altogether” with respect to intimacy: “You’re like a zombie. The last thing you want to do is be amorous ... Your antennas are out!” At same time, a mother is mindful of the impact of her relationships on her child and she begins to think that “it’s good for him to know that mom and dad have their own relationship with each other” (Corin-2). A mother sees the maternal relationship as based on a dependency that can leave her feeling both privileged and worn. With her child at her core Sharon feels: “There’s nothing left for my husband.” Less torn between these two relationships, her felt split is elsewhere. It is the spouse--the external third--who voices concern about the
mother’s devotion to the baby: “He doesn’t want her to get too used to us picking her up all the

time and making those demands on us” (Carolyn-2). In Corin’s case, it is the third in the person

of her own mother, who instruments her separating the baby out. It is her mother who instigates

putting Kyle down in his own crib at bedtime.

**Reclaiming Inner Space**

“I was trying to get into a routine where I could have some time to myself and then, I could devote the

rest of my time to her and I’m finding that a little bit harder.” (Carolyn-2)

The experience of reclaiming inner space incorporated two further dimensions:

anticipating loss and the feeling of being back in one’s own shoes.

As she begins to see her baby as more resilient, a mother more readily embraces his

separate existence, which frees her up to move further out of his orbit: “I think we’re more

separate than before, because the pregnancy is behind me now, the actual physical part of it. She

was so small that I used to think psychologically she was fragile. Now she looks more resilient”

(Sharon-2). That she wants the baby to feel comfortable in his own skin, to have a mind of his

own separate from hers, is evident in the rituals she now adopts: “When I put him down ... I can

hear him rustling, but I walk right out and he puts himself to sleep more solidly. I wanted him to

know his environment so that when he wakes up in the night, he feels he can soothe himself back

to sleep” (Corin-2). While there was an expressed desire on the women’s part to ‘be there’ for

their babies, whether that entailed being actually present or creating space between in any given

moment, there was still a reluctance to let go and to reclaim inner space.

**Anticipating Loss**

“I’m not looking forward to leaving her ... I don’t want to miss anything. She’s just starting grabbing her

toes now and each time she does something new I want to be there and going back to work ... I may not be

able to experience everything about motherhood.” (Carolyn-2)

While the emerging routine and their growing familiarity brings comfort, it also begins to

evoke in the mother anticipatory feelings of loss for what has become an integral part of her life.

Reflecting on the time spent lying together mid-morning, Sharon remarks: “As I let go of the

breast feeding more, there’s gonna be a bit of a loss.” It is a sadness that is “tempered with

reality” and the practicality of the situation however, given the clashing of schedules and the felt

draw on her time. At this point, a mother merely anticipates it being “difficult to let go.” Feeling

torn, she has to push herself to take that first step back into a world that is for now felt as lacking.

Anticipating their first night out without the baby, Carolyn notes: “I don’t think it’s hit me yet
actually. I don’t know if I feel ready but I feel it’s time.” And she speaks to the weaning off the breast onto the bottle with a painful ambivalence as she anticipates having to force herself to take that first plunge as if into cold water, but not without a glance over her shoulder as she mournfully contemplates which of her baby’s firsts she will have to forfeit upon returning to work. Much as a mother might wish her reality to be otherwise, that she didn’t have to race against time, or to relinquish her desire, she adjusts her reality to her immediate circumstance and rationalizes: “I felt a lot better after working out and then I could be more present ... I also felt it would be good for her to get used to being with other people and seeing other things” (Sharon-2).

‘Back in My Own Shoes’

“I have moments where I feel myself pulling, not pulling, but forgetting that I’m a mom, and I like that. My humour is coming back and my personality a little bit. So that’s different.” (Sharon-2)

As the baby’s head turns outward, the women begin to feel less caught up in the relationship and more like their separate selves. It is a comfort and a release to reclaim aspects of the self that have been temporarily lost, to feel “the old me coming back,” albeit a self transformed through the experience, the internal space no longer experienced as entirely one’s own. But no sooner does one reclaim the confidence to spring forward into the world in one’s own shoes, than the new occupant of one’s inner world taps one on the shoulder, beckoning her return: “I worked out one week for four days and I felt, okay! ... and then boom, I can’t go!” (Sharon-2). A mother quickly learns to shelve her desires, to compromise, her bodily self not necessarily aligned with her psychological outward leap, but somewhat bound up still with giving and receiving pleasure from her baby. Is it this that sustains her? “I’m surprised how my appearance too just went down the drain ... What’s important is that she’s healthy, she’s happy” (Sharon-2). Aware that many aspects of her life are still on hold, a mother weighs the losses against the gains and discovers that it is embracing her baby’s pleasure that makes it all worthwhile. In some respects, she acknowledges feeling temporarily “self-less, ... that you give up your self to some extent!” She sees it as tied to the nursing relationship, but it is her experience of the baby being “so much more responsive now” that enables her to endure his incessant demands.

While the felt isolation replenishes, affording a turning into the self, it now begins to flatten out life, prompting the desire to break out of the confines of house-boundedness, to air one’s mind, to spread one’s wings. It is that quiet time spent either alone or in the unpressured company of an other, wherein she feels contained, that a mother craves. With some distance from
it now, she feels grateful for the nurturing she received earlier, whereas now what she appreciates more is space: “In fact, I actually don’t mind that Marc isn’t home in the evenings so much, because that’s the only time I get to myself” (Rae-2). The felt split at this time is between the demands of the baby and a mother’s own individual need, be that for work, autonomy or a quiet space for thought.

**The Resurgence of Anxiety in the Wake of Feeling Torn**

“I think part of me being there for her is me constantly evaluating myself as a mother.” (Rae-2)

Feeling torn between resting in the maternal space and moving on, between trying to fulfill her infant’s need and trying to socialize him into the prevailing culture, intermittently revitalized the women’s sense of helplessness and paranoid anxieties of the early weeks, as manifest here in their feared loss of the good (panicked fear of loss) and their fear of losing control. The women’s split sense of self was also seen to facilitate to varying degrees their gradually coming to terms with loss and the passing of time.

**Panicked Fear of Loss**

“I was thinking, Oh my God, I have to get her vaccinated right now, or she’s going to get whopping cough. She’s going to die!” (Rae-2)

This dimension of experience was expressed explicitly by three of the women; for the fourth, loss was more integrated and experienced more as a part of life, evoking less panic at this time.

Feeling so endowed with pleasure, the feared void raises its head again from time to time, as a mother anticipates the pleasure bubble bursting and crumbling into nothingness, for pleasure so intense, so easily orchestrates its own demise. Identifying with the baby’s all or nothing existence, life and death loom large as polar opposites in a mother’s mind: “I think about how much I love her and then I think, God, what if I lost her? ... I would just die inside” (Rae-2).

Corin recalls the night of anguish spent in the hospital when Kyle’s temperature rocketed: “I was very scared. I was really worried that he was going to die.” A mother in health, carefully nurtures life, the baby for now, housing their shared pleasure: “I don’t think there’s anything like it that I’ve ever experienced ... and I do worry that if anything happened to her I would be just totally devastated” (Sharon-2). She persists in her vigil of safe-keeping: “Sometimes she’s sleeping so soundly that I’m afraid to touch her, ‘cause I don’t know if she’s breathing or not ... She holds
her breath sometimes and ... it makes me scared that she’s going to die. So loss, afraid that something’s gonna happen her, I do worry about that” (Sharon-2).

The panicked fear of loss is also tinged with guilt, a mother feeling culpable with respect to her baby’s woes. Rae feels exasperation and guilt as she reflects on the loss of the original attachment to her first born and the price to her second, of trying to preserve it, her own underlying anger and resentment at not being able to stretch herself thin, inducing guilt: “The hardest part is putting Kieran to bed and having to deal with her ... I let her cry more often than I would like on her own and ... I’ve been feeling guilty about it.” Finding the experience of splitting herself in two “just so hard ... demanding ... draining,” she feels resentful in having to “stay at home” and manage it all alone somehow. Finding herself without support while sick, Rae feels panicked about not having vaccinated the baby. Fear circles, the fear for her baby tied up with a mother’s own that may evolve into action or a state of helplessness. “I think one of the reasons I got sick was because I was staying up really late trying to figure out whether I want to immunize her or not. It’s just tearing me up!” (Rae-2). Feeling torn, a mother carries the fear and feels responsible regardless.

**Fear of Losing Control**

“*The worst part of it is that I really lose my cool ... and then I feel really badly ... I’ve always had a hard time controlling my temper, so it’s even harder to do that with children.*” (Rae-2)

Feeling lost, torn, in demand, and guilty about what she thinks she should or should not be doing, a mother fears losing control: “There were a couple of moments that I felt like I could lose my temper with her and shake her ... because I was feeding her all the time and nothing seemed to be helping” (Sharon-2). The world momentarily turns black and white as a mother feels “really torn” and envisages “this pure baby” ingesting the “chemicals and empty calories” of formula. Sharon fears the implicit threat of the breastfeeding world: “If you don’t breast feed its like you’re killing your baby!” Rae finds herself throwing her hands up in exasperation, not knowing how she will make it through: “I scream and lose my temper and I just kick myself later and think, ‘Oh God ... I’m not cut out for this! I hate this! I don't want to do this!’” She notices that in the back and forth exchanges with her children, anxiety spirals, the unknown looming large as her difficulty controlling her rage intensifies. Such fears can leave a mother worrying about the world’s potential destructiveness, and in turn, her own.

In the face of anxiety there is raised vigilance, the women growing more protective against potential harm as their infants turn their attention outward. Corin finds herself frequently checking Kyle’s temperature, fearing a repeat of the dreaded fever; Sharon, wary of potential
childcare providers. As his head turns, the baby’s perceived innocence is contrasted with a potentially harmful world in a mother’s mind: “All children start out ... beautiful, innocent and I feel really sad about all the violations” (Sharon-2). Safety becomes a priority, not just with regard to the child’s being protected from external onslaught, but with regard to how securely he feels held in his mother’s mind: “It’s important to me that she knows that we’re there for her; that she doesn’t feel that we’ve abandoned her” (Carolyn-2). A mother is called upon both to inspire trust in the world and be trustworthy.

Contemplating Mortality and the Cycle of Life

“I’m trying to picture as she gets older, how I’m going to feel as I become my parents age ... and I think more about my own mortality and their mortality, and life cycles from that point of view.” (Carolyn-2)

“Like, it doesn’t matter that the back door isn’t fixed, that our taxes aren’t done! It’s more important to just be together as a family and enjoy that and that to me is a really good realization ... nobody’s going to remember that the dishes were done, the laundry was done.” (Rae-2)

As one begins to regain perspective, one looks more closely at the wider canvas, at continuity across the generational line: “I guess I’m thinking more of the bigger picture now. Before it was just the tasks, the duties, very specific needs, whereas now ... I guess I’m thinking in terms of giving her a foundation, building a sense of security” (Carolyn-2). In honing in, delving deeper, one potentially broadens one’s worldview. Life is further contextualized, dimensionalized, its precariousness acknowledged. From contemplating the loss of one’s child, one may progress to contemplate one’s own mortality in the context of the strong dependency link, potentially giving rise to a deeper appreciation of life and gratitude for the moment. A mother puts herself in her child’s shoes: “I started thinking about what would happen if I died ... how awful an experience that would be for them.” (Rae-2).

While the question of mortality already raised its head at the birth, it is contemplated more pointedly now as one begins to more readily shift perspective and observe the years go by in decades, changing the face of the family. Rae reflects: “I’m 30 and I’m going, ‘What happened to my 20’s?’” As one more consciously travels backwards and forwards in time, re-assessing one’s place in the generational line, one balks in seeing oneself as having caught up: “It just goes in chunks of time, decades and then, oh my God, I’m going to be older!” (Rae-2). With a supportive family structure on hand, Carolyn embraces her transient place on life’s continuum as she contemplates her child’s growth in the context of her parent’s aging: “I think more about my own mortality and their mortality ... This is life ... we live, we grow, and we get older and at some point we’re all going to pass away.” Maternity paradoxically brings a woman more into the world, inducing her to form that line of continuity even when links seem severed.
With a three month old on one’s mind, one’s feet are becoming more firmly planted on the ground, and one is given the chance to re-consider in a new light what may hitherto have been taken as a given.

Being in the maternal space churns fear, while offering opportunity for renewal. Fears of aging, loss and the passing of time are brought closer to the surface, much in the way images of her baby and her own parents coalesce in a mother’s mind, which either disrupts the status quo or redresses internal disarray, facilitating growth, depending on one’s state of mind and what supports are available. The jewel in one’s palm ushers in a feeling of gratitude for the lived moment: “I remember thinking with Kieran, how precious life is. I guess that’s one of the things that happens when you have a baby ... just realizing how life is so precarious. Life and death, it’s just so close” (Rae-2). While refueling the fear of death, contemplating mortality also invites a deeper reflectivity. Carolyn sits with “the thought that she’s here to teach us something as well as to learn about life.” The inquisitive baby inspires second thoughts, an internal re-working; not an intellectual discovery, but one that arises in a moment of insight. Contemplating her fear of death as she sits with her child, Rae recounts: “In a way this is a good thing to feel this, because it’s making me feel more like I gotta ... take each day and enjoy it ... because I’m finding that I’m just trying to get the day over with ... rather than just try to live it moment by moment.”

Holding one’s child in mind gives birth to a desire, like that spurned by an Olympian with a torch, to take new life and run with it into the world beyond one’s own horizons. And yet, one must play the hand one’s been dealt. As a mother moves through each successive developmental phase alongside her child, she is granted an opportunity to contemplate each turning phase anew and to make good her losses, lest envy sabotage the next generation’s hope. Having reached the three-month mark, Rae reflects: “It does feel like everything’s sort of come together. My friend just had a baby ... and ... it’s interesting to be out of that stage now and getting on with the fact that she’s growing up.” Like passing through the eye of a needle, a mother gradually emerges from the first maternal phase and begins to regain perspective, the world gradually opening up again before her.
Table 2. Themes of Holding and being Held in Mind in the Second Transition

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Chapter Six: The Sixth Month Wean

Realizing the Other: Holding On and Letting Go; The Birth of Triadic Space

"Little by little, wean yourself... From an embryo, whose nourishment comes in the blood, move to an infant drinking milk, to a child on solid food, to a searcher after wisdom, to a hunter of more invisible game."

Rumi

This time heralds the onset of weaning, a process marked by ambivalence in both mother and child. Here, factors both internal and external to the nursing couple coalesce, instigating an observable push toward external reality, along with an attempt to hold onto the world of relationship as one wishes it to be. Spurred on both by his curiosity and developing perceptual apparatus, the baby becomes more aware of discrepancies, which confront his phantasy of having created the world. Torn between holding on to the mother of his creation and coming face to face with the mother who has a separate existence outside him, including her engagement with others, he strives to possess her exclusively on his own terms and chases after that which glimmers brighter; his demonstrated vigilance to her comings and goings, his darting attention from mother to other, revealing the dawning fear of exclusion. The mother for her part, while drawn to adult relationship--wanting to meet difference head on in order to challenge her beliefs and move forward--also wants to preserve the idealized link to the inarticulate child, whose dependency she can count on. With reality making its own demands, she comes to feel that their sanity relies on her making this outward shift and forfeits their exclusivity for more three-way exchange, by reaching out and peeling off another layer of life for her infant to behold. By the sixth post-natal month, the maternal space expands to include a third outpost, creating a vortex wherein a wider perspective gathers momentum. What is the nature of triadic space as it resurfaces here in this revisiting? Who initiates the weaning?

In this chapter, the interweaving themes, extracted from the data at the six-month level, are presented here separately for simplicity sake. The last two were drawn collectively from the sixth and ninth month data and as such, are seen as common to both transition phases. Collectively, the core themes are as follows: 1) interfacing with the world: preserving and relinquishing omnipotence; 2) crossing the desert: the arduous journey of weaning; 3) re-structuring the maternal frame: the side-ways step that prompts reflectivity; and 4) the birth of

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1 From the poem, 'Wean Yourself,' by the 13th Century poet in The Essential Rumi (1997, p. 70-71).
triadic space. The themes and sub-themes of the third and fourth transition phases are presented in Table 3. at the end of this chapter.

**Interfacing with the World: Preserving and Relinquishing Omnipotence**

"Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real"

*Irma Murdock (1959, p. 51)*

This overarching theme, derived from the observation data and the women’s narratives at the sixth month transition, comprises a phenomenological description of the infants’ experience of realizing change and the women’s experience of ‘being with’ their infants at that juncture. Two sub-themes were derived: incorporation as consolidation and possession, and the testing of maternal resilience.

By six months, there is a more definitive turning to the outside world and a more continuous state of awareness in the baby. In the mother, there is the added urge or felt pressure to promote autonomy and to expose her child to reality. Here, the baby is observed in his vigilance to the various aspects of his immediate surround. He is seen to initiate more, to avidly scan his environment, to voraciously incorporate and to embrace the world on his own terms in the reliable presence of his mother, whose encouragement fuels his hunger for exploration. More intent on exploring the whole world, the nursing child by now, frequently interrupts his feed with sweeping glances around the room, as compared to his earlier observed engrossed nursing at the breast. He has become an avid lap explorer, a reaching experimentalist. The baby’s earlier interest in his mother’s body is now transferred onto other objects, his hands and eyes now used as tools for mastering or controlling his expanding environment. The women remarked on this developmental shift: “His needs are more external from me in a way now. His needs are to learn about the world or to meet his own developmental challenge and some of my needs are just to have my own space” (Corin-3). In venturing outward, both visually and manually, he becomes more acutely aware of significant others in his immediate surround. Here, in the interview situations, the infants’ attention was strikingly drawn to the researcher controlling the camera, signifying growth in the attention to a third party outside of their felt dyadic exclusivity. During the interaction segments, the infant was seen to readily shift his attention back and forth between mother and researcher, having already assumed a level of confidence and trust in her continued care that enabled him to see the world as his oyster and himself as its centre. Striving to take hold of the world, to have it all, he is seen here to aggressively go after it, sometimes ruthless in his
aims. “The human race,” according to Eigen (1993), “naturally orients itself toward external objects and the tasks of survival” (p. 224). As Sharon notes, “What’s changed is we’re interfacing with the world more.” It is this push to survive that incites an encounter with reality.

The six-month old’s boundless energy and thirst for knowledge bring him in touch with realizations that may on some level, startle his senses. To “realize,” as defined in Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language (1987, p. 831), is “to be aware of the truth of; to recognize as real; to make real or actual.” It is here, that the infant first begins to realize that the mother who nourishes is also the mother who frustrates; that she exists in a sense outside of him and outside of his control. It is a dawning realization, which he vehemently resists, since it includes the fact that he did not create himself and that he depends for survival on something that is essentially outside of him (Sheppard, 1996). There are in fact, a host of realizations with which an infant is confronted in the second half of the first year and which a mother is wont to re-visit through her engagement with her infant at this time, the most prominent of which is the relinquishing of absolute possession of the other and the realization that relationship is not exclusive, but shared. Such truths, with their inherent threat of exclusion, can quickly take the wind out of one’s sails. In the words of Sheppard:

We rage against the discovery of dependency ... We want to hold on to pleasure and throw away pain; it is extraordinarily hard to learn to hold onto pain and let go of pleasure with the hope that pleasure will come again and that the pain will end. We keep a tenacious hold on the delusion of our omnipotence. (Pp. 64-5)

The baby, powerful in his tenacity, comes to resist that which he inherently seeks, for knowledge, when first tasted, is spewed for disrupting one’s existing internal frame; for threatening one’s erst begotten sense of security. What up till now, were experienced as separate worlds of ecstasy and terror, begin to be experienced as one and the same (Britton, 1985). As knowledge enters, innocence is trampled. There is an aggressive edge to the sixth month push-pull, the baby’s devouring of knowledge clashing with his attempts to tear it apart in order to keep the separate strands from linking. Oral incorporation, as discovered by Perez-Sanchez (1990), is a manifestation of the infant’s internal ambivalence in this regard.

**Incorporation as Consolidation and Possession**

This sub-theme, derived mainly from the observation data, pertains to the infant’s experience of reaching out to the external world within the context of the familiar holding relationship and comprises three dimensions of
experience: reliance on maternal background presence; vigilance; and tenacity.

The baby’s increased agility from the third to the sixth month is striking, his delight in exercising his autonomy over his bodily functions unquestionable: Curling up his body at six months, Kyle rolls onto his side, faces his mother diagonally, then yanks his head back out of her view, his eyes spanning the room. Stretching out his arms, he rolls onto his stomach, his legs kicking behind him as he swiftly pulls himself up onto his elbows. A mother is enthralled by her child’s pleasure in his new-found freedom: “She’s just starting to roll onto her tummy and push her head up and she’ll sit up and look around and laugh or lie on her back and she’ll have her hands in her mouth and her legs will be kicking and she’ll move around” (Rae-3). Here, the women notice the baby’s expanding curiosity and growing capacity to absorb experience: “She’s exploring more ... She’s energetic. She has a good appetite. She’s always taking things in” (Sharon-3). The infant’s observed outward thrust reflects an unrelenting desire to move forward and to assimilate the world: “She’s not crawling, but ... she’s learning to reach for things that are out of her reach. She doesn’t want to miss anything” (Carolyn-3). Joy at this time, seems to emanate from the baby’s growing sense of mastery and control, his consolidating his sense of the world as he has come to know it, his curiosity for novelty notwithstanding.

Described as “really getting into things” now, the baby manipulates objects with vigour: Smiling, with arms extended, Sara whacks a book up and down and lowering over her possession, pulls at its corners with her teeth. Later, a wide smile crosses her face as she excitedly places the peaks of a cloth sun into her mouth. Gurgling, she explores the cavity of her mouth with her fingers; then drawn back to the book, she shakes it excitedly, looking around her wide-eyed, and clamps down on it again with glee. Objects have become transferable and are easily displaced, should another happen to catch the baby’s eye, there being an immediacy to his desire to ‘take in’ the world. By now, the baby is seen to reach after that which glimmers brighter: As Rae dangles a red shaker in Sara’s line of vision, Sara immediately drops what she’s been holding and reaches out, her mouth opening almost instinctively as she moves toward the new object in anticipation, her head slightly ahead the rest of her, as if trying to engulf the ball of it. Her desire thwarted, she persists regardless, intently going after the object that gleams, her desire to possess now the motivating force. But it is not just the pleasure of ‘having’ that spurs her on; in addition, curiosity about the object’s very nature draws her in. Clutching onto it, Sara watches Rae carefully as she rotates it and tries to get it into her mouth. Gnawing its surface, she
momentarily holds it out away from her to inspect it with an inquisitive eye. Rae takes hold of its shaft to demonstrate rhythmic shaking and Sara’s expression turns serious as she reaches for it again adamantly with a gesture that reads, “Mine!” until yet another gleaming object catches her eye. An element of triumph is inferred. Is the baby trying here to gain some control over her surfacing hostile feelings, or her fear of loss—spurred on by her mother’s comings and goings—by means of manipulating objects, fingers in mouth, etcetera? Is it an attempt to deny her fear of losing by recreating the illusion of continued presence, possession, control and fulfillment? Might it also reflect the workings of the inherent urge to discover what is outside the self?

The baby seeks out externality in order to carve out an existence of his own—his inherent curiosity bringing him into contact with reality—while he attempts to keep his invented ‘reality’ under his control. There is an inherent aggressivity to the baby’s manipulative researches. As he tests the world out to discover what is outside of him, he is all the while striving to hold onto what he already knows. One strives to reaffirm one’s inner illusion, while ‘toying’ with reality; one revises one’s internal world through discovering what is external. The baby is drawn outward to explore in an attempt to build up and consolidate his inner world. As the mother is drawn out of the maternal space to test a reality that now beckons, she inadvertently frees the child up to acquire an internal space of his own. As one enters the external realm, the inner becomes more sharply defined. As one exits the inner realm, the inner and outer become more clearly differentiated. Growth of the mind proceeds through a process of engaging reality through the revolving door of the other’s mind.

The infant, according to Caper (1999), is an “unconscious experimentalist,” his ability to evoke states of mind in the other, his “provocative test probe” (p. 87). He makes active contact with external reality through projecting his state of mind into the mind of an other in an effort “to find out about their minds” (p. 87). It is his way of coming to know what his mother is like inside and a means by which he can display his own internal world in order to observe it in her response. The process, he says, enables the infant to learn about the internal and external world simultaneously. The child still relies on the (m)other’s presence: maternal space, the child’s first shock absorber; her eyes, his first window to the world.

**Reliance on Maternal Background Presence**

At six months, each infant was observed seeking out his mother’s following eyes, the pull for physicality that supersedes any physical needs he might have, an infantile demand that Perez-Sanchez (1990) came to understand as “a way of maintaining the object alive inside him” (p.
Similarly, in experiencing her baby as external to her, the mother was seen at times to employ ways of "bringing [him] back into [her] arms." Left waiting, the baby's limbs may flail; he may twist and turn, as if trying to expel a reality felt as imposed and he may try to comfort himself by incorporating substitute objects in an effort to hold on to what is familiar. Rae notes the baby's continued need for her background presence, the concrete experience of taking inside a part of the mother or mother substitute: "They just need to be hugged and cuddled, or they just need to be right near you and bite on a toy." The focus is on the act of incorporating that which is known in order to accentuate sameness (or to deny separateness), be it in play with an object or body part or with the mother in actuality: "If I'm holding her here, she'll throw her head down as if she wants to bite onto my shoulder." The infant also tries to possess that which eludes him.

Laid down repeatedly as they engage in a seesaw game, Sara's pleasure is heightened each time she is pulled closer to her mother. Being laid back down is tolerated only for as long as the baby is able to hold inside her mother's nurturing qualities. At this time, however, the other cannot be held in mind for long and the baby seeks confirmation of his external mother via a repetition of her containing function through play.

Riviere (as cited in Perez-Sanchez, 1990, p. 109) referred to the importance of both 'obtaining and possessing,' and 'losing and missing,' the former, seen to rapidly alternate with the latter in the baby's interaction with objects. It was earlier observed in the infants' nursing relationship at the breast; at three months, in their interaction both with the mother and with their own bodies, and at six months, in the infants' interaction with toys and their evolving relationship with the third familial figure. Predominant in the weaning period, the pattern entails searching, recovering, possessing with satisfaction and missing, and losing sight of the other or of an object, which itself triggers new fears. Perez-Sanchez found that this repetitive pattern operates hand in hand with the baby's assimilation of the mother's containing function, eventuating in the creation of "a mental space" within (p. 110). As the baby's internal world is consolidated, he gradually loosens his omnipotent hold on his mother and begins to use her more as a sounding board.

By the sixth month, there was demonstrated excitement in the baby's turning away and delight in his escalating capacity to make things happen, knowing his mother was looking on: Kicking an activity centre with bare feet, Kyle sucks his fingers and makes gurgling sounds, while Corin sits on the floor next to him. Momentarily, he rolls away from her towards an abacus frame, extends his arms and legs and resumes kicking, squealing with delight. Corin remains watchful, as he waves his extended arms about, his fingers fluttering. When he notices the song
has ended, his actions freeze, but when Corin resumes singing, he whacks the abacus frame with the rattle, her presence and encouragement spurring him on. Glancing over at her excitedly, he shakes it more avidly, and placing his two feet on the suspended activity centre, manipulates the sound board with the ball of each foot. Glancing over to his mother again, he hits the sound maker, kicks even harder, more concentrated now in his trial and error actions.

A mother feels called upon to witness and embrace such outward displays of autonomy. When a toy duck slips from Al’s grip, and she reaches out to retrieve it, Carolyn applauds and encourages her over and over to “try again!” The infant can begin to occupy himself for brief periods, if what he has received thus far assures him of the safety of his world. For Rae, this is a novel experience: “This morning ... she stayed for 25 minutes, just lying there, entertaining herself and if I can just look at her, she’ll be quite content while I have a shower and get Kieran dressed.” Amazed at her seven month old’s evolving capacity to carry some of her own frustrations, in contrast to her first baby, who she experienced as pushing all his anxiety into her, Sara’s expressed self sufficiency frees up maternal space: “It’s funny, at one moment she’ll be fussy and want something and I’ll try to figure out what it is ... and right in the next minute, she’ll be ... grinning from ear to ear ... making these adorable sounds of delight ... She’ll push herself like that. It makes me feel more relaxed.”

By the sixth month, the line between embracing the baby’s joy in ‘creating’ the world and encouraging his reality-based autonomy is a fine one. The infant seduces a mother to prolong his illusion of omnipotence, while at the same time eking out a bold encounter with reality. One falters either in going along with the former for too long, or in prematurely introducing the latter. A mother’s loving concern alone is insufficient to carry the baby over this transitional phase, for even the slightest hint of her discontinuity with his infant self may result in the baby resenting her very goodness. Here, the baby extends the maternal plane as a matter of survival, by seeking out more than one person on whom to test out his internal and external reality (Caper, 1999). Until one reaches externality, one remains in a solipsistic world with its closed feedback loop, foreclosing the possibility to learn from experience.

**Vigilance**

By six months, there was a notable shift in the infants’ capacity to differentiate and to discern difference. The women noted their baby’s dawning awareness of change that placed him/her on the cusp of realization: “He played for a few minutes, but then stopped and sort of checked you out. I thought he was recognizing there was a new situation” (Corin-3). Referring to
the babysitter, Sharon commented on Helen’s heightened awareness of change: “This lady does care for her and she does a good job with her, but I think Helen knows the difference.” What stood out about the baby’s engagement with the world at this point was its apparent duel focus: his immersing himself in his experimental researches with objects and his re-surfacing from time to time to “check in” with his mother, but progressively more to assess the extent of her engagement with a third party. Here, there was an observed intensity to the baby’s vigilance that intermittently interrupted or competed with his passion to explore. Sharon noticed this shift: “I think she was aware of you being there and something being different. She was looking over at you and sort of looking at both of us before she’d do something, whereas I think before she’d just do more. She seemed to be more attentive to us than to her activity.” What is it about the presence of a third party that entices the infant to so readily withdraw from his lively immersion in play at this time?

The baby is both inherently curious about and threatened by that which is unfamiliar. During the interviews, he was witnessed directing his gaze toward an unfamiliar outsider, whom he visually explored from the security of his mother’s held glance. We observed his reaching glance dart back and forth from observer to mother to observer, which I will refer to as ‘triadic scanning:’ the dawning awareness of the presence of a third party, which includes the detection, more on a feeling level, of whether he or she will either encroach upon, or enrich the world one feels one currently shares exclusively with an other. Will he be protected or hurled from his place of refuge in his mother’s mind? What might this third other offer in exchange? It is in becoming increasingly aware of his mother’s continuous interaction with an other that the possibility of exclusion first becomes a reality.

The response to the dawning awareness of discontinuity varied here across infants and situations, from instances where the observer was experienced as confirming and even used to confirm the baby’s own sense of being centre of the world, to instances where the third party present was sought out as a cushion to shield the infant from a reality felt as imposed. Witnessing their mother engage with an external third posed its own threat, to which the infants characteristically responded: Distracted by the sound of the camera, Helen intently focuses on the observer, looks back to her mother with a wide grin and resumes chewing on the rabbit ears. Looking on, Sharon laughs heartily as Helen swivels around again from her seated position to face the onlooker. Here, the baby seems to use her mother’s attention as a springboard to the world. She gurgles as she sucks on the rabbit, swiveling back and forth between her mother and the observer, joyous in having assumed a position in the mind of an other from the security of the
mother’s held attention; joyous perhaps, in having severed their earlier link, her inner world now unchallenged and embraced two-fold.

Similarly, amidst focused kicking on his activity centre, Kyle’s fleeting glance over to his mother leaves him reeling with delight. Squealing with excitement, he briefly glances my way and resumes kicking. “Who are you looking at?” his mother asks, to which he returns to face his activity centre, limbs outstretched, fingers excitedly half opening and closing and mouth ajar. Invigorated by another glance over to his mother, he proceeds with the kicking, the extra pair of following eyes adding fuel to his sense of omnipotence. Is the mother’s (and now the other’s) face his barometre of approval?

With greater means of acquisition at his disposal now, the baby pointedly reaches out to incorporate that which he desires; he wants it all. Sitting upright, Sara rummages in her Moses basket and finding a teething ring, brings it to her mouth, turning it around, while straining the muscles of her eyes to see it, and licking through each revolution, her vigilant eye catches that of the observer. Looking intently with pursed lips at the camera and around the room until the book catches her eye again, she takes the basket handle in one hand, the book in the other, and looks up at the observer, then behind her and back to the book. Somewhat torn between competing stimulants, the baby strives to have it all; Sara wants to incorporate the world, as portrayed in her facial expression that pleads, ‘Give me! Give me!’

Contrary to his tendency to oppose the presence of a third party, which itself confronts him with a reality distinct from his own, the baby is also seen here to turn to the third as a safety net, as a source of potential pleasure and gratification, whom he might seek out when disrupted by the imposition of a reality he means to defy. When Al’s pacifier falls out and she squeals, and her mother protectively draws her close, Al yanks her head back and looks toward the person behind the camera, her arms flailing, her eyes squinting, tears sprouting. Faced with the reality of a mother’s inability to totally hush the harshness of the world, the baby is drawn to significant others, as he holds on to the possibility that an encounter with the third may bring. When Rae gets up to attend to her toddler in the hall, Sara persists in staring, wide-eyed and mesmerized, at a toy octopus. Opening and closing her palms, she looks over at the observer and ignores her mother’s return by persisting in looking around her. In a similar vein, when Sharon tries to get Helen to stand, Helen’s knees buckle as she turns to the observer, a plea in her expression.

Simultaneously, the baby may feel hemmed in by the third eye that potentially threatens expulsion from his mother’s mind. His struggle to maintain his world as he knows it is reflected in his efforts to control, to possess, to preserve the status quo. Wanting to preserve the link with
his mother on his own terms, he feels torn between wanting it all (his desire) and not being able to hold onto what he already has; between control and the lack of it. He fights to negate the reality of her absence, his separateness; the potentiality of her preoccupation with an external third, his exclusion. He clings onto that which immediately offers solace and makes new demands in an attempt to obtain some control. It is his defence against loss.

The dawning awareness of the presence of an external couple, from whom the baby feels excluded, leaves him wanting, pulling for inclusion. As he struggles to hold in mind this painful realization, he may writhe, contort his body, and try to expel or split the association in his mind, his demand on his mother to attend to him physically, in some measure softening the blow to her at this time. Honing in to fulfill her baby’s need, the mother may feel assured of her capacity to sensitively attend to cues and to fathom what might overwhelm. “It’s learning to read her,” Sharon emphasizes. While engaged in the interview, Sharon attunes to Helen’s need to be included and when Helen starts to cry, she immediately addresses her: “Oh, you don’t like it when mommy’s talking so much, eh?” and draws her close. Against a backdrop of quiet observance, we witness also, Al forcibly push to have her presence acknowledged during triadic communication: Lying on her back across her mother’s lap, intently watching the conversation, she rhythmically moves her finger up and down inside her mother’s enclosed fist in a manner that accentuates their connectedness. “She’s doing that,” Carolyn clarifies. It is only when the baby feels assured of his mother’s presence that he can comfortably watch from afar, his mother’s side-ward glances mid-conversation assuring him of his continued presence in her mind. There is a poignant moment during the interview with Sharon, where we see Helen, contentedly propped up in the corner of the sofa at arms length from her mother, focus intently on Sharon, while the latter intermittently glances over at her, smiling.

While there is ample evidence at the six-month transition of the baby’s dawning awareness of a changing world, it is not until around the ninth month that we see the baby actually ‘play’ with such a realization or represent it symbolically. Here, we witness merely the first jolt of awareness, as reflected in the baby’s contemplative stare in the moment that a realization first comes to fruition: Having lost and retrieved her rubber duck several times, Al opens her mouth wide to incorporate it slowly and begins to chew. Carolyn mimics her devouring action and Al drops it again, her eye catching the camera, her mouth agape. Pulled to standing, she reaches over to retrieve her toy and as she begins to chew, there follows a moment of suspended motion as she stares at the observer with the toy held limply in her mouth. [A moment of recognition?] She resumes sucking, then dropping the toy, she reaches down after it

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from Carolyn’s hold, replaces it and drops it again and again, flinging it as soon as she retrieves it. [The beginnings of a playing out of the internal experience of being held and evacuated from the other’s mind?] Carolyn sighs and pulls her to sitting on her knee and Al slithers down onto the floor and begins to cry. Presented again with her toy, Al stares ahead, mouth open wide, arms flailing. Pulled to standing, she loses the frown, a smile spilling from the corner of her mouth as the duck squeaks underfoot. Holding her head to the side, her expression grows thoughtful again and one is left wondering about what has come to pass in this baby’s mind. A half-yawn and her arms flail again as she goes to lean forward. All in all, the baby appears to be still striving here, to consolidate her inner phantasy, while forestalling the dawning realization of change.

The baby’s contemplative stare away from mother toward a third is also seen in Kyle’s averting his gaze and staring ahead from his position of lying on his stomach on the floor, much to his mother’s chagrin. An uncomfortable expression washes over Corin’s face as she comments: “You’re just doin’ nothin’ sweetie! You’re just thinkin’ about everything!” And as she moves closer, he turns away, exploring the cavity of his mouth with his thumb; then picking up a teddy bear in his free hand, he looks toward the observer behind the camera. “Are you thinkin’ about the world?” Corin asks, to which he shakes the toy, looks to her and then back to the observer, sucking his thumb more vigorously now. Slinging the bear onto the play mat, he coyly looks from his mother to the observer and as she tries to catch his attention, he reaches for a shaker and glares over at the observer. Here, the baby seems to be more readily opposing change that has not been instigated by him.

The counter force to omnipotence, according to Benjamin (1994), is the inherent capacity to recognize the mother’s subjectivity, over and above the baby’s experience of her as container of his emotional state. There is, she proposes, “a mode of intersubjective reality” operating in tension with “a mode of fantasy as the unshared property of an isolated subject” (p. 132) and it is the breakdown of the tension between the two, she believes, that deters one from recognizing the other as separate. Reality however, is only tentatively sought, gradually uncovered and intermittently acknowledged. It takes some time before the baby is able to stand back from his experience to recognize an external intersubjective world. In this transition phase, we observe the baby only gradually become aware of change. He both knows and doesn’t know, and momentarily, wipes out knowledge. For now, he relies on his brief life experience, still so caught up in the immediacy of the thread of their relatedness that loops. It is not until he has moved further into the second half of the first year that we witness the baby hold onto an internal representation of the absent other. For now, he dwells in the border between acknowledging and
denying an objective world and is merely on the way to reaching what we call 'externality.' This is the process of weaning.

**Tenacity**

"She's definitely exhibiting more of her own will ... She wants to do what she wants." (Sharon-3)

In bumping up against the desires of his mother that run contrary to his own, the baby's will is seen to clash with hers. Here, we see the baby strive to win that which she experiences as her mother's possession: As Sara yanks a hand shaker toward her and tries to wrap her lips around it, the teacher in her mother intervenes and withdraws it from Sara's mouth to demonstrate shaking. Immediately pulling it back, Sara holds it upright like an ice-cream cone, covering the ball of it protectively with her cupped hand. Groaning, she licks its surface and when embraced, averts her gaze and persists in exploring it with her tongue and gums. Again Rae takes hold of its shaft, to which Sara at first smiles, but then grasps onto it vehemently and pulls it toward her mouth. Rae circles a matching red shaker out of Sara's reach and with a serious expression, Sara strains to swipe at it. Failing to grasp it, she withdraws her hand and picks up a cloth rabbit, which she adamantly places in her mouth, still glancing longingly at the shaker in her mother's hand. The baby competes to stake his claim, by now, more clearly making his wants known.

The baby's predominantly one-track desire to follow his own agenda—to possess his mother's perceived riches, to shore up pleasure—still disregards the mother's in the immediacy of a given moment: Swooped into nursing position and momentarily held out from her mother as the latter loosens her clothing, Sara's cries escalate, her legs shooting up, and with open eyes, she latches onto Rae's finger as she goes for the nipple, open-mouthed and sucks voraciously. Latching onto her own clothing, she frantically scrunches up the cloth, declines the offer of her mother's finger and gyrates, while sucking audibly. As Rae dreamily gazes down at her with glazed expression, Sara's leg shoots up reflexively, her movements growing more frantic. Unsettled, she comes off the breast suddenly and sits up trance-like and flushed, disrupting her mother's momentary sense of union. Even in the face of tiredness, the baby is seen to push himself more forcefully to explore and take in the world on his own terms. He moves now with more steady determination: Unable to free a candle from its stand, with Al's eyes glued to her movements, Carolyn introduces a book, but as soon as she begins to turn the pages, Al slaps her palm down on it and looks back at the candle. Torn between holding on and letting go, between wanting to control that which is not a part of him and the reality of not being able to, the baby
struggles to integrate new experience. One witnesses as yet, only rare attempts on the baby’s part to reverse his ruthless exploits, as demonstrated in this excerpt: Following the episode of flinging and retrieving her rubber duck, Al pulls back from her mother, knits her brow, and with a sudden burst of crying, turns inward toward her mother in an effort to either rejoin or appease.

It is somewhat of a paradox that in hungrily reaching outward to discover and ingest the world, the infant comes face to face with a reality that he at first shuns. In the sixth month we see the infant experiment, discover and recoil. Like an amoeba stretching its pseudopodia into new territory--now tentative, now aggressive--he pushes to the edge of dyadic relatedness and withdraws upon reaching that which lies too far beyond the bounds of his control. All the while he is reaching out, he is assimilating and furnishing his worldview with a sense of expectancy and continuity. All the while he is scanning his environment, confirming his sense of continuous existence, he is encountering change--the reactions of an other that confront him with the reality of their separateness. With the dawning awareness of the mother’s separateness--the fact that she leaves--a new vulnerability emerges: the possibility of abandonment and the experienced loss of control over the mother’s comings and goings. It is a vulnerability reflected in the baby’s response to his mother’s introducing aspects of reality that he may not yet want to stomach. Here, we observe him insist on his will by either severing links through his bodily moves by thrashing about, or voraciously incorporating as a means to possess that which he wants to master or control. Perturbed by the felt disruption of his immediate universe, the baby might appear more volatile, but is seen nevertheless to persist in his exploits. Benjamin (1994) proposed that the initial response to the recognition of an other’s will as differentiated from one’s own is a refusal to recognize the other as separate and an insistence on having one’s own way.1

The tension re-surfaces each time one is confronted with difference. Here, we observe the baby protest and temporarily oppose aspects of reality introduced by his mother in a manner which accentuates his tenacity in preserving his own worldview:

As Corin leans over to point out and manipulate some of the sound activities on the activity centre, Kyle’s excitement and enthusiasm wanes, his expression growing more serious as he follows her moves. Looking away, he reaches for a ball, his body instantly growing more flaccid. When she inches a toy over to him, he ignores it and latches on to a cloth rattle and it is only upon hurling it, that he regains his smile and resumes kicking. In a similar vein, as Sharon

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1 Granted, Benjamin considers this a process that occurs developmentally later, at around two years, but upon close inspection, shades of it can be seen here in the infant’s interaction with his mother at this time.
turns the page of the book and tries to introduce Helen to the characters, Helen ignores her and goes to feel the fur on her slippers.

The reverse situation, where the infant's own forceful thrust forward is thwarted by the mother's prohibition, reflects an equally forceful opposition of wills: As Helen goes to put the camcorder cord in her mouth, and Sharon tries to take it away, Helen latches on tenaciously. When Sharon opens the book to distract her, her eyes wander back to the cord. Placed lying on her stomach, she starts to cry, her nose pressed to the ground, her arms outstretched in an act of protest. Distracted from touching a candle, Al yanks herself from her mother's hold and forcefully stretches her body toward it from her position of standing on her mother's knee, legs locked, hamstrings taut, feet depressed into Carolyn's thighs.

Differentiation is both sought and opposed. While the infant tries to preserve a kind of fused link, he also strives to reach externality and to slough off his felt dependency on something that he is beginning to realize is not an extension of himself. Does he need to forfeit one for the other when the reality of their discontinuity begins to hit him around the six-month mark?

**Maternal Resilience Tested**

This second sub-theme pertains to the maternal experience of witnessing her infant gradually relinquish his omnipotent hold on the world. It comprises four interrelated dimensions of experience: maternal responsibility as a moral dilemma; ambivalence revisited; feeling split between leading and following; and mourning a lost idealized world, which includes the working through of aggression.

*Maternal Responsibility: A Moral Dilemma*

"I feel very responsible in terms of bettering myself to try to get a better job and to have more free time down the road. My husband feels that way too, but he's not as actively involved in pursuing it. I think I feel the pressure and responsibility more." (Sharon-3)

The women's own urge to make tolerable contact with a reality outside of the dyadic hold, along with their inclination to introduce this reality to the infant, conflicted at times, with an opposing desire to buffer them both from the starkness of its impact. It is around this time that the maternal reality of constantly having to attend to more than one demand at once, more than one thought at a time, comes more to the fore and it is here that the women first express feeling somewhat disillusioned about the fact that *maternal* responsibility cannot really be shared; for the parent who has taken on the maternal role knowingly or otherwise, has inadvertently conceded to 'carry' the baby inside by virtue of his/her ongoing identification with him. It is a
process that once initiated, assumes a life of its own. It is this intense emotional link with another’s mind that facilitates the baby’s earliest forward moves, although little is acknowledged about its weight on the maternal ‘carrier.’ In becoming more aware of the enriched, yet somewhat fragmented existence to which holding a child in mind gives rise, a mother feels prompted to push outward toward an integration, to re-group aspects of her pre-maternal identity. Here, the women speak to their ambivalence with respect to the dawning realization of maternal responsibility:

*I have these moments where ... it just kind of hits me that I’m responsible for [Addressing Al] every single need that you have—Yes!—even more so than my husband. Even though he’s involved with her ... I feel ultimately I’m the one who’s setting the ground rules for her and making the decisions ... I’ve taken on that role ... I feel he could very easily do that, but ... being the one to tend to her needs and wants all day, I feel that I’m in a better position to take that responsibility ... I feel like my life is never going to be the way it was before.* (Carolyn-3)

Being so emotionally invested, it is difficult to make the outward shift without experiencing some sense of internal loss, for with maternity, there grows into a woman’s life a perennial seed that demands continual tending, whose roots become embedded within her very core. Faced with obstacles that stand in the way of her baby’s safety or contentment, a mother may feel “paralyzed,” each outward step aborted until one reaches a resolution. Here, a sense of frustration was reflected in the growing tension between holding on and letting go. Disinclined to split off all the different pulls on their attention, the women found themselves constantly prioritizing: “It’s an overwhelming sense of responsibility ... It’s like, there’s ten things to do, but ... I constantly have to be aware of what’s most important for this moment.” (Sharon-3). Feeling responsible now as both bearer of emotional life and orchestrator of change, she feels wholly instrumental in the baby’s coming into his own. As Sharon gets up to leave the room to change Helen mid-sentence, she comments: “You gotta drop everything and be there [laughs]. The self is lost ... I felt like there’s this train and I’m the engine and if you pulled me out of it, the train would stop.” At the same time, there is something containing in knowing how one is needed.

While the baby’s demands continually draw a mother in, practical external demands draw her out and she begins to distinguish between the nature of evolving familial ties. Sharon contrasts her spouse’s tendency to compartmentalize his relational experiences with her own efforts at spreading herself thin, as she works toward an integration: “Helen’s close to her dad and he is there for her, but ... when he looks after her ... he’ll just park her beside him at the computer, but when I’m with Helen, that’s all I do ... I might do dishes, but I’m not preoccupied trying to read!” As she becomes fully aware of feeling “more protective ... and much more
acutely aware of her need for stimulation, security and safety,” she begins to feel some resentment in having to direct her spouse to what the baby needs, the maternal capacity to ‘see’ (or not see, as the case may be) the baby’s changing needs arising out of the intensity of their involvement.

Bergum (1989) traced the origin of the word ‘responsible’ to the Latin ‘respondere,’ meaning ‘to promise to return’ (p. 85). She found that the obligation to return and insure one’s return rendered the maternal subject no longer independent of that responsibility. All of the women in the present study felt bound by their loyalty to their child. This bind poses for women the dilemma of how to “live as mother - for her child - and yet for herself;” how to “act responsibly toward the child in her life, and yet be true to herself and her own project of living” (Bergum, p. 85). It is an undercurrent that effortlessly drifts to the surface here through the rubble of the day, issuing re-direction, as one detects that shift in what the baby needs, from physical nourishment to fostering growth through stimulation. Cloaked in ambivalence, it is nevertheless, a dawning that prompts a mother’s gradual outward move. For Corin, “It’s a lot of responsibility and it does create some conflict in me ... Sometimes I want a bit of a change.” For Bergum, having “a child on her mind” becomes not just an emotional response, but a woman’s way of being, a way of thinking about and experiencing the world. Living alongside children, attuned to their lives, she says, inevitably prompts self questioning, doubt, guilt. It is an experience that inspires, while it fragments. It is through the very experience of carrying, bearing, birthing and caring for a child, she found, that woman acquire the knowledge necessary for understanding human nature. “It’s something that I think you don’t appreciate until you actually go through it. With other mothers it’s something unspoken, having gone through it, dealing with the responsibility of your child” (Carolyn-3).

Bergum later (1997) came to understand maternal responsibility as a “moral move from self to other” that develops through the ongoing connection with one’s child (p. 23). She found that the transformative experience of mothering revolved around this turning from the ‘me’ to ‘us,’ the turning toward the child inspiring a renewed sense of self. Renewed? Potentially; if one can acknowledge difference and strike a balance between holding on and letting go. Much is tested on the way to integration that sends one veering down one path, now another. Is it the unspoken ‘promise to return’ that binds her? Her altruistic concern? Her need to hold on tightly to what she loves or knows?
"I just sometimes wish I could just detach myself and it's hard to detach yourself because there's so much of yourself involved." (Rae-3)

As a mother strives to draw together the different strands of her life into one, the baby continues to occupy centre stage in her inner world, though no longer monopolizes it to the same degree, the demands of reality that come crowding in, now reframed in the light of the child held within: "With Helen I feel more driven ... In terms of my inner space, I'd say she's right in the middle and it's not to say when I'm away from her I'm not able to do other things, but she's not excluded" (Sharon-3). As the baby pushes for her to remain unchanged, under his control as it were, by desperately trying to fit her into the mould of the idealized mother, she tries to fit that mould, while simultaneously trying to reclaim her more all-encompassing identity. Striving to accomplish the tasks of the 'all-giving' mother, she struggles now to integrate her own need to receive, as reaching outward becomes somewhat tinged with guilt. And yet, it is her reaching outward that in the long run, saves the baby from remaining lost in the chaos and fusion of their earlier entanglement.

Prolonged absence of limits may leave a mother fearing that she might lose her sense of self and drown in the maternal waters. The more immediate urge to seek re-definition, as evidenced in the women's talk, reflects here, their own developmental need to return to order, anti-chaos, and objectivity--the realm of shared reality. It is at this point that Carolyn welcomes the opportunity to re-integrate aspects of her pre-maternal life: "I'm looking forward to going back to work, to having my life aside from being her mother ... whereas before I was happy to be wrapped up in her." Chassequet-Smirgel (1994) refers to the return to absence of limits that gradually eventuates in a nightmare in Golding's 'Lord of the Flies,' the Pagan cult obliterating any reference to the father, having a suffocating element to it (p. 123). One can suffocate in a protracted experience of non-differentiation.

Two maternal urges that seem mutually exclusive, but are nonetheless intertwined, vie for expression at this time: the women's developmental desire to re-group the different aspects of themselves in the natural push towards individuation and their inherent concern for the infant's wellbeing. Here, we observe each of the women struggle to hold them both in the palm of her hand. As the baby wards off the realization of his mother's subjectivity, the mother vehemently strives to reclaim it, albeit with the maternal ideal colouring her outward moves. This is the first time in her relationship with her child that each of the women encounters the problem of trying to conceive of separation without linking it to destructiveness. Behind the pursuit of personal
desire lies the inherent fear of destroying the other. Her struggle, spurred on by her desire to reclaimer own autonomy, is complicated by the fact that the baby’s sense of abandonment—his momentary hatred of his ‘deserting’ mother—blends with her own fear of internal loss at the moment of parting (or the mere thought of it). While the infant fears his mother’s leaving or her dissolution upon his turning away, the mother in turn, fears that her own turning outward might inadvertently pull the security blanket right out from under him: “I have a hard time with the line between him being frustrated and feeling abandoned ... I just feel like he’s going to wonder what’s going on in this world” (Corin-3). This is not mere cultural pressure, for in health, a mother inherently experiences conflict at the point of separation, the transient desire for release equated with abandonment in her mind. But why does she equate taking something for herself with taking something from her child? What inclines her to tell herself again and again that she should have no desires other than her child? Is the prospect of her own separation-individuation experienced as a developmental goal or does it evoke “echoes of old bereavements and other intolerable losses?” (Daws, as cited in Parker, 1995, p. 101). Fleeting hostile feelings toward one’s child—the transient desire to be rid of the baby’s demands—can be frightening, threatening the return of resentment back on the self. And yet, it is the constructive aspects of aggression, according to Parker (1995), that prompts the unfolding of their mutual individuation.¹ For Parker, it is the infant within the mother who “agrees with the child who experiences separation as rejection” (p. 104). “At heart,” she says, “most mothers worry that the child will not withstand separation” (p. 108).

By the sixth postnatal month, the women felt “in transition still,” fragmented aspects of the self—the good and bad, the giving and receiving, the maternal and the sexual—now begging an integration; for if one is to tide the infant over to a reality that is shared and to experience mutual autonomy, one has yet to re-establish the link with one’s own internal world that is separate from the link with one’s child. Here, we witness each of the women caught, to a greater or lesser degree, in the bind of trying to strike a workable balance between constantly abandoning her own need to that of the infant and following her own desire, separate to his. Aware that she cannot forfeit one for the other, Sharon comments: “It would be a lot easier if I just had to focus on the job and Helen, but I have more goals and desires and if I let those go I would be resentful ... For instance, if I’m unhappy about my weight or my life ... that’s going to impact her!” Around this time, we see instances of the women fighting their over-identification

¹ Parker (1995) found that constant doubt and worrying, on the other hand, is linked with unmediated aggression, that is, hate in the unconscious that is not available for use in relationships.
with the infant, the tendency to slip back into the archaic world, wherein the rational perspective readily submerges. And yet, their observed gradual shift out of the physiological realm into the realm of thought and planning reflects a more definitive stepping outside of the maternal space into a more structured framework, the mother’s impulse itself serving to break up their mutually projected state. It is with this shift that the baby becomes ‘real’ in her mind.

To Lead or to Follow?

"His swimming lesson’s at 11:30, which means I have to ... wake him up and just say to myself, ‘It’s okay!’ I don’t know if it’s okay, but I hope it’s okay with him, because he doesn’t like being awake when he wants to be asleep.” (Corin-3)

Prompted by her own need to move on and her infant’s growing demands, which test her capacity to find a solution to the dilemma of holding on and letting go, it is with trepidation that a mother carries her infant over the chasm that separates phantasy and reality. And yet, all of the women in this study were resolute in expressing both a desire and a felt obligation to introduce reality to the infant at this time: “There’s a different sense of responsibility now. I’m trying to communicate with her and teach her things. I’m trying to provide her with more structure. It’s rewarding but also challenging and frustrating because she still doesn’t understand everything” (Carolyn-3). What is it that prompts a mother to gradually introduce the world, to step out and pull back? How does she settle on the dosage of reality to inject at any given time? What dosage can she herself tolerate?

Here, we observe each of the four women rush in to break the baby’s fall, interspersed with the introduction of bite-sized morsels of reality, the gradual ‘wean’ building trust that acts as a buffer against a more full blown induction. When Corin lifts Kyle to standing in front of an activity centre and he reaches for the handle, he taps with his free hand, and losing his balance, topples backwards in a gentle fall onto the play mat, Corin’s grasp breaking the fall. “Kaboom!” she exclaims, as Kyle gleefully comes to a landing and struggles to pull himself up again. Later, she makes provision for his active exploration, while carefully monitoring his moves as he pulls himself up by on an abacus frame. Initially she lets go but almost immediately holds onto him again as he begins to wobble. Holding on with one hand, Kyle looks down intently at the beads with a concentrated expression and as the frame goes to topple, he tightens his grasp, mooches and looks behind him, letting go with one hand again until Corin pulls him back to sitting.

For a while, the women persist in trying to fit the child’s mould of the ‘good’/idealized mother he wants to preserve, yet cannot adhere to, without supplanting the ‘real’ mother, whom the infant is only coming to know, with the imago of mother as all-powerful and potentially
engulfing. Sharon realizes the extent to which her losing herself to the baby at this time would militate against their mutual growth. Her instrumenting the disciplinary “No!” is something we witness here for the first time, curtailing now becoming a feature in all of the dyadic interactions: No, the baby cannot have everything he wants! No, he cannot have her all to himself; nor can she be his everything.

The baby himself seems to be pushing at this time, to experience both the security of being held and the freedom to push the limits, requiring of a mother a balancing act between holding on and letting go that facilitates the gradual build up of trust in a benign world and the establishment of an inner world as linked to a ‘holding’ parent. His faith rests on the belief that she will provide a form of food that will sustain him upon weaning. It is something that the infants in this study came to take for granted: Gurgling, Al leans to the side and is about to fall over, when Carolyn springs up and catches her around the waist. “Gotcha!” she exclaims, while Al gnaws away at the rubber duck, oblivious. It is the gradual build up of trust that enables the mother to let go with greater ease, knowing that the baby has the emotional wherewithal to survive, and in turn, allows the baby to more capably release her.

Each of the women became cognizant of their infant’s growing security in this regard, of their faith in their mother’s reliability: “I think he now trusts that ... I’m going to meet his needs and so I don’t think he’s as needing of me in that way. He just knows it’s going to happen ... It’s ‘whatever you guys want to do with me, I’ll love it ‘cause I trust you guys!’” (Corin-3). Sharon relates her commitment to providing this form of security for her daughter: “She knows she can count on me and I give her my all ... I mean I don’t expect to be perfect, but I do expect myself to make her feel as comfortable as I know I’m capable of making people feel generally ... All my energy goes into her and it’s immediate.”

It is perhaps in part, her experience of the baby’s felt security, and in part, her own need to re-group, that prompts a mother to move on and “let the world in.”¹ An underlying tension between buffering the infant against the brittleness of reality on the one hand, and actively bringing in the world on the other--between upholding security and providing stimulation--now comes to the fore. “Under normal circumstances,” according to Eigen (1993), “the mother nurses the baby back into existence to the point where discontinuity can once more be tolerated and used for growth purposes” (p. 223). Feeling somewhat torn between indulging and frustrating her

¹ A phrase used by Winnicott in his paper on Security, reprinted in “Talking to Parents” (1993, p. 91).
infant at this point in time however, a mother struggles with imposing her own reality and facilitating her baby’s discovery of his own. Should she lead or follow?

The underlying tension between actively introducing reality and allowing the baby to discover it at will was poignantly highlighted in the women’s response to being asked to follow their baby’s lead in the sixth month. While each sought to find a workable balance, the women varied in their natural proclivity to either teach or follow the baby’s natural inclination. It is difficult to abandon oneself to the infant’s need when one feels responsible now, for creating structure and instrumenting change though stimulation. In the play interaction, Rae found her attention split between following the baby’s natural momentum and actively introducing the world: “When you asked me to take her lead, I did that at the beginning and I’ve noticed that ... even though I was just letting her do her own thing, I still wanted to go, ‘Oh look at this!’ or change it somehow, so that I would interact with her that way. I kind of went in and out of that.” Sharon, on the other hand, felt contained by the act of following: “Following her was neat. It’s much calmer. Like when I was just watching her, it slowed me down and she was just playing there sucking on her thing ... I’ve been going with what she wants.” At the same time, she noted how she vigilantly tries to keep Helen both “comfortable and stimulated,” feeling conscious of those times when Helen is “bored ... just sitting there!” Carolyn noted becoming more aware of consciously “doing [her] job as mother and teacher as well.”

By the sixth month, the women more readily seized an opportunity to teach in response to the baby’s perceived curiosity: As Sara manipulates a book, Rae uses this opportunity to teach her animal sounds. Sara’s expression grows serious and then a wide smile crosses her face again as she excitedly pulls a cloth sun up to her mouth. Gurgling, she explores the inside of her mouth with her fingers. “Rooster!” Rae continues, to which Sara makes rasping sounds ... Rae imitates a bear, bares her teeth and growls angrily. Looking on in awe, Sara removes her fingers from her mouth and looks back to the book, captivated. Reaching over, she points to the picture with her finger and looks at the pages as Rae continues to sound out: “Cat ... meow!” Breathless and impassioned, Sara sucks in air, displaying her delight; then fingering over the next page in anticipation, she looks at the picture, evidently sharing her mother’s enthusiasm in this moment.

Being asked to follow the baby’s lead itself accentuates the felt tension between ‘being’ and instrumenting that might also be experienced as a dichotomous active-passive split. After watching Sara for a while, Rae found herself growing a little uncomfortable: “I wanted to hold her, ‘cause I didn’t like the fact that she was just sitting and playing.” What is it that makes a mother uncomfortable in watching her six month old observe and quietly ‘take in’ the world?
Does she feel she should be ‘doing’ more? Upon reflection, Corin noted: “I was just letting him pick his own [toys], then I realized about half way through, I’m supposed to be playing with him.” Why this timely push toward action and evident learning? Is the mother prodded into action by the baby’s growing hunger for stimulation? What does she now feel called upon to provide?

The maternal ideal by now, inclines a mother to stretch herself thin, to ‘do’ more. She begins to shun passivity. To be passive perhaps, is to feel unproductive at a time when one is just beginning to let go of the fruit of one’s labour. Perhaps it flattens out her own passion, prompting the outward push toward change. Following, interpreted as non-involvement, prompts her to create countless opportunities for learning, her own perceived creativity here pitted against her spouse’s perceived passivity: Corin describes Kyle at six months, sitting “relaxed” in his father’s arms, “playing with his toes or his fingers and watching TV ... mesmerized by the flashing lights;” an activity she considers “way too passive” because “he’s not learning anything.” It contrasts in her mind, with her endless “stimulating him and teaching him, giving him new opportunities to learn and play.” Perhaps a mother’s intolerance of passivity at this time is tied up with her own need to move on and her felt responsibility to move the baby on, the urge to introduce the world, a means to either escape their experienced fusion, or forestall the realization of their pending rift. Perhaps her instrumenting change provides her at this transitional point with some sense of control over what transpires. Sitting with the baby’s dawning realization of change on the other hand accentuates the passing of one’s capacity to soothe by giving alone.

There were times when the observed push to action was seen to militate against the women’s expressed purpose of introducing the world of reality, their persistence in teaching, at times eventuating in the baby’s protest and tendency to follow his own inclination with even more gusto: As Corin manipulates the activity board, Kyle passes her a glance, pulls the rattle over his face, transfers it to his other hand, and resumes his solitary kicking. At times, she instruments change on her own terms: Positioning Kyle to face the activity centre, Corin comments: “Won’t life be fun when you can sit?” to which he shakes the rattle, sways, and leaning forward in order to pull at something protruding from the play mat, jerks back to sitting, his expression growing fearful as he loses his balance, his sense of trust momentarily lost.

At the same time that she is orchestrating an encounter between his inner world and external reality, the mother also feels called upon at this time to put on the brakes, the baby himself, only too eager to pounce on every opportunity for free expression of his impulses at this time, oblivious to their impact: “She’ll grab at whatever’s within her reach ... I’ll let her grab ...
the tree and she’ll shake it, but when she starts to put it in her mouth, I’ll say, “No!” and take her away. She’ll look at me and try again, and I’ll say, “No!” and pull her hand away and she’ll try again, so I’ll usually take it out of her hand and distract her” (Carolyn-3). A mother’s holding on and letting go is not solely related to her own need and desire, but dynamically linked to her concern for her infant. The ambivalent desire to both protect and encourage his freedom to explore creates a struggle within her that is bound to an underlying cyclical process of protecting one’s child from harm and fatality and in turn, oneself from the potential trauma of it: “Helen's exerting her will more and more all the time. I like it. I guess I’m a little nervous about what’s to come ... I worry sometimes about her swallowing something or hurting herself, but I’m excited. It’s wonderful to see her unfold” (Sharon-3).

Erdlich (as cited in Bergum, 1997) speaks to both the relief and regret experienced by women when their babies grow to the point where they realistically cannot fit inside again. A natural wariness is detected. To curtail is also to institute control; to monitor the pace of unveiling reality; to pull back to avoid the pain incurred in the wake of the baby’s dawning realization of separateness (and her own). Sharon notes that her husband thinks she is “too protective and involved” with her child, but it is the very intensity of a mother’s involvement with her child that brings her in touch with the fragility of life in a way that potentially transforms her. Bergum discovered that “women who mother are transformed by the recognition that complete control of life, as the control of death, is an illusion” (p. 58). She touts “humility” as “the virtue needed to take on the world beyond our control” and quoting Ruddick, sees it as emerging directly out of “maternal practices” through which one comes to accept “not only the reality of damage and death, but also the actuality of the independent and uncontrollable nature of life” (as cited in Bergum, p. 58). Carolyn speaks to her own being humbled by the experience: “There’s times when I’m just kind of overwhelmed. I have this little baby, but she’s her own person, separate from me. She needs me ... but she’s gonna have her own piece to say when she gets older and that’s the whole idea of her being ... She teaches me patience ... I think everyone should go through the experience. It’s humbling.” In holding her infant in mind, a mother lives with the reality of the eternal possibility of loss that remains out of her hands. As the baby constantly tests his mother’s capacity to withstand this fact, she constantly has to renounce her own omnipotence.

Mourning a Lost Idealized World and ‘Surviving’ Aggression

“I think we’re both changing. We’re testing new situations, testing each other with what we can and cannot do.” (Sharon-3)
Propelled by the need to feel in control, to negate his experienced discontinuity, the infant tests out his mother's resilience through repeatedly demanding both continuity and change. Here, we observe each of the four infants test his/her mother's capacity to sustain relentless demands that confront her very integrity. More active now, the baby pulls for more and engages in risk-taking. Corin says of Kyle at six months: "He's more demanding. He has more wishes." For Carolyn, testing is related to her baby's increased awareness and demanding of change: "It's a little difficult now ... she knows what she's asking ... When I put her down by herself, sometimes she'll scream and put her hands up to be picked up." The baby's increased communicative intent and overt intentionality make it difficult for a mother to turn her back, but incline her rather, to try to cater to his every whim at a time when she is already starting to question his motivation. Carolyn is struck by the shift in her own experience of 'being there:' "Keeping her entertained is definitely one of the big challenges right now, just constantly trying to think of new ways to stimulate and entertain her ... It means always trying to be creative!"

The baby's relentless determination in securing a new response can challenge a mother's self-perceived capacity to fulfill, the baby now wanting more than her presence alone can provide. His testing of both reality and his mother's reliability can raise doubt in the mother's mind as to her own maternal competence, her sense of internal good. The maternal ideal, now linked to 'benevolent omnipotence' is, according to Eigen (1993), "both an achievement and a trap" (p. 231), maintaining a mother in a position of not wanting to relinquish her perfectionist ideals with respect to her mothering. How can she forfeit her omnipotent desire to be all giving in the face of his ruthless demands that question her very competence and magnify her guilt with regard her own need to both give and take?

By six months postpartum, the women come face to face with the realization that presence alone may soothe, but cannot wholly satisfy. Here, we witness each of the women struggle in coming to terms with the fact that her presence can now in fact provoke anxiety, the baby's healthy curiosity propelling him to seek stimulation elsewhere. A mother is always weighing up the different sides of herself, at times, clinging to the desire to be the perfect all giving mother, at times, mourning the loss of its possibility. Sharon acknowledges her own lack of perfection and wonders how women stretch themselves so thin: "I don't know how women do it all without being on medication or becoming an alcoholic! [laughs] It's like you're a woman; you're expected to be beautiful, to be a great mom and a good cook and a great lover and a career woman and never be in a bad mood, never be tired, and remember everybody's birthdays..."
and barmitzvahs and you can’t!” The baby’s controlling demands call forth a mother’s attempt to control or contain his control of her and she may find herself from time to time projecting her own omnipotence into the baby at this time.

The Kleinian perspective links weaning to the process of mourning, the relinquishment of the expectation of an ideal world. The infant, by now, is beginning to recognize his mother’s distancing and ongoing existence, her coming and going, his predominant anxiety being, losing her and the sense of a loving, helpful presence within, notwithstanding, one’s internal imago is bound up with one’s experience of the actual external mother. Guilt now enters because one comes to resent what one has only loved and regarded as good. The mother becomes aware of her own resentment, her range of feeling for the baby, who heretofore was seen as ‘all good,’ and of her need to take leave, which at times, disturbs her.

It is in becoming aware of the wider range of feeling in oneself and in the other, e.g., the other’s aggressive demands and desires that clash with one’s own that one encounters the other side of one’s humanity—a world view wed to the picture of creation that is rooted in the Biblical story of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. It was the Romantic poets, who before Freud, and whom Freud acknowledged, wrote of the pains of succumbing to the banality of life in the wake of a lost idealized world. Speaking to ‘A child dancing in the wind,’ Yeats¹ wrote: “Being young you have not known the fools paradise/nor yet love lost as soon as won”—the very essence of the weaning process. Britton (1985) too, referred to Wordsworth’s depiction of the “struggle not to reject the banal goodness of ordinary life” when pitted against the memory of a lost ideal world (p. 39). What gradually rises to awareness now, is the reality of the other’s separateness and potential relatedness with others—the kind of knowledge which at first releases latent hostility towards all that is foreign, towards all things which, according to Britton, “do not feel like some extension of ourselves, or as encompassed by the familiar boundaries of our mental landscape” (p. 38). On the brink of realization, we flounder. We scurry; we busy ourselves. We act. Anything but sit with the prospect of change! In this transition, we see each of the women struggle to relinquish the need to be all to her baby, a process which confronts her with the task of mourning her idealized maternal vision and acknowledging her humanity as she spreads herself thin and succumbs to the reality of loss. In re-visiting the cycle of fragmentation and integration, can this re-journeying through omnipotence nourish growth? Or as Britton asks: Can love once again survive knowledge?

¹ From the poem of the same name in The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats (1956, p. 120).
In experiencing the constant pull on her time to prioritize, to divide herself and to let other things in her life “go” in the wake of ‘being there’ for her infant, Sharon begins to resign herself to the loss of her own youth, and to relinquish her hold on the past by forfeiting her prior self image. Having a child on one’s mind forces a realization of inevitable change and human limitation: “Now that I’m back at school, Helen’s on my mind a lot and sometimes that’s distracting ... I feel I’ve got one foot here and one foot here ... I’m not as able to focus as much as I used to.” It is an experience which prompts her to more readily expose her child to the world, albeit not without a strong element of protectiveness: “It’s also good for her to be with other people because she’ll be more adaptable and sociable. I don’t want her to just be with me ... I always do worry a little bit, but I have to compartmentalize it, otherwise I couldn’t function!”

The prospect of change also sends one reeling backwards in time to cling to that which brings pleasure. In already having a reality-based glimpse in the person of her toddler, into what is potentially yet to come, Rae holds fast to the idealized experience of interdependence with her second child: “I don’t want her to grow up ... She’s not trying to exert her independence. She’s just still part of me ... She’s so happy to be in my arms and she doesn’t whine and complain and throw tantrums!”

In feeling torn between responding to both her baby’s pull for inclusion and his autonomous push outward, we witness the women contort themselves to satisfy and persevere in the face of the baby’s challenge. A frantic quality was observed in the women’s attempts to appease: Panting, with a downward deflection of eyes, Al lunges forward, and whimpering, is whooshed up into the air, placed standing on her mother’s shoulders and brought back down again as the whimpering persists. Bringing her thumb into her mouth, Al wails as she is swayed in her mother’s arms and as the wailing grows louder, Carolyn places her lying back down on the play mat, tickling her chest, to which Al brings up her knees and looks away. It is a struggle to both entertain and instill a sense of security. One is always at risk of overstepping the boundary by crossing the baby’s threshold of safety. When swooped too far afield in response to her own demand for change, we observe Al quickly huddle into her mother.

The women continued to search for a good solacing object in the face of the baby’s persistent irritability: Still trying to pacify Al, Carolyn stands her on her knee, to which Al proceeds to restlessly climb up her body. “What else do we have?” Carolyn wonders aloud, as she picks up a container of shapes and shakes it invitingly. When Al flips it out of her hand, crying, Carolyn swoops her into a cradling position again, switches her from knee to knee, and enthusiastically shakes the container, which brings forth more wrenching cries! In an equally
frantic effort to pacify, Sharon awkwardly turns Helen on her back and places a teddy bear in front of her. When the crying persists, she pulls her by the wrists to standing and Helen looks back to the cord and the camera case, her expression growing uneasier. Sharon searches for something to amuse her. “Want to lie on Mommy?” she asks, as she swiftly slithers down onto her back, her knees bent, and holds Helen straddling. But the crying persists. Exasperated, Sharon sits up, a frantic quality to her distracting search for something that might pacify. There were times when the women were left feeling that nothing they could do could satisfy the baby’s demands. Reflecting on their interaction, Sharon comments: “I try to make her feel better, but sometimes it doesn’t work and sometimes I don’t know what to do for her.” It is not always possible to decipher the nature of the baby’s demand, or to fulfill his immediate need.

A mother is all the time coming up against the nature of her own inner goodness and the fact that in the face of her child’s distress, one’s sense of inner good readily evaporates (Parker, 1995). Not only does she feel culpable for causing her child distress, but she is also at risk of losing her own sense of internal good, should this take a nose-dive at moments of parting or even upon recognizing their psychic distancing. In her analytic work, Klein (1945) found that the most fundamental female anxiety pertains to the incapacity to protect what one loves and holds within against internal and external onslaught. Accordingly, whenever her baby’s safety is challenged, a mother is inclined to feel her own integrity is at risk. This provides an understanding of the type of anxiety observed in the women whenever they felt their capacity to contain was challenged. With her phantasies and emotions weaved around her inner world, this is even more predominant in maternity, particularly at this time when a mother is re-engaging the outside world. Here, it is manifest in Sharon’s concern about exposing her personal space to an outsider: “It’s a very intimate experience, somebody coming into your home and being in your space for nine hours. The place has to be clean and tidy and he [her spouse] didn’t care, but it bothered me.” [It is the maternal caregiver who feels her ‘insides’ are on show.] Is the maternal ideal then, a standard a mother feels she needs to attain in part, to assure her of her competence in holding onto her sense of inner good? Might this account for some of the silence encountered around the pain, the ambivalence of mothering, even between women? Fleeing to the other side of her aggression, a mother may push herself beyond her own limit to endlessly give instead of receive

1 In the analysis of girls’ phantasies, Klein (1945) found that persecutory fears were often related to attacks on the body by a persecuting retaliating mother. Such phantasized attacks, she found, “always appear to a girl not only as a danger to her body, but as a danger to everything precious which in her mind her ‘inside’ contains: her potential children, the good mother and the good father” (p. 61). The overriding female anxiety, she concluded, relates to the feared damage to her body and her good internal objects.
(or take), in an effort to assure herself of the plenitude of her inner supplies. Does this not attest to a mother’s own need, along with that of her baby, to have her sense of inner good confirmed at this time of stretching towards individuation when latent hostility rises to the fore? It attests to the impact of their emotional linkage at this time of weaning.

Parker (1995) found that mothers vary considerably with respect to their susceptibility to losing the sense of good within at the moment of parting and the women in this study were no exception. How much a mother needs to have her competence as a mother affirmed as she anticipates separation is seen to vary by degrees. The very threat of loss may at times, incline her to tighten the reel, to accentuate the ongoing continuity between she and her baby, to extend her own presence. Guilt may entice her to shorten the cord between them, idealization of their connectedness serving as a buffer against the transitory impulse of ridding: “She’s so much a part of me that I don’t have a self in a way, ‘cause she’s always almost physically attached to me ... like the umbilical cord is still attached ... whereas Kieran is sort of further out there” (Rae-3). This being her second child, Rae’s ambivalence is split more across her two children and it is her older, more autonomous toddler, whose demands are felt to test and frustrate her: “At times, I just feel like I want Kieran to go away and I just want to enjoy her, just be with her by myself and just ignore him, because sometimes I feel like being with him just takes away from that experience.” There was evidence too, of the women accentuating their linkage by internally ‘blending’ their individual existences from time to time, denying the aggression inherent in separation: “Our space in the day sort of blends. It’s our joint space. The whole day is very intermingled” (Corin-3). A mother refers to “kissing the baby to death,” a phrase that conjures up an image of re-absorbing--irresistibly swallowing whole--the loved other into the self. For Rae, “the biggest challenge is trying to deal with my own feelings of frustration and my temper,” feelings that tend to blacken her inner world and prompt her to get “really down on myself and start to think terrible things, like that I’m a terrible parent! I’m not fit to be a mother,” the conscious fear being, that of losing control. With little toleration for her own internal struggle, she denounces her capacity to nurture point blank, and life becomes terribly black and white in that moment, just as it seems for the toddler in the throes of a tantrum at the point of disillusionment. A mother, like the infant in this transitional phase, might fear losing the other and the love of the other, as well as the loss of her own love for her child, abandoned by her in phantasy--feelings triggered by the anticipation of change subsequent to parting. She might also project her hostility, as manifested here in the expressed fears of a dangerous, hostile world, to which the women referred at this time, and which reflects conceivably more than one’s
identification with the baby’s terrors, notwithstanding the actual dangers that the world presents. As Sharon relates: “I have moments of panic when I’m downtown, like what if something happened to her?” Initially, as she leaves or anticipates leaving, a mother feels on tender hooks: “When I leave her I feel guilty—not not guilty—actually okay ... provided she’s okay and the person is safe” (Sharon-3).

Parker (1995) found that the experience of mothering itself can at once confirm one’s sense of inner good through the potentially transformative experience of giving and receiving love, and “can equally induce a terrible sense of inadequacy, the collapse of self esteem and the disintegration of the sense of there being a good helpful figure within” (p. 108), both of which were in evidence here within each of the women at different times, albeit manifesting in some in more subtle form. The experience of ambivalence itself is dismaying, the defences one erects against its realization reified in the surrounding culture, which calls upon women as mothers to hold it together, to salvage the world against all odds, inadvertently denying her both the right to desire and the right to leave. Chided for both holding on too tightly, and for abandoning too soon, it is difficult for mothers to retain a sense of internal good at this time of developmental shift. In speaking to her feeling at a loss upon her infant’s weaning onto solids, Corin immediately qualifies: “As a matter of fact, I feel the opposite now. It’s an opportunity for me to have more space and freedom, not that I want more!” Woe betides the mother who should want for herself! And yet, it is her toleration and integration of the contradictory feelings that well up inside her—both her “undying love” and her need to flee—that enables her to erect boundaries and sensitizes her to her baby’s wide-ranging needs, including his right to discover the world on his own terms. Carolyn expresses feeling relief upon getting a break: “When she’s asleep, I can let it go. It’s a release for me. I can stop thinking of her ... I wouldn’t say I’m burdened, ... but there’s definitely a sense of relief.” Parker had found that parents who owned their own angry feelings were in fact in a good position to adequately integrate them and to figure out how to be there for their infants.

A mother is challenged at this time of pending rift to re-cast her net into the maternal pool, sift through the emotional rubble and filter her inherent aggression, so that she might recycle it, untainted, through the current transactional loop and take the next developmental step forward, unthwarted. No amount of maternal presence can fully obliterate conflict that is a product of the internal world, neither the infant’s, or a mother’s own. Perhaps it is in part the baby’s testing of his mother’s resilience through his active demands that prompts her to move forward, enabling her to relinquish the phantasy that with this relationship, she will receive the
“unconditional” love she has always sought and resign herself yet again, to the precariousness of all human relationship; notwithstanding, the common experience that, as Carolyn relates: “It’s probably the warmest relationship I have in that she needs me so totally and completely!”

Developmentally, much rests on a mother’s capacity to endure the ruthlessness of her baby’s passions, his reaching out for pleasure and usurping her regardless of her physical state, his seductively leaning toward the third party. How resilient is she, for example, when her infant turns towards the other with a beaming smile after a hard day?

Winnicott (1971) drew attention to the importance of a mother’s “survival” of the infant’s “attacks” on her ability to be a competent mother—attacks, pertaining to whatever it is that makes it difficult for her to maintain her integrity: to remain fully “alive,” fully herself, and to retain her capacity to think and respond from a position of groundedness. On the part of the infant, “attacks,” or “testing” include relentless efforts at controlling or possessing, beaming smiles to a third party, veering towards the father for example, who has not shared the day’s intensity, or turning from the breast and the mother’s hold in the face of her desire to give—behaviours that might be experienced as expressions of ingratitude. It is the maternal capacity to remain present, yet differentiated and separate, in the face of the infant’s seducing her to remain under his omnipotent control, Winnicott asserted, that allows the mother to become more real in his mind, as opposed to being experienced as continuous with his infant self.

It is somewhat of a paradox however, that while Winnicott was purportedly more interested in the way in which one is carried over this developmental hurdle, which in itself proposes a two-way process that makes intuitive and clinical sense, his account focused on the baby’s need, and merely paid lip service to maternal experience, the other arm in the equation. The current study by contrast, in attempting to integrate into the developmental picture, the women’s own experience of carrying the baby over developmental hurdles, has highlighted (a) the extent to which maternity invariably draws a mother back into the developmental cycle, collapsed now across the first months of life, as she re-encounters primal conflict through the process of holding her child in mind, and (b) how the meeting of emotional worlds shapes what gets played out at each transitional turning point in the unique interplay of each parent and child. Here, we observe the women undergo a parallel, albeit different process of developmental

1 While Winnicott (1971) believed it was “the destructive drive” which prompted the baby’s “attacks” on his mother, he was not referring to a reactive destructiveness on the baby’s part at this time, but saw it rather, as pertaining to the baby’s denial of the mother’s separateness, his eventually placing her outside his omnipotent control, in contrast to experiencing her as still part of the self: “There is no anger in the destruction of the object,” but “joy at its survival,” he said (p. 93).
growth, which at times conflicts with her child’s, as they each negotiate individuation through relationship. Much that is observed in the baby—the omnipotent holding on, the feared loss of the (m)other’s love—is seen to re-surface in the mother at this time of weaning and is subsequently drawn into the relational loop.

Winnicott’s (1971) prescriptive account is a tall order that might be said to accentuate the maternal ideal and to underplay the observed exigencies of transactional looping. In observing the current interactions, it becomes immediately clear that it is not just a matter of whether or not a mother remains resilient throughout the Sturm and Drang of these emotionally intense times, but rather, it is how she re-engages the growth cycle and navigates its tidal waves—how she holds her infant in mind—and how the infant receives her holding that impacts the developmental outcome for both. In fact, very little about the weaning process can be taken for granted. According to First (1994): “A mother would need to be on good terms with her own aggression, to feel where it has been constructive to her, to be able to identify with the child’s aggression and play with it resiliently” (p. 159). This is not a given, but is seen to vary by degrees. Not everyone has a good internal mother to draw on. Each dyad must find their own solution to the challenge that pending change presents. Appreciating the validity of one’s felt hostility is something, with which the women in this study were seen to wrestle from time to time. Resilience, First noted, “requires acceptance of aggressivity ... in oneself, as part of one’s own aliveness, rather than fearing that any assertion of one’s own rights will be destructive to the other” (p. 159). What is a mother’s experience of her infant’s testing? What is her relationship to aggression that is inherent, her infant’s and her own? Does she embrace her baby’s voracious appetite or perceive his chomping as a display of anger, greed? Can she appreciate the constructive dimension of her baby’s aggressive forward thrusts?

As Sharon bends over to put Helen’s slipper back on, Helen reaches over and grasps onto her mother’s hair. “Are you gonna pull mommy’s hair?” Sharon asks. “Go right ahead!” Helen runs her fingers through it and grins as she takes Sharon’s finger into her mouth. “You bite real hard there!” her mother encourages, to which Helen slides down off her knee onto the floor, her eyes tracking the ‘mysterious’ black box, her aggression contained, her curiosity re-awakened.

One can also observe in the six month interview/interaction segment, Carolyn struggle and come to terms with her daughter’s aggressive testing: “I think she understands a little bit because with her teeth now, she’s nipped me a couple of times when I’ve been feeding her and I’ll say, ‘No!’ very sternly and she’ll stop and look at me ... but I was expecting it! She chews on everything and her teeth are pretty sharp, but that’s okay!” Carolyn mimics Al’s vocal
aggression: “Raaaar! Yes!” Then, opening her mouth wide, Al slowly incorporates the rubber duck and begins to bite down hard. “Ahr!” Carolyn imitates, with a devouring gesture, to which Al drops the duck, reaches for it, takes it into her mouth and clamps down on it again. “Mmm .. is it good?” Carolyn asks, to which Al flings it from her mouth, hitting her mother in the face. Carolyn passes her the container of shapes and again, Al flings the duck out of her mouth in Carolyn’s direction, to which Carolyn rolls onto her side, supporting herself on one elbow. Elated, Al reaches after the toy and bringing it to her mouth again, smiles, with victory in her grin. Handed the toy again, she flings it. A little later, in looking directly into her mother’s eyes, she goes to pull at her glasses and Carolyn draws her close, head supported in her palm, while Al leans back and looks toward the camera, her arms flailing as she starts to cry. In this segment, we witness a mother remain present in the face of her baby’s persistent and aggressive demanding, which, for this baby, is sustaining. For a mother, it might go one of two ways: the reassuring aspect of the baby’s response might facilitate her attending to her own desires as weaning proceeds, or it might equally entice her to succumb to her child, lest run the risk of experiencing insurmountable guilt.

The process of stepping out and realizing change itself, holds up to the light, the constructive aspects of one’s own aggression--the impetus to meet difference head on--enabling one to offer one’s child the opportunity for ‘authentic’ relational experiences beyond their mutual projecting. Each of the women was seen to be in a different place with this. Not experiencing her seven-month-old infant as making aggressive demands at all, it is her toddler, whom Rae experiences as testing her patience. As such, she does not make attempts to unhook herself from her baby at this time, but lavishly tries to prolong the earlier experience of ‘oneness.’ Carolyn, on the other hand, consciously pulls back to make room for the six month old’s relation with her father at this time, with view to preserving her own sanity and facilitating the development of their relationship. By this time, Sharon refers to her need to be whole, and not just a reservoir and ‘catch all’ for her baby.

Leaving only became a real possibility for the women in this study when they realized that the infant not only ‘survived,’ but also potentially benefited from their own moving out and their reclaiming of self. Aggression, once integrated, prompts a mother to recognize the need to pull back, re-erect boundaries, and reclaim aspects of her own selfhood and bodily sense as productive and vital components in the separation process. Aggressive phantasy, Parker (1995) contended, engenders concern, as long as it is not conflated with actual destructiveness, which,
she asserts, would make parting too difficult to even contemplate. This is the fine line, which a mother fears to tread.

**Crossing the Desert: The Arduous Process of Weaning**

"When the sky is no longer a roof
one's eyes are finally open:
it is in the valley one draws breath"

Jan Zwicky

This second core theme hones in on the experience of the maternal journey outward in the sixth month as derived from the women's narratives. It subsumes the two interfacing experiences of holding on and letting go, which emerged as essential dimensions of the weaning process.

It is around the sixth post-natal month that a mother emerges from the maternal pool in search of solid ground. With the horizon broadening out again before her, she treks across dry land in striving to reach some external reference point. Weaning is like crossing the desert, in the struggle to overcome unforeseeable obstacles, in the challenge to persevere on a journey of abstinence that seems to extend endlessly. It is with hope and trepidation that one traverses this vast and ancient terrain in the buried trail of countless others who have already journeyed this way. Looking out over the horizon, a mother brings her cupped hand to her forehead to avoid the glare of the bright sun as she braves this new frontier. She sets out, baby on back, to find a reliable external outpost, re-integrate her former identity and re-situate her family, her internal space gradually extending. The baby, for his part, clamours to push forward, heedless of his mother's restraint, though constantly in her shadow. En route, a mother hovers between boxing in structure--narrowing her vision--and opening herself up to the ever-widening vista, for the pathway is as yet, unclear and one is never sure of what lies ahead; reality or mirage? One does not usually forfeit one for the other, but gradually comes to realize that one's inner world is forever augmented by the external, over which one has little control. The journey eventuates in the recognition of solitude, the perception of one's child as enveloped in a different skin, yet perpetually carried within. The days are long and one cannot always stop to attend to the baby's demands. A mother fears that her own supplies might run dry and sometimes finds herself wondering if they will survive the journey. Along the way, there will be losses to endure and

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1 From 'Absence,' in *Songs for relinquishing the earth* (1999, p. 70).
2 Spanning generations, it peters out, but does not necessarily end.
gains to be made—potential growth on the inner plane. She sets out baby on back, leaving behind their shared oasis to find a civilization that inadvertently comes forth to meet them.

The strain of ‘carrying’ one’s baby over this period of ‘disillusionment’ is expressed in the women’s account of their experience of weaning. The term ‘wean’ from the old English, ‘wenian,’ frequently used in the sense “to accustom (a child or young animal) to the loss of its mother’s milk,” also means “to detach or alienate (a person) his desires and affections from accustomed objects of pursuit or enjoyment; to reconcile by degrees to the privation of something; ... to remove or abate gradually (a desire or affection)” (Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition 1987, p. 3718). It also means to induce to give up; to train; to get used to; to habituate (Webster’s Dictionary, 1987, p. 1114). Here, the mother weans the baby from his omnipotent phantasy that he has created the world, while the baby weans the mother from her omnipotent wish that she can wholly fulfill and be wholly fulfilled by their relationship. The external third figure (in the present study, the father) in turn, weans the nursing couple from their transitory illusion that their love encompasses all of reality. Weaning both stirs and is prompted by the aggressive components in ambivalence. Spurred on by the experience of feeling divided between the need to feel in control and the desire to reach out to a world that is by nature unknowable, it bridges the rift between the all-encompassing introjective-projective loop and the unforeseen external reality that seems to suddenly rise before them. These are times when “one feels a fresh sense of aliveness in a joyous shock of difference” (Eigen, 1993, p. 24). This is a transitional phase that marks both closure and awakening:

"It’s almost like closure a little bit. I won’t say my cocoon is ending, but I feel like I’ve been interfacing with the world and it’s like the end of a stage sort of for Helen and I. I feel I can let her go a little bit and I can let go a little bit, and this has been really helpful because all these things I’m thinking, I can say out loud, and it’s letting me know that I can move on too. “ (Sharon-3)

Letting Go: Release, Relief and Loss

"The night-time thing is weirding me out and I’m starting to feel like maybe we should get out more nights. There were feelings that somehow he was going to feel abandoned by me, but I’m coming to terms I think that that’s just not the case.” (Corin-3)

By the sixth month, we witness the three first time mothers more actively strive to renew their link with the external world and to reclaim aspects of their pre-maternal identity, knowing it is at a cost, for maternity has already coloured their viewing lens, divided their longings. Carolyn speaks to looking forward to “having a bit of space for myself--being me, as opposed to being her mother all the time,” while at the same time, feeling that she would “love to be in a position
where [she] could stay at home with her longer,” fearful that she “might miss ... these first years.” Through holding a baby in mind, desire itself becomes more all-inclusive.

Leaving the intensity of the early months is nevertheless fraught with ambivalence, the mother’s longing for lost aspects of her pre-maternal life—the ongoing connection with friends, the honing of a career perhaps—experienced against a backdrop of fear of either abandoning oneself to the maternal role, or harming the baby through letting go. Her internal split is no longer confined to her own conflicting needs, but now implicate the baby, who has become an integral part of her internal and external world. Concern extended, honing a career for example, may now be seen in terms of bettering the family standard. Here, one encounters depressive pain—loss, guilt, longing—on the maternal journey outward.

Overt evidence of the baby’s growing autonomy itself, can induce wrenching feelings of displacement and loss, diminishing a mother’s self esteem. Referring to her baby’s recent weaning onto solids, Corin notes: “At the beginning ... I felt like I was being displaced ... replaced, like I was no longer his sole provider. It evoked some feelings of loss of the intimacy between us or the uniqueness of our relationship together ... loss of that oneness of just us.” It occurred for this mother at the point of leaving, at a time when she found herself “having trouble just letting him feel so frustrated;” at a time when she was experiencing her milk “supply depleting.” In separating out, there is an experienced loss of that earlier sense of inarticulate connectedness. Integral to the experience is the loss of the familiar and predictable rhythmic flow of their bodies, their patterned dance, which a mother fears might leave her baby feeling out of his depths: “When I went out Saturday night ... it wasn’t leaving him; the issue was someone else putting him to bed ... I just feel like he’s going to wonder what’s going on in this world, ‘cause we’ve got a pretty solid routine that he’s used to” (Corin-3). The thought of handing over one’s child to someone outside of the familiar family circle induces concern and protectiveness, for intuitively a mother knows that no one is as intimately involved with her baby as she at this point in time, the ‘other woman’ invariably falling short in her mind: “I have a women coming in ... and she’s transferring to her, but ... she was leaving her in the crib too long ... I felt protective ... I know this woman wouldn’t hurt her, but there’s nobody who cares for Helen the way that I would” (Sharon-3). Anticipating the difficulty in leaving her baby overnight, Sharon contemplates: “It’s not being away from her as much as just how is she with other people.” In contemplating change, the women now situate themselves in their child’s mind. There is both anticipated relief and loss in reaching the point where one is no longer the only one to shut out the baby’s day.
Along with experienced loss, the women also express a sense of relief and release in letting go. While Corin winces at the very "idea of leaving" upon thinking how "interactive and playful" Kyle has become, she also sees it as "an opportunity ... to have more space and freedom." Carolyn experiences this time of weaning as one of growth and regression: "I've got her on solid foods now and she's been a bit finicky about that in the last couple of days and preferring the breast ... I'm a little relieved, 'cause I'm looking forward to it being over with and then hopefully she'll be sleeping through the night again." Evidence of her infant's growing autonomy can at once free a mother up and induce an unbearable sense of rift. Sharon speaks to the comfort that breast feeding affords, while also acknowledging her desire for release: "It's very comforting for both of us and it's a nice way to check in with her in the morning (but) there's a part of me that would like to just go to work, give up the breast-feeding altogether and ... get to the gym every day. I'm having to wrestle in my mind." Speaking specifically to her baby's rejection of the breast, she notes her own ambivalence: "Now, when she shows her dismay, part of me is sad, just in terms of time passing, but part of me is happy, in that it frees me up ... I don't feel as drained." What is it that a mother ultimately feels she is losing in letting go or being let go?

To relinquish the pleasure of intense intimate contact, to extract oneself from the joy that emanates from engaging new life, demands further growth and individuation--a return to the self--which is somewhat paradoxical, given that their linkage is now a given, the experience of mothering indelibly etched on the inner walls, just as one's own experience of being mothered remains forever embedded deeply within the self. What are some of the deeper feelings evoked in women around the time of loss and potential gain and transformation?

Furman (1982) saw the infant as the instigator in the weaning process and the weaning period, the first time in their relationship that a mother is called upon to be left; the first time she is called upon to acquiesce to "the role of assisting him in ultimately supplanting her as an adult" (p. 19). Weaning problems, she considered, are directly correlated with maternal difficulties in dealing with the infants' own push to be weaned. This rather one-sided view however, leaves the ball entirely in the mother's court, when sometimes it is the mother herself, who initiates the weaning and not necessarily by choice. In the interactions here, three of the women were equally instrumental in instigating change at this time, with both mother and infant seen to experience ambivalence that was not entirely bound to the maternal response. One might ask then, if it is the mother or the child who feels deprived of pleasurable closeness and responds with intense
feelings of loss and anger in parting, or both? Here, as demonstrated in the narrative accounts, the response to weaning was compounded by the women’s growing altruistic concern.

In her 1994 paper, Furman asked, what makes it so hard for mothers to be there to be left, whereas the data in this study beg the equally important question of what makes it hard for her to leave? For Furman, and subsequently Parker (1995), weaning entails coming to recognize that one’s child is no longer part of oneself, but rather a separate loved person, the change in “investment” representing the “hallmark of parenting” (Furman, 1994, p. 150). In this study, what infiltrates the women’s narrative accounts is their experience of shift on the internal plane, the sense that what for the last six months had assumed the role of holding her together, is now in the process of evaporating, leaving in its wake, the felt or anticipated sense of absence within, and with that, the experienced loss of part of the self. The women in this study did not experience this shift as necessarily forced upon them, but rather experienced themselves as somewhat instrumental in initiating the process, the impetus to move forward inherent. In the wake of this experienced shift, primitive anxieties are stirred, the nature of which include fear of losing one’s sense of wholeness, one’s essential groundedness and capacity to be effective: “I feel a little more insecure since I’ve had Helen ... I lost my confidence somewhere ... I don’t feel like I have that edge. I have grand plans to sit down and do something and it doesn’t happen. If I don’t get out of here, I won’t get anything done. It scares me” (Sharon-3). Initially, parting evokes a feeling of internal emptiness—a felt gap on the inner plane—that induces an immediate longing to fill it, along with experienced anxiety about the baby’s well being: “The very first time it was a bit scary ... weird ... It was like something was missing. I think we felt some relief because we were freed up a little bit, but we also felt a loss in terms of the little face and the little eyes and our interacting with her” (Sharon-3). In first parting, a mother experiences her mind wandering back to her child, as she contemplates: “Is she missing us? Is she comfortable?” It is not just the pleasurable link to one’s inarticulate child that one fears or feels one is losing, but the projected elements of the self that are somehow felt lodged within him. It parallels and is bound up with the baby’s convoluted experience of entanglement with his maternal caregiver around this time. The experience of loss is accentuated by the fact that maternal involvement continues to be both mental and physical and as much linked to the fact of her biological structure—her relationship to having an internal as opposed to an external body part, and by default, her need to fuse and care for an extension of herself—as it is to the experience of having emotionally carried her child within, the baby having both confirmed her sense of inner good and put it to the test. By the sixth month, three of the women expressed either overtly or covertly, the desire to unhook, not to
detach, the desire to carry over, not withdraw at this time of transition. Experienced concretely in the body at times of parting, the felt gap within internal space propels the process of reclaiming, which includes disentangling and boundary re-clarification: "The challenge is in teaching her, 'This is your time; this is my time!'" (Carolyn-3). In health, one does not want to sever the emotional link.

With her self-definition once again threatened, harkening back to a time when boundaries were more blurred, a mother experiences hope and relief in stepping onto solid ground and reclaiming aspects of her pre-maternal identity: "As each piece comes back to me I start to feel more hopeful. It's like my former self, but a different self--my own habits like, but it can't be like it used to be" (Sharon-3). Corin also affirms how containing this process of reclamation is: "It's easier when he's taking a nap or when someone else is attending to his needs. Then I have my space to be separate from his. I haven't reclaimed everything I need to reclaim, but I definitely do what I need to do, which sometimes is just relax." Looking forward to returning to work, Carolyn notes: "I know that's going to be hard, but at the same time, I like my work and the people. I'm missing that now ... I want my life as well. I think I'll be a better mother for it."

The anxiety induced by the fear of losing oneself to one's growing child was seen as mitigated over time by the mother's pleasure in her child's progress, as demonstrated in the narrative accounts of at least three of the women. Corin takes pride in reading her child as "so advanced," as "interested in that toy that is for a much older kid." The fourth participant was more inclined to stall the weaning process altogether: "I offer the breast all the time ... Even when she doesn't want it I try to give it to her ... It's hard because I've always thought that would solve any problem" (Rae-3). Through the process of holding each of her children in mind, Rae experiences time as racing by at an inordinate speed and suddenly imagines her children as being out of the picture. For now, she holds off the weaning process, fearing--in her own words: "just the cycle of life--we grow up, we get older and we die!"

Weaning threatens the very integrity of one's person, in confronting a mother with both the widening gap between her and her child and an immediate experience of absence and loss on the inner plane. The process of letting go entails coming face to face with that sense of absence in oneself. In her poem, Trauermusik, Zwicky (1999) writes: "Mourning requires an acknowledgment that death is the absence of desire" and that "in the relinquishing that is the end of mourning, we must pass through - as through a ghost - that absence in ourselves." (Pp. 84-85). It is not something that is once and for all accomplished, but returned to again and again throughout a lifetime. As Sheppard (1996) notes, "We are ferocious in our refusal to mourn" (p.
65). Is this what prompts a mother to hold on to the original link? Is it this striving to regain a sense of wholeness that propels her to resurrect structure at this time?

**Holding On: Preserving the Link to the Inarticulate**

“When we draw the blinds at dusk
is the moment we most want to open
them again”

Jan Zwicky

“I don’t want her to grow up, because I’m enjoying her being a baby so much. She’s not trying to exert her independence. She’s just still part of me.” (Rae-3)

There is nothing cut and dried about the maternal journey toward re-integration. As one proceeds on the outward trek, one is drawn from time to time, to longingly look back over one’s shoulder and feel the warmth of the maternal waters that seem to recede further into the background and become more enticing the further outward one moves. Rae compares her exasperation in dealing with her toddler’s exerting his will with the warmth of her infant’s felt dependency at this time: “Sometimes Kieran will be having this major tantrum and I’ll think, ‘God, I don’t want to deal with this. I can’t stand it!’ And then I’ll look over at her and she’s smiling away at me and I just feel this wave of happiness.” Separating out has such huge ramifications for one’s sense of personal integrity that the desirous infant can at times, be experienced as comforting and self-affirming. Rae quotes her mother as saying: “Oh, she just has eyes for you” to which she concurs: “She just wants me so much. I love it. It’s very unconditional.” It is in having an inkling of the change to come that inclines her to want to hold onto their dependent link: “I think ... when she becomes a toddler ... I’ll have a lot of the same feelings that I have now about Kieran and that’s part of the reason that I just want to enjoy her babiness.” [Recall Rae’s considerable sense of loss of the already established intimate link to her first child when Sara was first born.]

Gender would appear to be another factor complicating the developmental picture at this time; that is, the type of relational link that a particular female baby or male baby is felt to offer, including what a mother expects, and its impact on her at this time. What emerges from the data of this granted, very small sample, is the experience of one’s male child as exercising considerable outward reaching that is not necessarily synchronous with a mother’s own. In comparing her children, Rae remarks: “I remember Kieran was always wanting to get on to the next stage and he’d get really frustrated and try to do things that he couldn’t because he wasn’t

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1 From *Songs for relinquishing the earth* (1999, p.51).
able yet physically, whereas she doesn’t seem to be too upset about that.” There may be constitutional reasons for this.

To refer back to the literature: in her work on the psychodynamics of individuation, Offerman-Zuckerberg (1988) suggested that the unique relationship of mothers to their daughters is related to “observable differences in the female neonate’s constitutional ability to relate” that includes “observable differences in eye contact, activity level and responsiveness” (p. 38). She also raised for consideration that “body-gender ‘alikeness’ may stimulate more ‘affective resonance’” and present greater projective opportunity for mothers, impacting the course of individuation and rendering “self-body boundaries between mothers and daughters more ‘permeable’ and diffuse,” and separation more complicated (p. 38). More complicated for whom? It is at this time that Carolyn considers: “I’m learning what a mother-daughter relationship is and I wonder how different it would be with a boy!”

That gender difference in neonates trigger differential responses in parents, has been substantiated in the developmental research. Offerman-Zuckerberg (1988) cited the research of Hittelman and Dickes, which demonstrated that female neonates spend more time engaged in eye to eye contact (as a measure of personal relatedness) averaged over time, which has implications for how mothers experience that connection. Mahler, Pine and Bergman (1975) had found that the individuation process was more difficult for girls than boys, based on their observations that female infants demanded more bodily closeness, and demonstrated a more ambivalent tie to the maternal care-giver, in contrast to their male counterparts, who were “more stiffly resistant to hugging and kissing, beyond and even during differentiation” (from 4 to 7 months) and more inclined to turn to the outside world and their own bodies for satisfaction (p. 106). There was some indication of this tendency in Kyle’s shrugging his mother off as he attempted to engage with objects around this time. In the present study, attention is drawn to what the baby inherently brings to the relationship and its direct impact on the maternal caregiver in the context of their unique situation. Certainly, the one male infant in this study was more inclined to pursue his agenda outside the relational orbit, while at the same time maintaining a strong relational link. His fleeting glances over to his mother for applause contrasted with his female counterpart’s seeking out approval by way of frequent gazing over to their mothers. Constitutional differences aside, Kyle’s apparent joy in exploring would appear to be as much bound up with his mother’s capacity to ‘carry him over’ this developmental hurdle.

The issue of gender is raised here, not to generalize, nor to minimize individual variation, but to draw attention to what in the current data, points to the differential impact on a mother of
negotiating separation when either 'difference' or 'similarity' is accentuated, be that biological or perceived. One has only just adjusted to having given oneself over, bodily and mentally, to the daily task of providing the baby with a sense of repletion, when one is called upon to extract oneself somewhat and adjust to his rapidly changing need. When this shift is experienced as coming about too abruptly, it may feel as if they are each working at cross-purposes, making it difficult to sustain a sense of relational harmony. In the following segment, a mother accentuates their joining, while the baby demonstrates his surging autonomy: Holding Kyle around the chest, Corin strokes his head, and bringing her second hand around him, nuzzles close to kiss his other cheek. "Checks were made for kissin'!" she says, as he yanks away, first looking up over his shoulder at her and then outward with a determined look. She asks a question and he turns the other way, his expression flattening out. As he returns to centre, Corin's face brightens and she leans over and gives him a squeaky kiss on the nose. He doesn't stir. "We like this song!" she exclaims and sings along enthusiastically, while leaning over and hand over hand, gets him to shake the rattle. He shakes it independently and transfers it to the other hand. As she draws closer, he closes his eyes and turns his head to face in the opposite direction.

Invariably, there is loss to endure in adjusting to a baby's outward shift, along with a felt responsibility to facilitate the gradual lengthening of the gap 'between,' but such momentous developmental change requires ongoing negotiation. Not only has one to adjust to developmental changes in oneself, but in addition, to changes in how one is needed. It is not just a mother's own need that prompts her to hold on, but her felt responsibility to provide for her child the containing he needs—her presence in the right dosage—to carry them over the hump of weaning. One does not just suddenly let go, which itself might be experienced by the mother as 'dropping the baby' and by the baby, as being let fall. Here, we observe the women struggle to negotiate a smooth shift for both herself and her child, the one bound up with the other in her mind: "Everything's a part of you all at the same time ... What's good for me is good for her" (Sharon-3). Here, we observe her trying to fulfill her infant as much as she tries to maintain her own emotional groundedness.

Perhaps weaning in the face of blatant 'difference' presents a specific developmental challenge and growth opportunity, throwing different conflicts into relief. To lay stress on the assertion that separating out and individuation is more difficult for infant girls however, is to inadvertently fall into the trap of prizing separation over relatedness, whitewashing the fact that both need to be negotiated in the weaning phase, with the fact of 'otherness' and 'difference' integral to both. One might just as easily focus at this time, on the developmental difficulty of
infant boys in integrating the fact of dependency on the mother. One discovers and re-discovers oneself through relationship. Is a mother inclined to ‘hold on’ by virtue of her somatic design or her altruistic concern? Is biology destiny?

A mother has to rely both on her baby’s cues and her own developmental process in assessing when to linger and when to take her leave. To return to the desert metaphor, she has to consider when to stop, take her baby in arms, and how long they might need to bathe (refuel) in the maternal pool before proceeding on their forward trek? In entering the weaning phase, one has to shift from the habit of gauging how much closeness an infant needs to how much space and distance he can tolerate. Corin notices this shift within herself: “I feel I’m always ... with him in physical contact all the time, but sometimes at more of a distance. I like to let him have some independent play ... He needs me to be there when he wants me.” The struggle is in finding a way of maintaining the link, while simultaneously facilitating the gradual lengthening of the cord.

In the midst of forward mowing, one is invariably drawn back from time to time, to an earlier mode of linkage that is not confined to gender, but to a felt or wished-for state of unconditional “merger” that momentarily blots out the uncomfortable dimensions of human uncertainty. Nursing can be felt to revive that lost sense, by temporarily shutting out the rest of the world and closing the daunting gap: “One thing that really stood out was when I started nursing her, I really noticed the prolactin hormone ... because it just makes you feel more loving and I did remember feeling that when I first started nursing Kieran and it did wash right over me and I’d feel this incredible love for him and that’s how I felt just then when I was nursing her” (Rae-3). Based on her ongoing identification with her infant, such bodily re-immersions in the face of change—a throw back to the time of one’s own inarticulate infancy—are considered as necessary and as sustaining to her infant as they are to a mother herself: “At times it’s a real physical feeling, like I can actually feel the hormone going through my body. It’s a nice way of connecting with her and at one point, before I started nursing her I really wanted ... to hold her ... so I was really glad that she wanted me to nurse. It was a way of bringing her into my arms” (Rae-3). Nursing is experienced as a way of cutting through an imposing reality and maintaining that emotional link with one’s child as one goes through the process of separating out: “Even at school sometimes, I’m lookin’ at all these 22 year olds who are ... preoccupied with getting information and I’m just ... more interested in breast pumping because I feel it connects me back to Helen ... Pumping is a way of maintaining the link emotionally.” (Sharon-3). What seems crucial to this mother is her strong sense that it makes a difference to her infant.
The women in this study unanimously experienced the gradual wean as necessary in preparing both mother and child for the pain of the widening gap. Inside a mother compartmentalizes, rationalizes, or draws on her faith in the Gods, to assuage feeling somewhat unintegrated upon first leaving her baby: “If I start obsessing about it, I just turn it over to faith because you could make yourself crazy worrying” (Sharon-3). In health, a mother ‘holds on’ to buffer them both against the wholly unprepared blow of reality, and ‘pulls out,’ once trust is established, to expose them both to the opportunity of learning from experience.

Re-Structuring the Maternal Frame: The Side-ways Step that Prompts Reflectivity

This third core theme describes the experienced shift in the grounding link with externality as derived from the women’s first hand accounts at the sixth and ninth month interviews. It comprises three sub-themes: structure as containment of the women themselves; structure as protectiveness; and structure as a distancing mechanism that heralds the return of perspective.

By the sixth postnatal month, the women experienced a shift in self-body boundaries in accordance with experienced phenomenological changes in internal space, giving rise to a stronger yearning for order making and structure at this time. In the weeks immediately following the birth, while their babies grappled with establishing a rudimentary sense of boundedness and internal cohesion, the women had experienced a loosening of self-body boundaries, and a usurping of their internal space by the maternal function. By three months, prompted by an awakening curiosity, we witnessed a slow gravitation toward structure in the form of emerging routines--the slow turn of a head toward the familiar appeal of a reality that is external.

By the sixth month, with change looming and separation pending, a more definitive turning of the whole body outward in search of order and groundedness is observed, and what might have hitherto been experienced as a comfortable sea of fog, now begins to feel more like unbound chaos, a dark ominous cloud, a swarming of bees, or a “boxing in”--the feeling of being trapped on a circular path, or lost in a desert with dwindling supplies. Here in this transitional phase, one scurries to find a way off this circular trail that seems only to lead back to the maternal. Being in the desert can feel as claustrophobic as it can feel magnificently liberating. As the baby becomes more demanding in drawing closer to parting, the haze looms like a dark cloud suspended, a mother’s supplies now felt as split between she and her dependent child. It is around this time that we observe each of the women try to find her way back onto a linear path
that leads to some external outpost as a means to extend her inner plane and broaden out thinking space to sustain them both on their forward trek. By the ninth month, with this renewed structural frame in place, a mother’s own need for definitive boundaries once again subsides, the guiding map becoming less vital, and change more integratable. In this study the process of weaning was seen to begin somewhere around the halfway mark in the first year and to extend into the fourth transition phase. Accordingly, I will draw on the data gathered at both the sixth and ninth month transitions in documenting the derived themes in these two remaining sections of the analysis.

With the onset of weaning at around six months, three of the participants felt a greater urgency to reclaim internal space, re-define self-body boundaries and re-institute structure. The fourth expressed the same urgency and longing by the ninth month, the fact that she had a toddler to contend with and was not planning to return to her career in the immediate future seeming to have a bearing on the timing. The yearned-for structure on the mother’s part at this developmental transition was seen as constituting a first step in dealing with pending loss at the point at which her infant was becoming more possessive, its function threefold in her mind: 1) to provide containment of the mother herself through this period of change; 2) to protect her child in traversing the developmental hurdle of weaning; and 3) to pave the way toward a renewed self reflectivity.

**Structure as Containment of the Women Themselves**

"I want the routine to help me as well. If I wasn’t going back to work I would still want the structure, but the scheduling I wouldn’t feel the need for." (Rae-3)

As a form of maternal containment, structure serves as a bridge to the outside at the point at which one begins to experience the claustrophobic fear of being consumed by an extended experience of encapsulated vastness. In the second half of the first year, a mother may begin to feel trapped, wedged in, prompting her to find a means to create order out of experienced chaos. In the fourth interview, Carolyn retrospectively recounts: “My need for structure the last time [sixth month] was probably related to feeling just a bit too trapped. And part of my drive to get her into a routine was so I’d have time for myself.” By the ninth postnatal month, we observed the same three participants [all first time mothers] gradually relax their boundaries once again, based on a growing trust that the world would not cave in, a security afforded in part, by the creation of a reliable, flexible framework, which provided an emotional groundedness as the women’s own internal space broadened out: “When we were able to make time for myself during the week, that took the pressure off ... Before [sixth month] I was trying to get her into a routine and she didn’t take to it very well, so I decided to kind of wing it and I feel more relaxed. I think
she’s probably more comfortable … It’s quite different from how it was at the beginning, ‘cause there’s still a bit of a framework for me and I do like having that even though it’s loose’ (Carolyn-4). As soon as a mother is able to reclaim inner space, her own tight hold on structure loosens considerably: “We’re just … responding to her more, and trying to be more flexible … There’s a rhythm there” (Carolyn-4).

The six month old for his part is no longer content to remain within the confines of maternal space, but pushes outward to meet an ever-expanding world, at times shrugging his mother off to venture further afield. But however much he may fight his dependence, he relies on her carefully charting the outward path. In the second half of the first year, the women gradually moved toward a position of being able to stand outside the shared dyadic space to observe change. More inclined at that point to define their role as it fit with their current move toward integration, the women began to structure their outward path, the interview meetings themselves experienced as anchor points, something concrete to work toward: “It’s a little bit of structure. I know … logically things are a process but when you’re in it sometimes, it’s like, oh my God, this is never going to end! But … I knew that it would change ‘cause I could see how it changed each time I saw you. It gave me some perspective” (Sharon-4).

Going with the flow starts to feel quite restrictive. A mother raises her head. By about the sixth month she expresses her own desire for structure in the face of experienced fluidity and begins to order her experience: “I’d like to create some structure for my life … Just this staying home in the mornings and having him take his nap here already feels a lot better for me than to … have no idea how long he’ll be up or what time he’ll go back down.” (Corin-3). “A nice morning solid nap” she feels, might provide her with “a nice mental break,” a routine at least making “life a little easier in terms of predictability.” It is a pattern she is now “trying to impose” on her child. By the sixth month, Corin notices the shift within herself: “I wasn’t ready to put him out of my arms, when I saw you last. It took me some time and some adjustment for him.” Weaning demands endurance and patience. Carolyn speaks to a similar need to impose structure around this time, as she focuses on the process of “stepping outside of what we do and thinking in terms of planning ahead so as to make that change easier for her.” The routinization is linked with anticipated leaving, pre-empting the return of perspective. A mother pulls for structure, not just to support her infant’s adjustment, but to sustain her own mental health. It is a means by which she re-defines her borders and re-locates herself back inside her own psychic skin.

But while routine, structure and the predictability they afford are experienced as emotionally grounding, they are also experienced as confining, interfering with spontaneity, her
baby's and a mother' own. Six months into motherhood, Corin finds herself “struggling with the whole routine and structure versus not-structure kind of things.” Structure re-constitutes an internal order. Staving off uncertainty, it acts as a safety valve, countervailing the overwhelming sense of chaos: “A good two-hour chunk is very nice for me, but there’s a couple of things that I’m starting to feel the structure’s getting in the way of” (Corin-3). The aim is to become “more flexible.” Relationships revolve around circling rhythms that are rarely that predictable.

Structure temporarily provides a mother with something solid to hold onto in the face of transience. Drawn back to the social realm in search of an element of closure in facing the reality of uncertainty, the maternal scaffold becomes aligned once again with the social order. It is at this time that the walls might go up, or remain forever crumbled; she might turn on her heels or hover. There is still ambivalence to contend with. Sharon becomes tearful when she contemplates separating out from this unequivocally authentic and exclusive time with her child: “This is the first time in [my] life that I’ve only had to do one thing and focus on Helen, and these are happy tears ... I don’t think there’s anything else you could do that’s more important.”

In crossing the desert, there are few discerning guiding posts. It is a journey on which one must constantly move forward, while bearing the uncertainty of not knowing what lies ahead. Does one cling to order and fixity or flexibly take the next step forward? Weaning forces a reconciliation.

By the sixth postnatal month, the three first time mothers demonstrated a decided itch to move on, employing structure as a means to reclaim lost aspects of the self. For Sharon, her weight is symbolic of the load she now carries: “It’s a visual reminder that my life is different and I have a fear that I’ll never get the weight off.” But she persists in reaching out nevertheless, reminding herself that she is “strong inside and ... still the person that [she] was.” While she anticipates it getting “easier” upon returning to work, “where it’s structured,” it is her identifying with the maternal scaffold--the frame that upholds the child--that directs her back to reclaim her broader identity: “If I don’t take care of myself I can’t do anything!” (Sharon-3). Feeling torn, in juggling work and school and family life, she nevertheless holds onto that tension with the conviction that “going to school separate from [her] life with Helen is uplifting.” It serves perhaps as a concrete corner post in internal space as she approaches the point of integrating the experience of ‘being in,’ with the experience of standing back and ‘looking in.’

Six months into motherhood, the thought of returning to her career is experienced by Carolyn as “a release” from the constant focus on the child. This need to reclaim space, along with some sense of internal order becomes more predominant as the baby becomes more
demanding of his mother’s specific attention, which was seen to occur in the infants in this study somewhere between 6 and 9 months:

_About two months ago [seventh month], I went through a time where I was just starting to climb the walls a bit ... She went through a stage of being very demanding when she knew who we were and she knew strangers were strangers and ... she was basically tied to the hips ... I felt a little bit boxed in and I really just needed space ... to get out ... and not have to think about her and deal with her... so we agreed upon a schedule where I could have a couple of hours to myself ... That lasted for about a month and a half maybe, and we just got really busy with her ... but on weekends I’ve still been able to spend time with family and friends ... and don’t need that space as much. I felt like I was just running on a treadmill and I needed to get off._ (Carolyn-4)

By the ninth month, the pendulum swings again, by which time, Carolyn finds herself challenged by the temptation of losing herself to the world of externality: “Now the biggest challenge is ... trying to think about how to balance everything between her, my husband and work ... I haven’t thought about work for almost nine months, so to get myself back into that frame of mind without losing myself in it, because I think that would be a little tempting ... just that being free of the child.” Sharon experiences the nine month mark as “the end of that little nesting time with just her and I,” which she feels they negotiated together: “She was letting me know she didn’t want it, so it made it easier for me, rather than just my decision.” Coming to the close of the nursing chapter evokes “mixed feelings,” sustaining the marriage of the physical and the emotional: “My hormones changed. I didn’t feel as ... teary, sentimental and sensitive. I felt a resurgence of being able to get my body back a little bit, individuation, with Helen, like being one and now we’re separate.” (Sharon-4). Feeling that in order for her to “get it together,” she has to “pull back a little bit to reclaim” her self, her “physical self” being “a big part of that,” returning to the gym is experienced by Sharon, as the “first step towards independence.” Having dived deep into the maternal pool, there comes a time when a mother is naturally propelled to re-surface, cut through the water’s skin and repossess her own silhouette, her body seeped in maternity. Structure provides breathing space.

In contrast to the other three participants, Rae by the seventh months, speaks neither to her desire to re-institute boundaries, nor reclaim internal space, but experiences rather, her identity at that time, as still so bound to her two children, that to stand back, is perhaps to still risk losing aspects of her self: “Once I started having babies I realized this was for me ... As much as I get frustrated ... I see that as a career.” For Rae, mothering actually provided a bridge to the social world, such that the very thought of moving out of this phase is experienced as both “scary” and “exciting.” It is not until the ninth month that she too, expresses a desire to break her
confinement: “For the last month I’ve been going to bed with my mind just going woor woor, just around and around. It is a sacrifice, but ... sometimes I do just need a break. After nine months of it I feel frustrated. I make sure that I have adult contact all the time ... Otherwise I feel I would just go crazy!”

It is a “fine line” that a mother treads at this time of weaning. While she herself feels the urgency to gather herself together, wanting her child to identify with her outward step, to see her as “competent ... so that she will aspire to that,” she does not want to over-extend herself or risk crossing that line by becoming “a workaholic!” Confronted with the dilemma of how to “get off that treadmill,” for Sharon, “the best scenario” is “to work part time and be a mom.” But it is not the ‘work’ per se that appears to offer the much sought emotional grounding at this time, but rather the reliable link with externality, the recovery of mental space beyond the maternal function. Working toward achieving a state of equilibrium, Corin in the sixth month is drawn to “the idea of having a piece of both; not a lot of the other [laughs], just a little bite-size morsel, so that [I] have a little space from this.”

“There is a way our bodies/ are not our own,” writes Anne Michaels (1999) in her poem, ‘Into Arrival’ (p. 5). Chiseled from the loins of our ancestral past, they house the imprint of generational rhythms circled through time, rhythms the mind might prefer to forget. But there is a transparency to the body’s outer borders—the way one bumps up against the other, caresses with fingers, withdraws a shoulder—that instantaneously reveals the shape of relational vulnerability. A mother pulls back to climb back into herself and free her child, their linkage already seeped in history that remakes itself in each new encounter. Structure serves here to redefine the body’s envelope. Space reclaimed is already space transformed.

**Structure as Protective Shroud**

This second sub-theme, derived from the women’s narratives, comprises two dimensions: structure as a shield that protects; and structure as an extension of the container function of the (m)other.

With the observable shift from the position of being “wrapped up in the baby” to wrapping something around the baby, like a carefully crafted quilt that provides comfort in absence, structure becomes the scaffold that holds the baby together until the maternal function is fully consolidated within. In contrast to the predictability of their earlier choreography, the mother, from six months on, begins to weave a more structured world around her child to instill a
new sense of security and reliability—a new order that defines the boundary between them. This new structure is not something that necessarily sits well initially with either mother or child, since it entails gradually extending the space between them. On the inner plane, a mother still struggles with moving out of her infant’s orbit and repossessing her own borders. What is structure employed to contain during this weaning phase? What does a mother fear might ‘spill out’?

**A Shield that Protects**

“I mean he’s crawled out of the stroller twice and you saw him today, halfway out of the highchair! You need eyes behind your head!” (Corin-4)

The period between six and nine months is marked by increased mobility and exploration on the baby’s part. In a mother’s mind her baby’s expanding curiosity and growing need for stimulation is pitted against the need to impose structure as a means to order their lives. By the ninth month, Sharon observes how much work her baby’s “touching and pulling everything” entails. “There’s a temper there now,” she notes. “You almost have to pin her down to change her and she rebels.” Placed sitting on the floor, we observe Helen at this time, race on her hands and knees away from her mother. “My, look at you go!” Sharon exclaims. Helen grins at the camera and upon reaching the table, is momentarily swooped into the air and seated back down again, their boundaries momentarily re-defined.

Structure, employed during the weaning phase, both as a protective shield and as a means to contain the mother herself en route to regaining the capacity for perspective, curtails the baby’s surging demands at the point where loss is yet to be overcome. While the expanding flexibility is freeing, the baby’s surmounting demands induce a mother to put up the barrier again to ease the transition for both of them. By the sixth month, Carolyn notes: “I’m more concerned about spoiling her now and that picking her up all the time, she’ll get too used to it. That’s part of why I want to structure the day.” Aware of her own felt split between imposing limits and indulging her child at this time, she comments: “I get a little pang and feel torn about it. I’d love to just indulge her for as long as I can, but at the same time, I know we need to be a little more disciplined and that she has to learn to play by herself a little longer so that it’s going to be an easier transition. In the long run, it’s what we need to do.”

By nine months, the baby’s active curiosity becomes more visibly associated with danger, risk, and the need for safe-keeping, offsetting once again, the rhythmic flow of their transactional cycle: “Up until now she’s been pretty easy to take care of and (as) she’s sort of getting into more things, my frustration level and my patience is a little bit short” (Rae-4). Noting the shift in
what her baby needs, from "a lot of holding and cuddling" to her "starting to require some discipline, in terms of being talked to so that she can understand things more," Rae decides with her second child, "to be little bit more, not strict, but when [I] say, 'No!' [I] want to really mean it." It marks a qualitative shift in the way she holds her baby in mind.

The conflict between trying to offer a safe challenging environment that is adequately stimulating and trying to avoid the risk of harm becomes more prominent in the ninth month: "There's a safety issue a little bit now, whereas there wasn't before" (Sharon-4). Seeing her baby as "more mobile and independent" with "more opportunity to hurt herself," a mother feels "the pull" in "trying to child proof and make it fun for her, but at the same time, safe." The greater the mobility, the greater the felt risk and the consequent need to erect barriers. In noticing Kyle's agility at nine months, Corin relates: "It's a ton of work keeping things safe for him so that I can breathe ... but it could be worse if I wasn't child proofed as much as I am." Determined to "let him explore" she feels strongly that "you decide whether you're going to socially isolate your kid or let the kid go through the bumps and grinds of everyday life!" But the more the baby unabashedly ventures, the faster she reaps him in. A common dynamic observed across participants in the ninth month interactions was the baby persistently chasing after the cord of the camcorder, attempting to place it in his/her mouth and the mother protectively curbing his/her action. Counterintuitive to the sense that further development brings greater ease of adaptation, advances in motor development were seen to increase the risk of harm and the attendant maternal anxiety. One step forward, two steps back. By the ninth month Rae reflects: "I kept thinking when she was younger ... it'll get easier, but it's not, because she wants to crawl to the end of the bed and stand up, so I'm terrified she's going to fall right onto her head." She relates an incident where Sara "managed to stand up and bobbing up and down, she banged her head." What feels challenging to the women in the ninth month is encouraging exploration, while ensuring safety. Exercising the vigil and being the one to prohibit can leave a mother with a bad taste in her mouth: "I don't want to be like, 'No!' about everything" (Rae-4).

While there were numerous examples of the women redirecting or guiding their baby's actions to ensure safety, an element of guilt with regard to imposing limits, which varied by degree across the four participants, was observed. For some, reason dictates, safety becoming the bottom line: "You have to say no to some things because they're not safe. She doesn't like it. I don't like it, but my common sense kicks in" (Sharon-4). [That said, Helen crawls over to the sound system and bangs her head on the side of the stand.] The baby's rapid motor development also stirs fear and panic. Corin is struck by this new imposition and finds herself unnerved by
"little things," like finding "one of the plum pips on the floor," which she notes is "perfect size for like basically choking him to death!" Vigilance itself requires "so much energy and work," that to have to check up on other family members to ensure the baby's safety is doubly wearing. Rae experiences the whole task of "baby-proofing," the "constantly picking up little pieces of paper," which she fears Sara will "choke on if she gets them into her mouth," as physically wearing. It impinges upon the relational flow and leaves her longing for "that little baby that would just sit there and play."

By the ninth month, the women perceive the baby as becoming more outwardly defiant: "The new issues are that he's not listening to 'no' so quickly. He was a month or so ago ... so it's a lot of work to keep taking him away from danger areas." (Corin-4). She begins to 'see' (and first becomes aware of seeing) an element of hostility in their interaction. Referring to the incident above, where she felt she could not curtail her infant's unsafe bouncing, Rae becomes aware of feeling angry: "I was getting angry and realizing I'm getting angry at her already."

Difficult as it is to integrate her own contradictory feelings, a mother finds it hard to simultaneously hold in mind the dependent, gentle infant who caresses with the assertive baby who retaliates. Corin relates with dismay, Kyle's recent bout of hitting: "He's a very very gentle kid usually ... Earlier on, he would be really gentle in his touch of my face ... so all of a sudden he starts like, 'Ah!' [She thrusts an attacking hand into the air by way of demonstration] and yanks my hair." She too, finds herself feeling "conscious of ... feeling angry at him for the first time in his life" and wonders, "Is this normal natural aggression coming out that he's experimenting with?" With the third eye, she interprets his striking out at her and his father as retaliatory, based on what she perceives as his feeling persecuted by their recently "going at him with a Kleenex" on account of his "constant runny nose." An undertone of guilt is detected upon first perceiving expressed anger in one's child. Now that Sara is "actually biting with teeth," having her nipple bitten during nursing leaves Rae "starting to dread just putting her on," and so she prefaces each feed now with a prohibitive comment, to which Sara proceeds regardless. "It's like she's testing me," Rae suggests. Perceived anger fuels anger that somehow needs to be contained. In the past, the live-in grandmother served as the family 'hold-all.' Here, depending upon available emotional support, the women implemented varying degrees of structure, at times flexible, at times more rigid.

The baby's rapid motor advancement and autonomous strivings, in particular, his aggressive taunts, provoke a range of intense feeling in the maternal caregiver, in which love, guilt and anger coalesce. Structure is erected during the weaning phase not just to ensure the
baby's safety in the face of increased risk-taking, but to contain the subtle infusion of aggression, the baby's and a mother's own, the extent of which varied across the participants in this study. It is at this time, that Rae actively seeks external help with her felt anger as a means to figure out the meaning of what this 'testing' provokes in her.

During the weaning phase, the maternal carrier struggles with keeping the door open (extending the social plane) and keeping the lid on (relegating demons to their proper place). Structure nurses the observed tension that comes to play between a baby's bold steps forward and a mother's need to protect. The given destructive element in weaning pertains to the necessary separating out to enter the world of shared reality, wherein mother and child can communicate and their communication may be understood by a third party (Segal, 1991).

Container Function Extended

"She likes to interact with other people, mind you, usually in the comfort of my arms ... I'm just there to prop her up. I'm sort of her helper." (Carolyn-4)

With the onset of weaning, the inclination to branch out and extend the social plane was as much spurred on by the perceived need of the baby for external contact—an extension of maternal containment—as by the women's own timely need for more worldly experience: "It's also good for her to be with other people because she'll be more adaptable and sociable. I don't think it's that healthy to be that protective and so insular from the world." (Sharon-3). Here, we observe the women extend the social plane outward at a time when they begin to see the child as more resilient, as "old enough to be with somebody else during the day" (Carolyn-4). During the weaning process, a mother experiences her baby as gradually stepping into and being given the world of shared reality, while always remaining within reach; as further out, but still relatively close to the body line. It is she, who handpicks the selected third party and metaphorically continues to hold her baby's other hand upon release. It is the beginning of three-way interchange. To comfortably entrust one's infant to an other however, one has to be at the point where one can appreciate the good someone else could potentially offer. When she needed time out, Carolyn felt freed up in leaving her seven month old with her father, which she saw as beneficial to both of them: "He was the person she was most comfortable with next and it would give them a chance to bond, so I was completely at ease with that." The idea of entrusting one's six-month-old to a stranger on the other hand, did not sit well with any of the participants in this study. Slowly, a mother unfurls the umbilical, while gradually extending her child's horizon from the safety of her arms. By the ninth month, she continues to see herself as giving her child the necessary leg up into the world.
By the ninth month, the theme of leaving infiltrates both the narratives and the interactions more potently. Purse-lipped, Helen looks around her, while Sharon whispers in her ear: “You’ve had a nice time with Mommy this past two weeks. It’s going to be a bit hard for Mommy to go back to work!” She broaches the subject that is on her mind with Helen once again as Helen sits perched and still on her knee, her legs crossing comfortably at the ankles as Sharon strokes her hair: “You’re going to see the baby-sitter on Monday!” Perhaps a mother needs assurance that her unleashing has been sufficiently gradual. Corin relates her first experience of leaving Kyle for a short period with a stranger: “I was trying to get him used to being around other kids and other people taking care of him and that mom’s coming back and it’s okay. The first time ... he was very upset ... but I knew that ... each time if he was familiar enough, he would not be as upset.” Familiarity and trust ring loud. Carolyn places her infant in the hands of her mother, which she considers, “the next best thing.” In parting, a mother feels wholly responsible for ensuring a smooth transition, her own level of confidence in being an adequate maternal scaffold impacting her sense of how well she can now carry her baby over this transition. Referring to Helen’s being with a babysitter in the afternoons for the month prior, Sharon relates: “I know that she’s really bonded with me as her mom, so I don’t get jealous or threatened by it” (Sharon-4). Gradually, upon realizing that she alone cannot give her child “everything that she needs,” she draws on others to help round out her baby’s experience. Gradually, she begins to perceive merit in difference. Sharon reports liking “that [Helen] has this other lady, because she’s very different than [me],” yet “great with her!”

Weaning from the breast, as linked to leaving and the actual loss incurred in separating out, leaves a mother struggling with transient feelings of guilt, tinged with fear and protectiveness. While consciously “trying to mentally, physically separate a bit” from Kyle at nine months, Corin tries to shield him from experiencing her absence as “the end of the world.” Anticipating that she herself, will find parting difficult until assured of his happiness upon her return, she fears that his apparent happiness in her absence might leave her feeling “displaced.” She relates her ambivalence following a visit to a day-care centre: “You want them to be affectionate, but it was like ... I don’t want a stranger kissin’ my baby! ... I want to be the one.” Experiencing the loss of intimacy in going from the position of “having a baby that has to be held” to supporting an infant who is exerting her autonomy, Rae expresses her ambivalence through her toddler:

Kieran adores her and he’s really having a hard time adjusting to her changing, because he wants her to be a baby still and to ... just play with her and kiss her ... She’s starting to get ... upset, because he wants to confine her more, but she’ll just
try to wriggle away ... 'cause she's trying to assert her ability to move around ... He wants to have the control, right? ... But it's exciting still having a baby that's grown.

What seems to make it possible for a mother to release her child in the face of such highly charged feelings at this time is the imposition of the reality factor, the returned capacity to test reality, buffered by the baby's own forward leaning. For Sharon, "What's probably shifted is the realities of life," which she describes by way of example: "When I go through her clothes sometimes I get sad, 'cause I remember her being so young and tiny and I long for that sometimes, but then I also remember how hard that was ... and that's where it's a reality check ... Nurturing alone won't do it!" (Sharon-4). Having regained and lost the "taste of freedom" she had just begun to enjoy when her toddler was 18 months once Sara was born, Rae experienced it as a regression.

None of the women in this study tried to abruptly sever the link with their child. Experiencing guilt, they toyed with leaving, while trying to hold in mind the larger picture. Transferring the baby to a third other was experienced as an extension of maternal containing—the housing of the baby within an external shell, carefully monitored from without, the emotional link unbroken. In releasing her child, a mother re-locates him in her mind. Linking objects begin to hold significant meaning: "I bought this expensive breast pump and I've been clearing stuff out ... and I'm thinking, there's a part of me that doesn't want to give it away... It's like a tie to Helen ... something that I did to show my affection and my caring for her and if I give it away or sell it, that's kind of cutting it off" (Sharon-4). A mother can "let go" and passionately re-engage the world outside as long as she feels her child is "healthy and growing." At the same time, due concern for her baby can in an instant, upturn a mother's inner world, placing the baby once again more squarely at its centre: "If you're not feeling good about your baby, it's game over" (Sharon-4). It is the intensity of the link that churns guilt.

In order to reach a shared reality, one renounces one's pleasure and looks toward a third external outpost, drawing on inner strength to regain dimensionality. The child is weaned from the breast onto civilization, the external scaffold that once again ruptures the ongoing sense of continuity. Having already rescued their infants from the first encounter with the unknown, the women now uphold the second induction into reality [civilization and the social structure] by imposing structure over and above attunement to the baby's natural rhythms. It is the first time she is called upon to actually leave and be left, while remaining irrevocably connected. Weaning, the prototype of all subsequent losses, entails 'letting go' through a process of restoring the lost
other within the self. It is a slow process that rests on the continued interplay of mother and child in the context of their specific family.

**Stepping Outside the Frame and (Re)gaining Perspective**

This third sub-theme, derived both from the observations and the women’s voiced experiences, pertains in the case of the women, to the gradual return of a more objective stance in relationship to one’s child; and in the case of the infants, to the development of symbolic representation. It comprises two dimensions of experience: playing with loss, and representing experience.

The weaning period is marked by increased progressions and regressions. In coming to know that it is his mother who picks him up and not just a pair of hands, the baby by nine months is seen to depend more specifically on her as a person and seems more concerned about her whereabouts. He recognizes her more easily on account of his own developing thinking apparatus, perceptual and bodily skills, and as determined by her capacity to present as more defined. Increased mobility and the developing capacity to leave his mother brings great excitement, but also the realization that she too can leave him without the security of being held. When he turns his back, he may feel that it is she who has left, as reflected in his constant head turning and checking out her presence: “She notices if I’m not there. She’ll look around and if she can hear me, she’ll either call for me or she’ll try and make her way towards me” (Carolyn-4). Developmental progress brings with it new anxieties. Paradoxically, the developing baby who displays an increasingly wider range of skills, seems now more easily perturbed by his mother’s departing, the possibility of her leaving becoming more real in his mind. By the eighth or ninth month the women notice the baby’s reacting more intensely to their departure. Content with seeing her in the distance, holding onto her with his eyes as it were, he experiences her speaking to him from outside the room as akin to receiving the nipple in his mouth, being held—an extension of their earlier link. “[She] just needs to know that you’re there” (Sharon-4). Her disappearing however, now triggers anxiety that is qualitatively different from either the disintegration or persecutory fears observed in the earlier months: The telephone rings. Corin stands up and Kyle, at nine months hurriedly crawls over the toys after her. The level of relating has shifted in that it is now more whole person to whole person: “She just wants to be with me,”

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1 Termed ‘separation anxiety’ in the developmental literature.
Carolyn notices. A little refueling can reassure: “We’re very connected now ... A little snuggle and he’s ready to go again!” (Corin-4).

While the infant of nine months is capable of handling some distance, his situation still labile, he remains volatile, unable as yet, to sustain what is within him for too long without physical proximity to his primary maternal care-giver (in the present study, his mother): “We can be in the same room ... with me doing my own thing and her doing her own thing ... As long as she can see me. But if I leave the room that’s a different story!” (Sharon-4). It is not just holding arms, but his mother’s arms and her following eyes that the baby now seeks when anxious. His antennae are out. The women notice this steady increase of vigilance to their disappearing: “We went to a movie the other night for the first time since he was newborn. My mom baby-sat ... and he freaked ... and then passed out in her arms, and as soon as he heard me come in, he woke up” (Corin-4). Sharon relates how “at night time, Helen didn’t want anyone else to hold her except Mommy!” The baby’s ‘making strange’ is experienced by the women participants as being sucked back in, just at the point at which they have taken the first steps toward separating out: “There are times when I just indulge and enjoy it and other times, when she’s clamoring for my attention, when I get frustrated, like ‘give me five minutes ... I need a little bit of space to myself!” (Carolyn-4).

‘Playing’ with Loss

“We love things which disappear and are found”

Michael Ondaatje

While the baby’s increased mobility brings him further into the social realm, his fear of losing his mother leads him to resort to more primitive modes of uninterrupted and continuous holding to sustain their connection. At this time, we observe the baby once again poignantly grasp the mother with his eyes as if mentally holding on, or encourage her commentary from a distance. Sharon describes Helen’s taking a liking to music, her mother’s singing still ‘holding her together’ in moments of heightened anxiety. In the face of absence, the baby may- be seen to re-activate the maternal containing function through bodily means, through pointedly bringing his own hands together for example, one hand enclosing the other, emulating an integration of sorts, a joining, actions, which might on another level, reflect the baby’s playing out his mother’s very coming and going: “In the tub a couple of weeks ago” [ninth month], Rae notes, Sara independently “brought her hands together” for the first time. It is at this time that the baby is

1 From ‘Proust in the Waters,’ in The cinnamon peeler: Selected poems (1991, p. 188).
seen to recoil from the experience of loss by means of his movements, movement itself siphoning off pain that the baby is not yet able to tolerate, while simultaneously facilitating a concrete working through. What is the significance of hand play as linked to weaning in the ninth month?

When Sharon addresses her husband as he enters the room just before leaving, Helen, at nine months, immediately looks over from her position of lying on her mother’s lap. And as Sharon turns her head away to take a gulp of coffee from the mug that rests on the table adjacent, Helen jerks forward, her knee’s brought up as she takes her bottle out of her mouth and abruptly draws it back again and reclines. In and out of the mouth the bottle is manoeuvred. Helen raises her fingers in the air and quietly observes them from a distance. Moving her hand in and out, she inspects her fingers intently, re-grasps the bottle and encircling her own wrist, opens her mouth wide to incorporate the plastic teat. Upon hearing her mother speak again, she whips her head around, acutely vigilant. Taking the bottle out of her mouth, she pulls herself up, then retires and resumes sucking. Stretching her arm out again, she looks at one hand, while holding onto her bottle with the other. Sharon places her finger into the curl of Helen’s hand, which Helen encloses and then releases. Opening and closing her hand, Helen makes a fist and carefully encases it with her other hand as her mother holds the bottle in place. Still sucking, Helen vigilantly looks on, clearly working something over in her mind.

Here, the baby appears to be recreating through hand play, the situation of coming and going just observed. In attempting to work through on the inner plain the fact of her father’s leaving (and her mother’s turning toward him) via concrete action on the outer plain—the teat in and out, the hands inspected now at close range, now at a distance, etc.—there is a sense in which the baby appears to be consolidating what perhaps has already been incorporated within. Helen explores her hands at arm’s length following her father’s exit and her mother’s turning away, as a means to both gather herself together and come to terms with being left (or feeling ousted out to the periphery). Internally, something is being worked through, while externally the repetitive action itself appears to contain. By eight or nine months, the infants in this study were seen to ‘play’ repetitively with their (m)other’s comings and goings through bodily means.

Freud (1920) had described the repetitive activity of an 18 month old, who was “greatly attached” to his mother and seemed to take great pleasure in finding small objects, discarding them and searching for them until found (p. 284). He noticed the repetitive game played with a cotton reel, whereby the baby held onto the reel by the string and carefully threw it over the side of his crib from a position of standing on the floor, such that it ‘disappeared,’ upon which he
uttered the sound, “o-o-o-o, accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction,” the latter representing the German word “fort,” for “gone” (p. 284). He then carefully reeled it out and uttered a “joyful ‘da’ (there) upon its reappearance, the complete game being “disappearance and return,” [“fort-da” meaning, “gone-there!”] (p. 284). Freud considered this game to reflect in the case of the child a “great cultural achievement ... the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction,” the birth of the capacity to allow his mother to leave without protesting (p. 285). Noticing that the child drew greater pleasure in retrieving the object, even though the former action was carried out more frequently, Freud wondered whether the act of losing was a necessary preliminary to experiencing joy upon the mother’s return. He wondered also about the pleasurable dimension of repeating something that was inherently unpleasurable and considered that “throwing away the object so that it was ‘gone’ might satisfy an impulse of the child’s, which was suppressed in his actual life, to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him” (p. 285). He concluded that “even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasureable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind.” (p. 287). By implication, the repetitive act of losing and finding might be said to transform the passive experience of being left into a more active situation involving control and mastery—the solitary playing out of experienced loss. The baby’s playing out the other’s coming and going through a more distant observation of the hands, as observed here, dimensionalizes thinking space by introducing a rudimentary reflective function.

As the weaning phase progressed, the infants at nine months, were seen to more readily hold at a greater distance and observe what might have hitherto been wholly incorporated, their mothers’ looking on calmly and unintrusively providing the necessary emotional scaffolding: Striking a wheeled toy, Kyle brings it to his mouth and then holds it at arms length to inspect it, while his mother looks on. Handed a rattle, Al at nine months, slowly inspects it at arms length, while exchanging it from hand to hand, as she leans against her mother’s shoulder for support. By nine months, the baby appears to no longer feel the urgency to ‘plug’ his mouth with a bottle or pacifier, but is more inclined to manoeuvre it back and forth, emulating the comings and goings of the mother, and re-creating “the situation of remoteness and closeness” (Perez-Sanchez, 1990, p. 157). This form of physical ‘play’ appears to give expression to the anxiety of loss specific to the weaning phase, while at the same time helping the child overcome it. The baby’s observed delight in throwing things in order to retrieve them is thought to proceed from the phantasized satisfaction of controlling the comings and goings of the loved mother (Isaacs,
It is perhaps, a way of coming to tolerate her actual departure, its rudimentary beginnings already observed here in the baby of six months:

At six months, we observe Al in a moment of suspended motion stare at the camera, a toy held limply in her mouth. Dropping the toy, she reaches down after it from Carolyn’s hold; then pulled back to standing, replaces it in her mouth and drops it again. She grasps it with Carolyn’s help, only to fling it again; and again, the process of discarding and retrieving itself, evoking pleasure. In the same segment, Al pulls a cloth place mat over her face and leans back, Carolyn’s arms breaking her fall. Silently, she kicks her legs as Carolyn plays along: “Where’s Al?... I see you!” Al kicks the place mat off and covers her face again. “Peek-a-boo!” Carolyn exclaims. Al kicks her legs with excitement. Carolyn pulls her to standing and Al looks toward the camera, then back down at the place mat. Dragging it up, she covers her face with it again and slithers back down. “Where are you Al?” her mother asks, to which Al squeals and kicks her legs with delight. By the ninth month, the sentiment behind this peek-a-boo game becomes more ritualized: “She’s gotten into hiding things in the last week or two. I didn’t do anything to encourage that, but for some reason she started putting her soother or her hat in between the cushions on the couch when we’re sitting playing and she just thought it was great. She’d put it in there, pull her hand out and then go in there and reach for it, grab it out and put it back in ... without me necessarily having to introduce the concept to her” (Carolyn-4). The concrete manipulation of objects progresses toward the installing in the mind of greater degrees of abstraction, the physical working in tandem with the psychological.

To ‘represent’ is “to symbolize, to serve as a visible or concrete embodiment of (some quality, fact, or other abstract concept); to present again or a second time” (Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition, 1987, p. 2489). During this weaning phase the baby was observed pushing for more space to explore within the context of external re-structuring, the maternal carrier providing the necessary safety net. By six months, the infant’s determination and perseverance was already in evidence. Over the subsequent three months, we observed him grow more capable of waiting and concentrating in order to achieve his aims.

With the onset of teething, Perez-Sanchez (1990) observed the baby more readily ‘get his teeth into’ or penetrate things, a developmental achievement enabling him to grasp an object, take hold of and chew on it, with teething seen as related to the development of concentration and patience. He found that the physical act of penetration, whether into the (m)other’s mind or that of a concrete object, opens out thinking space, allowing “thought to become deeper and three-dimensional” (p. 197). By the ninth month, the women in this study noticed their infants’
focus and concentration sharpen as they became fascinated by objects and more intent on exploring detail: “When I read to her she’s paying more attention, almost as if she’s reading along. She’ll make noises and she’ll point at the pictures and I feel almost as if she’s understanding what we’re doing” (Carolyn-4). Sitting upright, cradled in the shell of her mother’s body, Al points to the pictures, babbles and turns the page of the book as Carolyn reads. The women noted the baby’s developing capacity to absorb and internally work over experience: “You can see the wheels turning as he processes.” Corin describes the “challenge” of having a child with an active mind who “constantly needs stimulation:” “He’ll play with something for a while, but then it’s like, Okay, I’ve conquered that mom. Give me something new to play with that I can figure out!” Holding a child in mind now entails having to anticipate his next move, while learning how to sit tight and wait in the sidelines.

In moving from concrete action during this phase of motor exploration toward a more abstract representation of experience, the baby pulls for reassurance and relies on the presence of a continuous external frame that is somewhat pliable. Without some distance and separation from the primary maternal figure on the other hand, there would be little reason to acquire increasingly greater degrees of abstraction. Growth of the mind has relational significance, the symbolic sphere itself founded on a passion that both pushes forward toward change and militates against it. A mother’s receptivity to her baby’s outward reaching stimulates further exploration and working through, creating a clearing in internal space. Leaning over her mother’s shoulder toward something in the distance, Al curiously looks around the kitchen, her mother following her glance. Shaking the rattle, she stretches her arms upward, to which her mother responds: “The clock, yes!” The provision of space as yet unfilled, both provokes and prompts the necessary first step toward overcoming the anxiety of loss.

For the baby, it is the emergence of play that gives expression to the anxiety of loss, while at the same time helping to overcome it. For the maternal caregiver, structure temporarily serves this function until such time as one is able to move more freely in and out of the experience. Both play and structure permit infant and mother to attain incremental control and mastery over pending loss, which the experience of weaning induces. As the mother takes measured steps to reclaim aspects of her pre-maternal identity, gradually opening up the space between them, the baby is seen to ‘play’ with her coming and going, her consistent return consolidating his sense of continuity and opening out space for thought. While this process first became evident around the sixth month, it was seen to persist into the ninth, with maternal re-structuring more prominent in the former, and the infants’ playing out her coming and going.
more prominent in the latter. As the mother carefully opens up the space between them, the baby’s internal thinking space extends, as reflected here in the evolving complexity of his play. Phenomenologically, this links the gradual widening of space between to the expansion of space within.

**Representing Experience, One Step Removed**

"It’s almost like it’s a major learning curve again, how you think you’re not going to get through and how hard it is and how intense it is ... I have a smile on my face when I look back and I think how well I coped.” (Sharon-3)

As the infants gradually move through the weaning phase between the sixth and ninth months, toward the position of representing experience, we observe the women’s reliance on structure gradually diminish, giving way to a renewed flexibility, a re-clarification of self-body boundaries and a more rational give and take. The return of a more objective perspective—the capacity to stand outside maternal space and observe change—as seen to varying degrees in the women in the ninth month, rests on this renewed flexibility and boundary re-definition, and on the infant’s own forward developmental thrust. In this section, the role of structure in the maternal transition toward a renewed reflectivity is delineated.

Structure—the ordering of experience, the establishment of ritual—which all of the first-time mothers instrumented around the sixth month, provided a contained viewing frame, a type of controlled seeing that offset being overwhelmed by experienced chaos. Like a doorstop tightly wedged to keep a door only half-ajar, it initially occludes full view of the external picture, forestalling the full realization of separateness. At the same time, the security afforded by the controlled frame permitted the women to peek their head around the door at will, inch forward and dislodge the doorstop--discard the blinkers--and gradually move toward a position of being able to move more freely in and out of maternal space, in accordance with their individual capacity to assimilate change. One hopefully moves toward the point where the door may be left either open or shut, where one can either comfortably remain inside or outside the frame to observe change. Sharon refers to the return of a more objective stance in the ninth month: “It’s been a learning experience, like I’m in it, but I’m also able to stand back and look at it ... Being able to process it and to stop and capture it has been invaluable. I mean, it’s ongoing, but I can stand back from the experience more now.” Structure, which paces the process of realization through maintaining an invisible, expandable cord between mother and child, contains them both until such time as their re-settling into a pattern gives rise to a flexibility that allows for separateness, out of which a more objective perspective is born. As a precipitate to mourning
their interdependent exclusivity, structure acts as a stepping stone toward a more realistic reconciliation with existential solitude.

With the return of greater objectivity, holding an infant in mind is experienced as requiring as much work in terms of ‘doing,’ but feels perhaps less intense in that one can now stand back and more readily leave the moment and offer a different part of the self that is less tied up with the baby’s immediate need. By the ninth month, the baby’s own emerging autonomy may be experienced as freeing up maternal space at a time when external reality is making more demands on a mother’s time: “It’s tiring, but more gratifying because she’s more independent ... It’s less physical in that sense. Whereas before it was sleeping with her, holding her and breast feeding her, now it’s a little more mechanical [one step removed] ... I’m looking at her education and things that might help her learn” (Sharon-4). In the fourth interview, Corin notes that it is her infant who has “allowed” her “more energy and space” to do her “own thing,” by “being interested in the environment.” Not all of the women experienced the same degree of freedom with respect to their infant’s expanding autonomy. Still feeling somewhat submerged in the maternal space, her devotion still split, Rae experiences her nine-month-old as being still “pretty much in the same place within [her], just really there” [holds her hand to her breast]. In ‘being there’ for her children, she feels she has “sacrificed [her] life” and “given up a lot of [her] own being in a way.” The degree to which each of the women loosened their hold on structure between the sixth and ninth month varied in accordance with their own internal relationship to uncertainty, separation, and loss. Structure can be seen to mask the reality of loss until one is able to bear the pain of separation and separateness. A mother may let go and yet feel the urgency to hold on tenaciously to circumscribed areas, which in turn, may be ‘earmarked’ to follow one of two paths in the generations to come. If one is to be released from the immediacy of the moment however, and permitted to stand back and embrace change, structure must eventually give way to the experience of loss.

In exploring the meaning of the “artistic impulse,” Segal (1991) related that it is the sense of loss that inspires one to recreate what one has loved (and perhaps idealized) and to express it symbolically. A mother’s reproductive momentum that draws her into inner life—the maternal space—and now positions her on the rim, affords her the opportunity to re-engage her infantile depressive anxieties—to juxtapose the old order with the new—and move toward emotional and psychic re-integration. Thrown into relief are deep-seated conflicts, which may either be tracked down and resolved, or become even more entrenched. It is in the ninth post-natal month that Rae is prompted “to look more into [her] feelings of anger and where that’s all coming from.”
Moving through loss entails acknowledging absence, while restoring the loved other in one’s inner world. For Sharon, “It’s a major learning curve again.” In separating out, she experiences her baby in the ninth month as “still definitely within [her] heart and soul, but ... a little further away,” but she qualifies, “She’s internal—still within me!”

Weighing her own need against that of her infant’s in internal space presents a perpetual struggle to each of the women, her ambivalence provoking what Parker (1995) calls, “the circulation of passion between mother and child, creating a force for concern, for thought” (p. 134). In reaching toward wholeness through a process of integrating contradictory passions, is the mother trying to create a world for her child that is more beautiful, more rounded, more secure? “You could always do more!” (Sharon-4). Is this a facet of moral altruism peculiar to maternity? And her willingness to sacrifice her self for her child, altruistic? Or does the child also serve as her vessel for growth and become the eternal project she feels she has to perfect? What is the meaning of the eternal bind?

Like Segal’s (1991) artist, who is always searching for closure, a mother is always searching for containment of the ambivalence that holding a child in mind invokes. And like the “artist’s reparative work” that is “never completed” (Segal, p. 94), a mother’s reparative work in relation to her child comes full circle, but never fully reaches closure. The creative impulse, according to Segal, is to recover and create anew the world that has been lost.1 Weaning impresses upon the maternal carrier once again, the need to face absence2 and imposes upon her, as Segal suggested, the task of learning to relinquish the need to resolve the conflicts of the next generation, for only experience can teach her that neither completion, nor closure can be passed on, only the “capacity to sit with loose ends.” In crossing the desert, one is always en route to installing in the inner world the satisfied moment of finally reaching the distant horizon. If one tries too hard to control against unforeseeable changes that might lie ahead, either through hovering or controlling structure, the baby’s own capacity to ‘see’ clearly will be thwarted. “We are sent into the world of contradiction; when we soar away from it into spheres where it appears fathomable to us, then we evade our task” (Buber, as cited in Dillard, 1999, p. 141). To “organize rigidly,” according to Winnicott (1971, p. 64), “is simply to comply.” Winnicott’s (1971) transitional “third area of human living” is “neither inside the individual nor outside in the world of shared reality” (p. 110); and his “transitional object”—the proverbial ‘security

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1 This is the main impetus and the overarching theme of Marcel Proust’s unhurried 4,000-paged search for truth in ‘A La Recherche du Temps Perdu’ (In Search of Lost Time).
2 Bion (1970) related thought, as Segal (1991) related symbolism to the capacity to recognize and experience absence.
blanket’ of infancy—neither under the infant’s control, nor outside it. It is not the object itself that is transitional, but the “infant’s transition from being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to a mother as something outside and separate” (Winnicott, p. 13). Only gradually does his play expand to include an emotional identification with an external position. A mother’s flexible use of structure may be seen to offer the same intermediate resolution: the door neither open nor shut. Gradually, as structure opens up to allow distance, thought becomes reflexive.

By the ninth month, we observe the women dip in and out of that gray area in between ‘being in’ and standing back from the experience and ‘looking in,’ wherein trust in the reality of the moment itself contains. Steered by the sheer practicality of trying to integrate her own life with that of her child’s, while “still trying to give [her] time,” Sharon asserts in the fourth interview: “I’ve had more time to reflect on my own person now ... I’m at the point where I’m saying, I love Helen and want to be with her, but I’m building in mechanisms so that I can also be away from her and do some of the things I want to do to get my identity and my self back and that’s really hard.” Carolyn experiences her nine month old infant as “still pretty central” in her inner space, while at the same time feeling that the time has come for her to make “more room for [her] self.” There is a tension surrounding the women’s felt need to stand back, while remaining emotionally engaged. During the weaning phase, the women wrestled internally with being pulled into the maternal space to identify with their infant’s immediate need and being pulled back to contemplate their more overarching developmental needs. Paradoxically, this moving in and out, this indwelling and withdrawing from the immediacy of intimate contact brings one even closer to perceiving the reality of the other. The structure inherent in this study’s method—being asked to inhabit the infant’s space during the interaction segment and then to stand back, one step removed and reflect on the experience—created an opportunity to obtain a magnified and more isolated view of the women’s experience of moving in and out of dyadic space that is particularly pertinent to this weaning phase, even though it is understood that in actuality, the experience is clearly more fluid and often occurs outside awareness.

Sharon is moved by the actual experience of stealing time to be with her child without feeling preoccupied by life’s other demands, while also being aware of her own desire to feel productive outside the maternal realm. In really ‘being with’ one’s child there is an experienced slowing down, a realization of other that invites a mellowing, a gratitude for the moment: “It slows you down to be where she’s at. I’m used to doing things and just being with Helen forces me to just sit back and be really present in the moment” (Sharon-4). Their ‘joining’ may in fact, facilitate a mother’s identifying with her infant’s need for separate space. As Carolyn begins to
reclaim her own inner space in the sixth month, she begins to acknowledge their need for mutual autonomy. A mother may experience a sense of disquietude, a feeling of dismay about the divisiveness of her experience, upon realizing how rare and unattainable in the general run of the day these shared times in fact are. And yet, this internal cleavage seems to prompt the necessary push toward change. As the fourth interview comes to a close, Sharon poignantly anticipates life pouring back in, filling each solitary moment with ‘doing,’ as opposed to ‘being.’ By the ninth month we observe the women seek out more of a balance.

The dysjunction experienced by some of the women between directing and following in being asked to follow the baby’s natural rhythm, highlighted the extent to which structure is still, to varying degrees relied upon, the baby’s individual pace in acquiring an internal world of his own seen at times to clash with the mother’s sense of where her baby “should be” developmentally: As Rae strategically identifies the animals pictorially indented on the bottom of stacking cups, Sara picks one up and carefully licks its surface, her own interaction with the object in this moment clearly more sensual and pre-symbolic. In becoming aware of the ambivalence welling up inside her in being asked to follow, Rae voices a desire to become more flexible in her relating: “Following her makes me feel relaxed. I remember with Kieran, I was always trying to guide his play ... There are times where I’m not so much trying to get her to do things (but) just sort of let her do her own thing and play with her more.” Upon reflection, she comes to the realization: “When you’re not thinking, time just slows down. And I wasn’t really thinking much. I was actually being just there, which is unusual ... Often I’m not just there with them.” Sharon finds the experience of following her baby relaxing and peaceful, in contrast to life’s usual rush. Experiencing progressively greater ease of movement between her subjective and objective experience of ‘being with’ her infant brings about a renewed sense of boundedness: ‘I can think beyond these walls and I’m engaging in the world again, like I’m in it, but I’m also able to stand back from the experience and look at it. I think I’m more separate.” (Sharon-4). The women found the experience of being fully present to their child pleasurable and enriching, and their growing capacity to notice its impact growth-promoting. Striking a balance between the two, whether consciously or not, seemed pertinent during this time of weaning. By the ninth month, Corin felt that “letting him lead” was something she did naturally, even though she was more inclined to shift between following and directing during the interaction. Carolyn saw herself at this time as moving more flexibly between leading and following: “There are times when I try and show things to her and other times when I just let her go and explore.” The women gravitated at their own pace toward a more flexible holding structure.
Looking back over the transcripts brought forth a certain clarity, providing the women with “a more objective look,” while affording them the opportunity to see change in the making. Upon reflection, Rae described the process as helping her “to clarify my thoughts and feelings somewhat” given that she doesn’t “often get the chance to do that.” The individual components of the following exercise were considerably more interwoven in actuality, of which Carolyn had this to say: “I actually appreciate the time to kind of reflect on our relationship and where I’ve been and where I’m going, but I don’t often do that in our regular routine ... Mostly I’m just really trying to enjoy the time that we have.”

Being asked to stand back and reflect on the experience of ‘being with’ evoked responses that ranged from welcoming an opportunity to observe change, to wanting to more actively hone in and tailor the frame by adopting a more distant viewing lens, through to feeling confined by one’s own unflinching need to know. Sharon highlighted the importance to her of being contained by a third party through the process. Apart from being given the opportunity to spend undivided time with her child, she felt that the meetings themselves provided “a little bit of structure,” which enabled her to track her own progress and obtain insight as she ‘lived’ the experience, the structure inherent in the method providing a grounding. Carolyn suggested having something even more concrete to focus on between meetings, “for example, taking just one mealtime experience and just writing about that,” which, she felt, would allow her to “stop to think,” in contrast to being consistently caught up in the busy rush of their interaction. Finding the questions both “thoughtful” and “intense,” Corin seemed to feel challenged more by her own need to know: “These are questions that I think I should be able to answer easily because ... I think of myself as being that way in touch.” The variability in the women’s responses here, demonstrates the degree to which flexibility in moving in and out of the maternal frame is tied up with one’s internal relationship to uncertainty and how contained one feels in traversing change.

The actual person of the baby comes more sharply into focus, as one is able to stand back and see growth and change as opposed to being continuously caught up in the flow. Earlier, we observed the women fall in with the infant’s need unawares, whereas the growing capacity to assume some distance between the sixth and ninth months (not detachment, but engagement interspersed with stepping back) made a clearing space for more objective ‘seeing.’ Now that she is able to step outside the experience and contemplate change, Carolyn sees her relationship with her child as having moved beyond the all-encompassing, merged bonding with nature to the give and take of reciprocal exchange: “She’s definitely her own person. There’s no doubt about that!”
It is not, Parker (1995) asserts, that a mother needs to be conscious of her ambivalence, but that ambivalence itself prompts consciousness to what is occurring in the relationship, which can be “a force for affirming her independent identity” (p. 137) and for introducing reality to her child when it is timely. Assuming a more objective stance does not obliterate, but rather accentuates a mother’s ambivalence, requiring of her a different type of emotional work:

*On a positive side, I’m able to be a better clinician because I’m much more empathetic. On the down side... it really bothers me to even read a report now. It’s more vivid, more upsetting... I’m more sympathetic to the tragedies of the world... When I was at home on maternity leave... I felt more in a cocoon, whereas... out there... I do feel as emotional, but it’s not as intense... I’m able to distance it, but I think a lot about it after on a more political level.* (Sharon-4)

The intensity of passion, with which a mother emotionally relates with her child, including its deep reverberations within her, gradually infiltrates other intimate relationships in her life, colouring her relationship to the world at large.

**The Birth of Triadic Space**

This fourth core theme delineates the phenomenological experience of expanding the dyadic relationship to include an external third party and comprises four sub-themes: the experienced shift from dyadic to triadic relating; the dimensionalization of experience; the phenomenology of triadic space; and the differentiating function of the third. It spans the sixth and ninth month transitions.

By the sixth month, the original dyadic link between mother and child opens up more fully to include relationships external to the maternal one. The women themselves pushed the boundary of maternal space to re-engage in differentiated adult relationships beyond the shared parental function: “I think of the relationship between my husband and myself as separate, something else that we have to work on and incorporate into our routine” (Carolyn-3). During the weaning phase, the women also became more aware of and make provision for their child’s developing relationships with significant others: “And she sees me differently too. She sees me as somebody that’s close to her but I’m not the only person in her life anymore” (Sharon-4). The extension of dyadic space is witnessed here in the baby’s own reaching glance toward the third member of triadic interchange, be that a feature of experienced frustration in the nursing relationship, with the baby wanting more than the mother alone can provide, or his experienced satisfaction, which frees him up to seek out new sources of gratification. In this study, the
infants’ recognition of their fathers became more evident between the sixth and ninth month. Of significance, was the infant’s growing capacity to tolerate distance, his first becoming aware of the triangular situation, as evidenced in his demonstrated vigilance to his mother's engagement with a third person outside of their dyadic linkage in the sixth month (as described above under triadic scanning). Sharon noted the focal shift in Helen’s attention around this time: “There’ve been a few times that I was yelling at George or crying or upset and she would be just lookin’ at me. She knew. She didn’t know what, but she knew something and I think she’s a little more in tune.” The baby’s increased vigilance to his parent’s ‘rejoining’ between the sixth and ninth month is seen to nurture a growing conflict between rivalry and possession, revealing oedipal stirrings and what is in evidence in the interactive segments from the sixth month onward, is the baby’s and the mother’s negotiating being one of three.

By the sixth month, the baby has turned a developmental corner, wherein his own curiosity, which gradually brings to his awareness the entry of the third into maternal space, discloses the possibility of exclusion. It is the very desire for exclusivity that is weaned in the baby and prompts an oedipal re-awakening in the mother around this time. It heralds her stepping out of the frame of their linkage to re-negotiate the reality of three-way interchange, culminating in the acquisition of greater objectivity and a renewed reflectivity.

In this final section of the analysis, I will focus on the phenomenological experience of shifting from dyadic to triadic relating on the external plain, as it pertains to the expansion of maternal space on the internal plain, both of which will be seen to dimensionalize experience, giving birth to ‘triadic’ space’ in the mind of the mother and the mind of the child. The present data suggest that it is not that any one person has to do something to trigger this process. Who instigates the weaning is perhaps the wrong question. In observing the unfolding relational dynamic between each of the four participant dyads in this study, separate lives are seen to unfold according to their own inherent rhythm: the baby’s head turns; the mother reaches out laterally to her adult partner or significant other(s); her spouse draws her back in--all to a beat of their own, seeped in a personal history that to some degree binds. The observed shift from dyadic to triadic linkage through an exponential expansion of relationships, along with the

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1 Britton (1989) described the oedipal situation as arising in the context of the infant’s even partial recognition of the parental relationship, proceeding with rivalry with one parent for another; it is resolved by the infant’s relinquishing his sexual claim on his parents and accepting the reality of their sexual union, the latter evidently beyond the scope of this study.

2 ‘triadic,’ from the French ‘triad,’ meaning “a group or set of three (persons, things, words, attributes, etc.); three collectively or in connection;” from Biology: “a group of three cells... a tertiary unit or organization consisting of an aggregate of dyads” (Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition, 1987, p. 3398-9). Here, it is used to describe internal space as bounded by three persons from the sixth month on.
dimensionalizing of maternal space in depth and breath through re-incorporating into the internal relational system a differentiated third element at the onset of weaning, appear to act as a bolster against rigidity—dyadic fixity—widening the viewing lens by introducing a ‘third’ perspective,’ through which new thoughts are permitted to come together in the mind.

**From Dyadic to Triadic**

“During the day I make sure that I have adult contact all the time, on the phone or there are three friends that I see almost every week who have kids ... otherwise I feel I would just go crazy.” (Rae-4)

The women’s relational focus proceeded from a position of honing in on the maternal dyadic link in the first five weeks to re-engaging the spouse primarily around the care of the infant in the third month, through to contemplating more fully the marital relationship in its own right from the sixth month onward. It was not until the second half of the first year with the onset of weaning that the women really began to contemplate emotionally reconnecting with an adult beyond the parental function.

Central to the sixth month re-structuring is a mother’s demonstrated effort to renew her external links, specifically her primary relational links: “It’s nice letting her sleep in my bed, but George and I need to rekindle our intimate relationship and also, she needs her own space, even though I’m torn and with Helen there, it’s not going to happen” (Sharon-3). It is a reaching out and a re-structuring based on a mother’s felt “need to have some kind of balance in [her] marriage again.” It is at this time that she feels compelled to single out and reinforce the evolving intrafamilial relationships. In the third interview, Carolyn reports “looking forward to structuring [the marital relationship] into [their] lives” again, feeling that it is “important that we still maintain our lives as a couple in addition to being a family.” “And in addition to that,” she says, “I want my life as well.” It is not an either-or situation. What is revealed rather in the sixth and ninth month data, is the women’s persistent attempts to coordinate the unfolding separate relationships beyond the bounds of personal desire. It is in the ninth post-natal month that Corin finds herself “thinking about getting a baby-sitter regularly and going out more,” but “it is not,” she says, “that I feel the need to emotionally, but intellectually I know Vince and I should. I know we have to get away from him. It’s an intellectual sort of decision.” For Rae, who in the ninth postpartum month still feels quite alone with the children because of her husband’s absence, notices nevertheless Sara’s evolving attachment to her father: “Marc hasn’t been around much ... but she really seems to like him a lot. When I was changing her diaper yesterday ... he started to come down the hallway and she could hear him, and I said, ‘Oh, here comes dada!’ and...
she was straining to look and she was smiling away at him.” The re-ordering of familial relationships appears to provide an emotional grounding for the women themselves.

**Dimensionalizing Experience**

“I think that her relationships with the various family members are really important for her in the sense of knowing and understanding who she is and where she comes from.” (Carolyn-4)

On a deeper level, there was evidence both in the women’s talk and in the interactions of their re-engaging their own internal parental couple on the inner plane as they negotiated the developmental transition of weaning with their own child. Of renewed significance is the perceived nature of the relationship with one’s own parents, as manifested in the shift in the women’s inner dialogue over the six month period from engagement with predominantly maternal figures to a re-engagement with maternal and paternal representations as they come together in her mind at this time. Through the intimate process of containing her infant’s mental and emotional state during the weaning phase, a mother’s internal dialogue extends, such that the paternal element now enters the internal discourse on a footing equal to that of the maternal, as the mother herself begins to re-negotiate being one of three. It is evidenced in the current data, either overtly or covertly, in the re-entry of the mother’s own father into her thoughts and inner discourse, her alluding to the parental dynamic experienced in her own childhood, her gradually de-idealizing the mother of her own infancy, and in her more direct reference to her spouse as a differentiated adult partner, in contrast to her earlier experience of him as a predominantly maternal or joint parental figure. As the third enters maternal space, one is faced yet again, with the realization of the triangular situation and the legacy of a mother’s own experience of being weaned in the broadest sense is seen to enter the relational picture:

*I could see me becoming dependent, me always focusing on Helen and never focusing on my husband ... It’s a boundary issue almost for me. I don’t want her to be my surrogate partner. I am her mother and I think she needs that independence too ... You could use it as a way to avoid your relationship with your husband. My own mother did it where all her attention was on her children and then when we grew up, she wanted us to meet her needs. Well it doesn’t work like that. I’ll start moving her stuff out of my room ... I just don’t want to start bad habits. (Sharon-3)*

While all of the women did not explicitly mention their own fathers in the third and fourth interviews, they either alluded to the impact of the parental relationship, or began to speak to their relationship with the spouse in a manner that suggested a qualitative shift in the internal relationship or representation. In this study, the experience was seen to shift across participants and situations at the time of weaning, from a position of welcoming the other’s perceived
difference, to being leery of his perceived demands, to feeling deprived of such a relationship, to feeling at times, threatened by his separate link with the child: “Now he cries from my arms to go to Vince, whereas before it was generally the other direction. It started a couple of months ago. When it first happened it was a little, ‘Oh he’s rejecting me already!’ and ... then it was, it’s nice. Like I feel we’re probably the only situation I know of where the kid is that connected with a dad and, and I like that” (Corin-4). With the father’s role no longer collapsed within the maternal in a mother’s mind, her spouse comes to be perceived and sought not just as an emotional container for the anxiety evoked, but also for his differentiating function in reciprocal adult interchange, its absence noted when wanting. In the fourth interview, Rae refers to her experience of a marital non-relationship: “Sometimes I just feel like we don’t even have a relationship. We rarely see each other and when we do ... he’s exhausted and we all want his attention. We don’t get much time to ourselves.”

The Phenomenology of Triadic Space

“In the morning we’ll all try and get ready together and we’ll watch her father shave and get dressed and after work, when he comes home, he gives her her bath and they have their special time together, and if I’m walking past the bathroom ... she’s not too disturbed and will just kind of smile and then carry on playing in the bath.” (Carolyn-4)

As the mother’s boundaries become once again established, the internal canvas stretches to include a third external outpost, culminating in the expansion of the internal plane to comprise at least three corner posts. From here on, the number of separate but related discourses (both internal and external) increases exponentially, in accordance with the shift from reciprocity in the context of the predominantly dyadic relationship (as described earlier under maternal space in chapter four), to one of triadic interchange, wherein one party is always potentially on the verge of being expunged.

Infiltrating maternal space from the sixth month onward, are the distinct, yet interlocking internal discourses with 1) one’s infant, who himself is just on the verge of realizing triadic relatedness; 2) one’s partner, with whom both the parental and marital roles are shared to the exclusion of the child; 3) the self, who is in the process of re-negotiating being one of three, as one shifts from experiencing oneself as the primary caregiver to being one of two in relationship to one’s child; and 4) the parental figures of one’s own infancy, both separately and as a couple, including all the potential relationships emanating therefrom.

Britton’s (1989) developmental construct of an ‘internal oedipal triangle’ is useful here, in terms of its applicability both to the phenomenological experience of being in a three-way
relationship and its depiction of an internal psychic spatial structure. Employed originally to
delineate the infant’s extending relationships, both internal and external, in the second half of the
first year, he described it as follows:

*The closure of the oedipal triangle by the recognition of the link joining the parents
provides a limiting boundary for the internal world. It creates what I call a ‘triangular
space’—i.e., a space bounded by three persons of the oedipal situation and all their
potential relationships. It includes, therefore, the possibility of being a participant in a
relationship and observed by a third person as well as being an observer of a
relationship between two people.* (p. 86)

Applied to *maternal* experience, it is used in the context of this study to describe the
expansion of maternal space into a plain via the re-incorporation of a third differentiated element
from the sixth month onward, as evidenced in the women’s re-negotiating the marital
relationship around this time. Britton’s (1989) schema of internal space bounded by the vertices
of a triangle, gives rise to what he calls the “third position” (p. 87), that is, the capacity to stand
back, one step removed, and entertain alternative points of view, while retaining one’s own. In
fact, he saw the capacity to move freely back and forth between engaging (being *in* the
experience) and observing (standing back to reflect *on* the experience), as resting on the
internalization of a “recognizable oedipal triangle” (p. 99). The process is observed here in vivo,
in both the mother’s and the baby’s returning again and again to the relationship at hand and
working through in each re-visiting, the reality of multiple perspectives and the reality of
separate minds. With internal space now peopled by three, one’s worldview is seen to expand. In
the ninth month interviews, greater boundary flexibility was evidenced in the women’s increased
ability to converse and share eye contact with the observer, while still remaining attentive to the
baby’s needs; that is, in their capacity to move more readily in and out of the maternal orbit than
was the case in the earlier interviews.

Shared reality by default introduces a third perspective, the third party representing a
reference point for what is outside the closed dyadic system, giving rise to new ideas forming
beyond the confines of the dyadic. As internal space becomes more three-dimensional, layered,
with at least three separate worlds impacting, one grapples both with integrating seemingly
disparate experiences, and with moving from a position of felt reciprocity to one of being an
observer of relationship, one step removed. It is through the very practice of negotiating the
triangular situation that one comes face to face with the possibility of perspectives separate to
one’s own. What is a mother’s experience of this broadening out of mental space vis a vis the
entry of the third at this time? How does she experience her own internal parents? Do one’s
internal parents maintain a “mutual autonomy” from one another in the mind of the adult, Caper (1999) asks. Or is one parent felt to be taking over, invading, merging, destroying the identity of the other? How does a mother experience her spouse’s perceived demands at six months postpartum? The sixth and ninth month data hint at the different experiences of being parented that come to bear on the women’s current experience of relational triangulation: “My being there for Helen has indirectly or directly made my husband feel left out ... I feel a really strong allegiance to Helen. Since she was born ... I felt that my husband was somewhat resentful on some level ... of how tuned in I am to Helen, because when push came to shove, I was always doing something for her” (Sharon-3). Carolyn appears to welcome opportunities to re-locate herself in the marital role. Corin initially feels obliged to. Rae feels it is wanting. In this transitional phase, it is the linking of the parents in the mind of the mother and in the mind of the baby that influences the feel of maternal space. Rivalry and possessiveness presented as significant dimensions of this experience.

**Rivalry and Possessiveness in the Triangular Situation**

“You’d think it would be normal for an infant to be comfortable with her father. Maybe not ... I’m actually surprised at how well she has adapted to him when he is here, because with Kieran, I remember oftentimes he didn’t want to be with Marc. He wanted to be with me.” (Rae-4)

Faced with the triangular situation, the baby is seen here, to move back and forth between acknowledging and obliterating the presence of external coupling. There are times where he insists on linear communication that blocks out the third, wherein a sense of space can be achieved only by increasing the distance between two [hence, no plane]. The baby’s possessiveness of the mother around this time temporarily narrows his view of the world by closing off the possibility of new ideas coming together in his mind. The realization of his mother’s separateness and her relationship with the third on the other hand, can initially evoke what O’Shaughnessy (1989) calls, a sense of being “ejected” from his place of refuge in her mind (p. 143), to which he might respond by immediately trying to re-position himself back inside: Lifted onto her mother’s knee at nine months, Al babbles as she briefly exchanges glances with her mother. Turned sideways, she looks to the camera open-mouthed, then back to Carolyn, her arm flung around her mother’s neck now. With a little cry, she wraps her arms more tightly around her mother, whose engagement with the external third party is temporarily suspended.

The term ‘possess,’ from ‘possession,’ derived from the Latin, ‘possessio-nem,’ meaning, “seizing, occupation,” means “to hold, occupy (a place or territory); to reside or be stationed in;
to inhabit; to take up the attention or thoughts of; to own.” (Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition, 1987, pp. 2248-49). The term ‘to take possession of’ means “to take for one’s own or into one’s control, to seize” (ibid.). In the above example, the baby momentarily attempts to ‘take under her control’ or ‘occupy’ her mother by trying to re-position herself more squarely within the familiar bounds of maternal space, temporarily obstructing the entry of a third. Eliminating the third member from the equation momentarily closes off the possibility of direct engagement through a mini reversion to closed loop existence, the baby’s omnipotent control temporarily short-circuiting the broadening out of dyadic space.

Rivalry, on the other hand—cornerstone of the oedipal situation—involves engaging the triangular situation head on. The term ‘rivalry,’ from ‘rival,’ meaning “to enter into competition with; to contend or vie with; to strive to equal or excel (another),” or “one who is in pursuit of the same object as another,” is derived from the Latin, ‘rivalis,’ neighbour, originally meaning “one living on the opposite bank of a stream from another” ['rivus,' meaning stream] (Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition, 1987, p. 2558). In the context of the triangular situation here, it brings to mind an image of a third party vying to inhabit the more fertile bank of a river with one of its two prior inhabitants, while maintaining a working relationship with each; meanwhile, the inhabitants, who live on opposite banks, actively compete to share their land with the viable third, while maintaining their own relationship, their rivaling providing an opportunity to observe the world from an external frame of reference. That something new has to be negotiated on account of the entry of a third, potentially draws one further out of oneself in order to try to conceive what life might be like from the other side of the river. To disengage, or close oneself off to the reality of the third on the other hand, is to resign oneself to the position of observing the fruits of joint labour invigorate the opposite bank. ‘The grass on the other side is always greener!’ Rivalry is a means to work through the loss of relational exclusivity, eventuating in the capacity to move flexibly between engaging in relationship and standing outside and observing others partake in a relationship, from which one is excluded.

On the cusp of the triadic, the baby is seen at times to entice his mother away from her engagement with the third: At nine months, Al reels her mother in from her engagement with the interviewer via her wide smile and reaching visual contact. “Yes, you want to tell us something?” Carolyn remarks, as she is drawn back toward her infant. During this phase of heightened motor exploration, the baby demonstrates a need to have firm footing with the ground, particularly at this time when his parents’ togetherness is becoming more prominent in his experience, lest feel ousted prematurely from maternal space. The baby is described as
vigilant to the engaging presence of a third person and is observed vying for attention: Watching Kyle first sit and stare at the person behind the camera, then crawl to the other side of the room at nine months, Corin draws attention to what she perceives as his feeling left out on the periphery: “Mommy’s not paying you enough attention, so you go wrecking the place!”

A poignant example of competing for the mother’s undivided attention was seen in Sara’s taking notice of the cat in the ninth month: Sitting securely wedged between her mother’s legs, coyly shifting attention from the observer to the cat and back to the observer, her hand going up to her cheek, one gets the strong impression of a baby trying to position herself at her mother’s centre. As Rae strokes the cat, Sara indiscriminately strokes the rug and looks up at the observer, her top lip protruding. [Already, there is some hint of her competing with the cat here, for her mother’s attention] She persists in following her mother’s moves with trepidation, but her mother’s eye is on the cat, not her. [Is she vying for a place in the mother’s mind?] Captivated by the cat’s movements, Sara draws closer, her eyes inquisitively spanning the length of its body. Rae keeps stroking: “Good girl!” [There are a few occasions during this interaction, where it unclear whether the mother is referring to Sara or the cat.] Sara pulls back momentarily, placing her finger in the corner of her mouth, then mooches about in an attempt to catch her mother’s gaze. Growing agitated, she shuffles about and noticing her unease, Rae leans back to receive her. Al takes this opportunity to strike out at the cat. She climbs up on her mother’s knee and almost immediately crawls back down to pull at the cat’s leg. The cat screeches. Reflexively, Sara withdraws, wide-eyed. “Okay! Okay!” her mother says and strokes the cat protectively. Sara tries to entice her mother, as Rae tries to dissuade her from touching the cat. With her head held coyly to the side, she turns back toward her mother, placing her hand on her thigh, then crawls after the cat again, as Rae reflects: “It’s the first time that she’s really been so interested in the cat!”

During the weaning phase, the baby is observed moving in and out of active triadic engagement, at times sidestepping the experience to quietly observe. As the interview proceeds out on the porch, Al at six months, sits contentedly, not looking to be stimulated other than be included from time to time in the conversation. Corin notices her nine-month-old’s capacity to watch her interaction with her spouse from the sidelines: “I noticed we were having words or yelling the other night and Kyle was just about to start feeding, so he just lay there and watched and listened ... He doesn’t interfere. He doesn’t try to rescue me by getting me to attend to him. He just stands back and watches and lets us do our thing.” This capacity to step sideways into a place in one’s mind, form where one can quietly observe change in the making beyond one’s
active influence, is a developmental achievement that rests on the prior experience of reliable reciprocal interchange. The baby’s emerging capacity to observe from a distance the engagement of a couple reflects his expanding mind.

The same wrangling between rivalry and possessiveness as a means to relinquish exclusivity is observed in the mother’s own dealing with the triangular situation through this period of weaning. From as earlier as three months, Corin draws attention to her infant’s seductive glee in captivating an audience, by addressing him as a “flirty boy.” At six months, as some competition presents itself, she breezes back into view to win his affection as Kyle looks over at the person behind the camera: “Who are you looking at?” Then resting her head against his upper arm, he twitches and she inquires: “Oh, what did I miss that you heard?” [From what am I being excluded?] Rivalry becomes more pronounced by the ninth month, as evidenced in Corin’s comment: “Kyle’s much more connected to his dad now. He cries from my arms to go to Vince, whereas before it was generally the other direction ... When it first happened it was a little, Oh he’s rejecting me already!” As Kyle hurriedly crawls toward the camera, having caught the observer’s eye, Corin yanks him back by the ankles and draws him close into an embrace. When his body grows flaccid and he pulls away, she swoops him up in her arms and kisses him. Pulling himself to standing, he looks up at the camera again, then at Corin, who holds his gaze, smiling as she brings her head closer to his. “You don’t ever give that big smile for the camera! Mommy gets the smile,” she voices triumphantly. Later, as he nurses, she notes how “he’s a little disjointed” and how “he comes on and off all the time, especially when anyone’s in the room.”

In observing the ‘competition,’ a mother is enticed to at once, dismiss and contemplate the different worldview being presented. In the sixth month, Sharon notes explicitly the different world of experience that her spouse offers their child: “I’ve recognized that my husband is not able to do things the way I do them. He’s able to do other things.” Developmentally, much rests on one’s capacity to acknowledge difference.

**The Differentiating Function of the Third**

*The biggest challenge is going to be making sure I’m keeping things balanced, still giving her the attention she needs, still setting aside time for my husband and myself.* (Carolyn-4)

The maternal link with an external third during the weaning phase, whether on the internal or external plane, becomes in a sense, a mother’s reality sounding board, representing a grounding consensuality, rationality, anti-chaos, without which she feels she might remain forever caught up in the emotional tie with her child.
In the sixth postnatal month, we observe the mother begin to identify with her infant in a more limited and circumscribed way, by virtue of her renewed relationships with her own internal parents and her extending relationships with others in reality. Her re-investment in relationships aside from the maternal, re-establishes a grounding in reality that disrupts the mutually projective mother-infant cycle, freeing the baby up to develop realistic contact with himself and his own internal world at this time.

Between the sixth and ninth month, we observe the mother begin to re-integrate different aspects of her identity, which both include and exclude her infant. Beyond the sixth month, we witness her attempt to free up internal space, such that she retains an ample holding area for her child, but also begins to guard against being wholly filled with his projections—While she perceives the external third party as claiming more of her internal space, she also seeks out that external link at this time, the baby’s omnipotence disconfirmed through her re-aligning herself with her spouse. Bion (1962b) had emphasized how the nature of a mother’s relationship with her partner invariably gets “communicated to the infant even though incomprehensive to the infant” (p. 36). Much as the baby might try to possess her, she is now more invested in maintaining a space in her mind, into which she might increasingly retreat, in order to obtain a clearer perspective. From the six month onward, she engages in a balancing act, wherein she apportions holding space to each separate relationship. It is around this time that we observe her re-negotiate the marital relationship and invite the third party back in as marital partner: “My husband and I are trying to have some time for ourselves” (Carolyn-4).

Reclaiming maternal space includes a mother’s gravitation toward repossessing her body as her own, in contrast to her earlier experience of her body as vessel for her infant. Furman (1994) saw the infant’s separation-individuation as directly linked to the mother’s capacity to find pleasure in her own sexual body and to enjoy her intimate relations with her husband. Caper (1999) wondered if the infant really needed “the mother to love its father, in addition to loving it” (p. 119). By the sixth postnatal month, with the re-entry of the paternal element into maternal space, including the re-awakening of their sexual linkage, the women struggled once again to integrate their image of maternity into a more all-encompassing identity, although it presented more of a struggle for some than for others. At six months, Sharon perceives her husband as looking at her “differently,” and she perceives herself as having “become a different type of woman ... a mother,” which to her mind at this time, is “not a sexy image. It’s more of a schlupper!” At six months postpartum, she does not feel she has her “confidence back.”
ninth month, she remains conscious of the fact that they “have a long way to go in terms of finding time to be intimate.”

Despite obstacles that present in each individual case, a mother is nevertheless prompted to renew her physical and emotional link with her partner at this time. It is a developmental step forward, intuitively taken at times, for the sake of her child, at times, for her partner, and at times, for herself. During weaning, a further stage of separation-individuation from a woman’s own mother is seen to come into play, as she re-engages the paternal element in the context of re-visiting the link between her own internal parents. The re-sexualization of the couple, both internally and externally is seen to free the infant up to think independently.

It is not, according to Chassegueut-Smirgel (1994), that the paternal element—actual characteristics of the father—per se, brings the infant into contact with the reality function by introducing rationality into the merged mother-infant dyad, but the fact that “he stands in the way of primal fusion” (p. 118) by performing a differentiating function. In the context of the present study, it is the integration of a third differentiating outpost—third pole in the triangular situation—that partly broadens out the thinking space. The mother also re-engages her joint parental imago at this time. In the unconscious of both infant and mother, the father, as external third represents a protection against chaos, an anchor to hold onto in the face of the experienced pull of the maternal depths. It is an aspect of structure, which the women themselves pre-empt. The father (paternal figure) is in actuality, less emotionally merged from the start. The oft misconstrued gender distinction, according to Chassegueut-Smirgel, is based on “a most unfortunate confusion between the mother as an internal object (imago1) and the mother as a real external object, between the conscious and the unconscious” (p. 114). In the current data, the distinction is understood less along gender lines, but more in terms of who falls in more readily with the baby’s passions from the start and who stands outside as “container” of the original dyad, keeping watch.

In this study, we observed the women strive to make their own way out of “primal fusion,” even when this was at odds with their own desire. In each case presented, it was the mother who remained intimately and intensely in tune with the baby’s fluctuating mental state, by virtue of being the one more often present, while the third party was called upon to provide an emotional backbone by containing the mother’s anxiety, sadness, and doubt from time to time.

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1 Chassegueut-Smirgel (1994) defines imago as “a kind of stereotyped mental picture that forms in the unconscious, reflecting not only real experiences with ... the mother, but also all sorts of early experiences that, given the relative lack of differentiation, ... are experienced as having been caused by the mother” (p. 115).
all of which are seen to arise directly out of her more intimate nurturing role. Containing is seen as layered, the third party remaining primarily one step removed—depository for tension within the dyad. By the sixth month, the women in this study became more aware, both of their spouse’s demands and the latter’s capacity to stand aside. The maternal figure, on the other hand, does not operate in a separate emotional sphere, even by the sixth month. Intimately involved with her baby, the mother pulls from him a certain type of attention. She looks for signs of her baby’s interest in her and she seeks out his affection. The fathers of the infants in this study, because of their less intense and ongoing involvement, may not have felt as bound by the baby’s volatility, or as dependent on the baby’s affection. Perceived by the women as being involved, yet more on the periphery in his thinking about the baby, the father, as paternal figure is conceivably less at risk of falling right in with the baby’s passions and consequently encounters less of a struggle in remaining objective in relation to his child.

Does the mother really need the father to “intervene,” to present “an obstacle” between she and the child in order for them both to reach the reality function? In this study, it is as much the women themselves who seek out this “obstacle” by instigating the push toward externality around this time. The concept of ‘paternal rescue’ is taken too literally. In the light of the present data, the weaning process presents as more three-way. On account of his dependency, the infant projects omnipotence onto the first contact that is then countered by the appearance of the third, more peripheral figure. The maternal imago is deep-seated by virtue of being first. In this study, all three parties of the familial triad were perceived as moving from the sixth month on in the direction of breaking the projective link and reaching a more consensual reality.

Developmental growth during weaning rests not so much on the fact that the father is (re)-installed within the internal system, but on the infant’s realization of parental coupling at this time, in the context of the mother’s re-engaging her own internal parental figures. The world, internal and external, is seen as opening up for both mother and infant, each having their own investment in separation. Mothers have other preoccupations that return to the foreground of inner space around the time of weaning. Babies themselves desire to grow and separate, while at the same time desiring experiences of fusion (Parker, 1995 p. 135). By the sixth post-natal month, the maternal and paternal function are seen to converge in dimensionalizing the linear horizon into a plane, the triangular situation now secondarily superimposed upon an initial

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1 The roles are not necessarily gender bound and therefore, may conceivably be reversed.
2 It should be noted that the father’s ongoing separate and impactful experience with his infant, while assumed, is beyond the scope of this study. His role was mentioned only as seen through the eyes of the mother, where this was relevant to her experience of holding the infant in mind.
experience of being contained. The entry of the third heralds the birth of perspective from outside an intimacy that is born of fusion.

How willing is the mother to stand back, and let the father in? In this study the women themselves made provision for their child’s developing relationships with the father primarily from the sixth month on. At six months, Carolyn relinquishes her hold for the good of all three: “It became really apparent that she needed me most of the time and we both decided that we had to structure more time for just the two of them ... We definitely have a relationship, so it’s more to build their relationship ... It’s for my sanity and also for their relationship.” And again, in the ninth month: “If they are having time together, I’m staying out of the picture so she can bond to him even more.” In the ninth month, Sharon also makes provision for Helen’s link with her father, as she grapples with the idea that her baby may not be as free to explore the sole confines of their dyadic linkage: “George is with her till 12 every day and ... I definitely would always want her to have that influence because I think he’s very good with her. He’s very different, but he’s very good with her.” Corin, in the fourth interview embraces her infant’s evolving relationship with his father: “It’s probably the only situation I know of where the kid is that connected with a dad at this age anyway, and I’m happy for them to have that connection and I always try to foster it.” The observed opening up of the dyadic link on the part of the mother to include the third party does not necessarily eliminate the phantasy of remaining the chosen one: “I’m actually surprised at how well she has adapted to Marc when he is here, because I remember Kieran was much more attached to me when he was an infant ... I mean she gets to a point where she wants me, but she’s pretty good about going to other people” (Rae-4).

Only gradually does one come to trust that the birth of triadic space—letting the third in—does not rupture the unique reciprocity of the dyadic union, but this is a hard realization to swallow. One might eventually emerge from the desert, but there is always a more distant horizon. One does not finally come to see the other ‘objectively,’ for what one sees is always coloured by one’s own viewing lens. Benjamin (1994) claimed that the paradox of recognition cannot be resolved, but proceeds rather as a healthy tension between recognizing the other and asserting the self. The maternal carrier is continually taking off and putting on her own foggy lens. No sooner has one opened up to the world, hope-filled, than one’s illusions are shattered again and again with each new accretion of knowledge, with each new experience. While the process of weaning entails both coming to acknowledge the other as existing outside of one’s projective need, and realizing that relationships are in fact, shared, “the task of reality-acceptance,” according to Winnicott (1971), “is never completed” (p. 13). A mother may come to
see her child from many angles through the arduous journey of weaning, but the *real* other is always in the process of being found. The paradox of relationship is best captured in Rilke’s letters on love (1975, p. 28), in which he states that it is the interaction of autonomous beings who in love, remain “guardians” of each other’s “solitude.”

**Table 3.** Themes of Holding and Being Held in Mind in the Third and Fourth Transitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third Transition</th>
<th>Interfacing with the world: Preserving and relinquishing omnipotence</th>
<th>Maternal resilience tested</th>
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<td>Incorporation as consolidation and possession</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reliance on maternal background presence</td>
<td>Vigilance</td>
<td>Tenacity</td>
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**Crossing the desert: The arduous process of weaning**

<table>
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<th>Third and Fourth Transition</th>
<th>Letting go: Release, relief and loss</th>
<th>Holding on: Preserving the link to the inarticulate</th>
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**Re-structuring the maternal frame: Reflectivity regained**

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<th>Structure as containment of the women themselves</th>
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<td>A shield that protects</td>
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**The birth of triadic space**

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<th>From dyadic to triadic</th>
<th>Dimensionalizing experience</th>
<th>The phenomenology of triadic space</th>
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<td>Rivalry and possessiveness</td>
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Chapter Seven: Developmental Overview of the Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis

This study set out to explore the nature of shifts in the experience of holding and being held in mind in mothers and infants across four developmental transition points in the first nine months. What emerged from the data was evidence of a closely correlated developmental progression in the maternal and infantile experience of (a) self-body boundaries, (b) maternal space, and (c) structure across these transitions. Both the first and sixth month experiences stood out as prominent, the former in terms of being the first encounter with change; the latter, in terms of representing a turning point in the dyadic experience of holding and being held in mind. The third month transition presented more as an intermediary position, and the ninth, thematically, an extension of the sixth, although the move toward (re)-presenting experience was more prominent in the ninth month for both members of the dyad.

Analysis of the data that emerged from tracking the mutual interweaving (physical and emotional) of mother and infant over the four transitions, revealed their ongoing interconnectedness in the face of change and the re-evocation in the maternal ‘carrier’ of developmental conflicts specific to each transition, maternity drawing the women back into the developmental cycle, now collapsed across the nine months. Maternal holding was depicted as revolving in a generational cycle that entailed intermittent re-looping through developmental transitions alongside one’s infant, each with its own conflictual core. The negotiating and re-negotiating of developmental transitions was not rigidly phase-bound, but followed a natural progression, with the time varying somewhat across participant dyads. Holding an infant in mind was seen to ignite a potent re-encounter with beginnings.

The phenomenological analysis portrayed maternal re-visiting not so much as a regression to the past, but a re-evocation of primitive experiences in the present, as a direct response to being continuously and intimately engaged with an infant’s state of mind. Maternal-infant development was seen to follow a natural progression from the unitive experiences evoked through nursing in the early weeks, to the conjoined turning outward to the world around the third month, through to the re-negotiation of being one of three from the sixth to the ninth month. The journey entailed the women’s constant struggling both to ‘remain sufficiently in’ the experience in order to intuit what their babies needed, and to ‘stand back from’ the intensity of the experience in order to view it more objectively from a position of groundedness. Shades of
reaching for a middle ground were observed in the sixth month data for both mother and infant, but this became more prominent in the ninth month.

The ongoing experience of holding an infant in mind prompted the women in this study to re-negotiate developmental core conflicts in the presence of their child and to revisit life's existential meaning. In this overview, the data are organized developmentally across the three areas of developmental continuity—self-body boundaries, maternal space and structure—in order to highlight the points of convergence in developmental progression. A schematic outline of the process is presented in Figure 1. at the end of the chapter.

**Shifts in the Experience of Self-body Boundaries**

Self-body boundaries in the context of this study refer to one’s sense of self-definition and identity. It includes the felt nature of the boundary between mother and infant (boundary permeability) and the back and forth emotional flow (the experienced interchange). It was seen to follow a natural progression across participants over time.

As the infants in the early weeks struggled to obtain a rudimentary sense of psychic boundedness, the women experienced a loosening of the definitive edgedness of the boundary between self and other that allowed for an enfolding of the infant within psychic space, their self-body boundaries rendered more permeable, at times, inviting fusion around this time. The first month data revealed an internal clearing of space to house the baby in the mind of the mother, the baby’s needs experienced as temporarily crowding out a mother’s own.

While all of the women in this study felt comfortable and somewhat familiar in initially stepping into the maternal role, they felt that their whole identity had been somewhat dislodged, hauled into the maternal space as it were; that they had stepped onto foreign soil and needed to re-discover their bearings. With their self-body boundaries experienced as shattering and regrouping again and again, in line with coming in contact with the volatility of the neonate’s inner world, they experienced the early cocooning—the initial sheltering of the newly formed family from the imposition of reality—as providing a temporary sanctuary, a protective wall around their encapsulated union that was experienced as at once, disconcerting and inspiring.

This boundary permeability—the felt porous quality of their own ‘psychic skin’—rendered each of the women more open to emotional impact, their transactional looping, their mutual absorption in each other, seen in terms of a revolving door, leading into and out of the other’s mind, conveying their circling states of mind. Their conjoint primitive choreography in the first
month depicted rapid shifts in the flow between them from one of harmony to a kind of mismatched clashing, the nature of their exchange determining the feel of the internal world.

By the third month, their dyadic back and forth interchange came more clearly into view. Marked by the infants’ social awakening, their budding curiosity about the mother herself—what she contained within—and the world external, moving through this transition evoked in the women in this study, heightened feelings of pleasure with regard to the felt reciprocity of their exchange, while also stirring feelings of both relief in being freed up, and despair in no longer feeling themselves to be the sole source of their baby’s joy.

The women’s own social awakening, their slowly returning appetite for worldly contact, evolved partly in response to the prolonged experience of isolation and confinement. Enticed by the draw of civilization to curtail the earlier relaxation of self-body boundaries and to now ‘let the world in,’ all of the women felt an urge to ‘feed’ the baby’s growing curiosity with stimulation and found themselves confronted with the maternal ideal of not ‘doing’ enough, as opposed to the earlier experience of not ‘giving’ enough. While prompted to turn outward, the women also experienced the contradictory pull, both from within themselves and from the infant, to sink into the maternal pool of sensuous embrace and mutual rapture.

The infants’ curiosity triggered the women’s own, offering a second change to negotiate change from a renewed position of hope, their renewed buoyancy around this time instigating the process of reclaiming aspects of their identity which had temporarily lain fallow. Their mutual outward glance nevertheless remained relatively subdued, the infants still relying on their mother’s continued presence; the women continuing to feel torn between trying to fulfill their own needs and those of the baby. Each of the women sought refuge less in the world external, but in a place in her own mind into which she could retreat, which has implications for the type of support that might be considered useful to maternal care-givers around this time.

The sixth month evidenced the firming up of the boundaries between mother and infant, along with observed efforts to make a clearing in internal space as a protection against being filled up completely with the baby’s projective need. Here, the process of weaning was experienced at times, as threatening the very integrity of a mother’s person. The baby’s testing his mother’s resilience (her capacity to remain integrated and competent in the face of his controlling demands) left her struggling to remain differentiated and whole. Her own inclination to pull back from the intensity of their earlier engagement was experienced as leaving a part of herself behind, she being the one to fall in with the baby’s passions from the beginning. The impetus to intermittently withdraw was experienced as a temporary loss of groundedness and
loss of a defining border. It prompted the women to disentangle somewhat from their infant, to reclaim lost aspects of the self previously lodged within him and to re-define their boundaries, while maintaining an emotional link. Faced with the dilemma of how to maintain the link, while simultaneously facilitating the lengthening of the cord, the women found themselves gauging how much distance, as opposed to how much closeness their baby could tolerate. The more aware they became of the range of feelings they held for their infant, including the need to retreat from engagement, the greater the felt urge to re-integrate and orchestrate change. The women felt torn between the baby’s immediate need and their own need to restore their own sense of wholeness. With the re-establishment of a grounding structure in the ninth month, the boundaries between mother and child were seen to relax once again.

From the sixth month on, the women endeavoured to repossess their bodies as their own, as manifested in the demonstrated efforts to get the body “back into shape” in some of the women, and in the turn toward the marital partner on a more equal adult footing, separate to one’s relationship to one’s child. The very openness to the third party freed the women up to redefine their boundaries and view the maternal relationship from a more external position.

The shifting experience of self-body boundaries on the phenomenological plane may be seen to map onto developmental progression on the psychic plane, from boundary diffusion (mutual projection) in the early weeks, to boundary demarcation (emerging differentiation) in the third month, through to the repossession of a bounded internal space (re-incorporation of projections and individuation) in the sixth month and boundary flexibility and extension (integration) in the ninth month.¹

**Shifts in the Phenomenological Experience of Maternal Space**

Used in the context of this study to describe the mother’s and infant’s conjoined experience of internal or psychic space, its emotional shape, its shades of ambivalence, its dynamic flavour, ‘maternal space’ constituted in the first five weeks, the impact of the infant’s primitive state, the mother’s own experience of holding an infant in mind, along with the pooled experience of her own infancy and the mothering she received therein. The overall feel of the internal world both impacted and was continuously impacted by their dyadic transactions.

¹ In health, this developmental progression is not fixed, but entails a process of *flexibly* moving in and out of these positions over the course of development as the situation demands. Mothers in particular, readily identify with being frequently pulled into the primordial ‘maternal space’ in caring for their children. It is not a position that is once and for all left behind, but returned to again and again as one progresses along the developmental cycle.
Maternal space in the first five weeks was essentially maternal and dyadic and tied in with bodily experiences. The increased permeability of self-body boundaries gave way to a flood of feelings from the past, the intimate contact with the baby's primitive longings re-awakening the women's own. It brought forth an evocative re-engagement with maternal figures of the past, which became idealized in an attempt to hold onto the good aspects of maternal care through the settling-in phase. The spouse was seen primarily in terms of his maternal function at this time.

Maternal space was experienced in the first transitional phase as a diffuse, unbordered, at times bottomless maternal pool, into which the women felt hurled and out of which, they watched with ambivalence their pre-maternal identity recede into the background. Feeling themselves at times, caught in the borderland between the pull of the maternal depths and the more structured world of pre-maternity, the women felt confronted with uncertainty and self doubt regarding their capacity to be 'a good mother.' There was an experienced sense of timelessness, a slowing down of pace, felt as both liberating and confining, which brought the women in contact with aspects of their deeper humanity--the cycle of life--encompassing birth and death and the sense of generational continuity. The experience of shifting backwards and forwards in time also triggered a desire for stasis, experienced as a defensive pull back into the womb-like waters, wherein change remains temporarily unchallenged. Like their infants, the women felt at times, hurled into space without a spacesuit.

Drawn into the infant's turbulent world, his rapidly shifting emotional state, which veered toward ecstasy and terror at the extremes, the women described feeling a more potent emotional volatility than usual, ranging at the extremes, from panicked fear to experienced bliss. The women felt awe-struck in closely witnessing potentiality unfolding, their own sense of wonder re-visited. This brush with new beginnings provided an opportunity to linger in the present, to experience life's continuity, while at the same time bringing to light its essential transience.

The felt intensity of the mother-infant link also triggered panicked fears of its dissolution. The women were taken aback by the extremes of emotion invoked in housing the baby's passions, its impact at times, jarring. The baby's panic induced immediate and unmediated fears of helplessness and losing control: fears that the ground might open up, that all might unravel. At times, the persecutory nature of the baby's panic seeped into their mothers veins, like blood transfused, its impact invigorating: swiftly transferred, but generally short-lived. At times, it had a numbing effect. The women tended to feel culpable with regard to their baby's perceived pain, the instilled fear provoking them to maintain some link (stabilizing hold) with the external world, while continuing to remain close enough to intuit what their baby needed.
By the **third month**, the women experienced themselves as residing less in the borderland, and more at home within maternal space. Drawn in by the baby’s awakened sociality, his inviting smile and increased vocality, they experienced the ‘evolving conversation’ itself as grounding, confirming their own sense of having something good inside worth sharing. In feeling aligned with their infant’s coming to experience externality as less threatening and internal space as less volatile, the women felt freed up to glance outward and re-engage externality reality. Less internally engaged with imagoes from the past, they experienced a renewed link with social reality through the captivating experience of ‘reciprocal gazing,’ the infant’s beaming smile, with its promise of immediate contact, externalizing his humanness. The baby’s eyes, experienced as pools of infinitude—windows into the soul—accentuated at once, the depth of their indivisibility and the dawning sense of ‘otherness.’ Their vocal dialogue was experienced as a mutual feed, an inspirational narrative in the making, which temporarily brought the rest of the world to a standstill. Feeling the baby to be more squarely at her centre, the baby’s evolving curiosity now raised some doubt as to her place in *his* mind. His perceived enthrallment and curiosity about the mother’s body evoked in the women an ambivalence, pertaining to the desire to either indulge or bring order to his experience, his vibrant sensuality with its seductive undertones, inducing her to tone down his passions somewhat, to quell his desire. It was around this time that the women first felt prompted to curtail the baby’s demands, to order his experience and give it the stamp of the surrounding culture. By the third month, the central internal conflict was seen to pivot around impassioned experience and the pull of civilization to conform.

The **sixth month** marked a qualitative shift in the experience of maternal space that was carried on into the ninth month. The change coincided with the onset of weaning and ‘triadic scanning’ (the baby’s awakening to the father’s re-alignment with the mother and his attendant vigilance to their relating). By the sixth month, internal space was seen to open out to include the pooled experience of (a) the third family member, the father (who remained up till then on the periphery of *maternal* space in the mind of the mother and the mind of the infant), (b) the father’s own infantile experience of being parented and his parental imagoes of the past, along with (c) the mother’s re-engagement with her conjoined internal parents, both separately and as a couple. The parametres of maternal space extended accordingly, by opening out into a triangular plane as it were, bordered by all three figures of the family triangle, with the legacy of both the parental and infantile figures of the past secondarily influencing its shape (i.e., determining whether it be skewed in one direction or another). By this time, the emotional tone of the
conjoined internal space, bounded by at least three dyadic relationships and the aggregate of relationships emanating therefrom, revolved around the experience of being one of three. In opening out the prior encapsulated dyadic link to include the external third as a differentiated adult partner, as opposed to a joint parental figure--the re-sexualization of the couple, primarily on the internal, but to some degree also on the external plane--the developmental task of individuation was brought more to the fore.

By this time, the women welcomed this rounding out of internal space, felt grounded by it, even instigated it, and yet felt somewhat threatened by the changes and losses to which it gave rise. Feeling a bit hemmed in by the confines of dyadic exchange by this time, the women began to feel the need to raise their head from the maternal pool, the experienced fragmented aspects of their identity now begging a re-integration. The infants themselves were observed trying to possess the mother on their own terms, while also reaching out toward the third, their own inherent curiosity propelling them on to discover the truth of relationship, while at the same time denying the possibility of exclusion, to which it gives rise. By the sixth or seventh month, the women felt torn between their growing concern for the infant’s well being and their own timely push toward individuation. Enduring guilt in stepping outside of their dyadic linkage, they experienced their leaving as abandoning, their difficulty in separating out bound not just to their concern for the infant, but to the subjective feeling of internal emptiness that it evoked. Having been so emotionally invested, the women found it difficult to make the outward shift without experiencing some sense of internal loss. Disentangling is invariably more difficult for the ‘maternal’ parent who has fallen in with the baby’s passions from the start.

Maternal space at this time, was dominated by themes of possessiveness and rivalry (involving alternating dyadic combinations to the exclusion of a third), feelings of belonging and exclusion, fears of abandonment, harm and loss of the love of the other. Mother and child went back and forth between acknowledging and denying the triangular situation, the fact that relationships are not exclusive, but shared. In the midst of forward moving--opening up to encompass the wider world--mini regressions to a closed loop existence were experienced and observed, with internal space extending and contracting until a third external outpost assumed a more continuous position in the mind.

\footnote{In the context of this study, not gender-bound.}
Shifts in the Felt Nature of Structure

Structure is used here to refer to a grounding link with externality, as in a supportive frame that lends order to experienced chaos. The first month data revealed a partial severing of the link with externality as the women turned more inward toward the infant and re-engaged the internal mother. This weakening link with the external order rendered the inner world formless, giving birth to the unbounded experience of “floating on a cloud.” Confinement in the early weeks induced an anxiety spiral, experienced as an overwhelming sense of losing ground, including the fear of ‘going under.’ In the midst of ‘falling in’ with their baby’s passions, the women, like their infants, nevertheless endeavoured to hold onto an external anchor--a beacon of light--needing to have their own boundaries confirmed, their identity solidified. They used ‘knowing’ as a lifeline and sought grounding in reality as a protection against the fear of losing the self to the primitive world of infancy. Social contacts were experienced at this time, both as a hindrance and a support, the spouse experienced in terms of his containing function: as a grounding voice from outside in times of panic.

The third month witnessed a natural falling into a pattern. Prompted by an awakening curiosity, the slow gravitation toward structure--the ordering of experience--was manifested in the gradual emergence of routines. The women both yearned for structure and backed away from it, still feeling somewhat reluctant to relinquish their newfound spontaneity. Emerging routines coincided with the women’s own returning self-definition, the infants’ awakening sociality seen to run alongside the women’s gravitation toward the social order. There was a contagion of busyness in the return to the more structured world of conformity. By the third month, the women found themselves relatively more time-bound, future-oriented, practical. More inclined to think structurally, they began to anticipate turning points, wishing away whole chunks of time. While they longed for predictability, they remained nevertheless willing to cope with being less organized, and less defined at this time.

By the sixth month, with change looming and separation pending, a more definitive turning of the whole body outward in search of order and groundedness was observed in both mother and infant, and what might hitherto have been experienced as a comfortable see of fog, began to feel more like unbound chaos, a dark ominous cloud, a “boxing in,” akin to the feeling of being trapped on a circular path that seems only to lead back to the maternal.1 Feeling by this time, somewhat confined--wedged in--the women endeavoured to find their way back onto a

1 The overarching theme of the 1999 docu-drama, Blair Witch Project.
linear path, leading to some external outpost, as a means to stave off uncertainty and to re-establish a sense of emotional groundedness.

Structure was sought at this time to provide a bridge to externality in order to escape the claustrophobic pull of the maternal depths, and as a means to re-establish order on the internal plane. Staving off uncertainty, structure acted as a safety valve—something solid to hold onto in face of transience—countervailing the transitory sense of chaos, the fear of harming through leaving, the maternal scaffold aligned once again with the social order. Structure was re-instituted at this time as a grounding mechanism to contain the fear of loss, which was seen to fuse with the mother's own fears of internal loss.

Structure also facilitated a graduated or controlled introduction to reality during the weaning phase by buffering both mother and child from an abrupt onslaught from without. From the sixth month, the women were observed actively pulling back in small graduated steps in order to carefully 'let the world in.' Further to physical holding, and partly in response to the baby's increased mobility and demanding, structure became the new maternal scaffold, the infant's aggressive taunts provoking a range of feelings in the maternal carrier, in which love, guilt and anger were seen to coalesce. Structure then, served to contain the subtle infusion of aggression between mother and child, the infant now weaned from the breast onto civilization in this second induction into reality.

Structure provided a contained viewing frame, a type of controlled seeing, pacing the process of 'realization' by maintaining an invisible, expandable cord between mother and infant, containing them both until such time as their re-settling into a pattern gave rise to a more grounded flexibility. Similarly, the infants' playing with the mother's coming and going (seen to emerge between the sixth and ninth month), provided a means to instrument incremental control and mastery over pending loss, induced by the experience of weaning. This playing, one step removed from experience, was seen to broaden out thinking space through enabling the infant to stand back somewhat from the relationship and observe the other as now outside his control. Growth of the mind was seen to have relational significance: As the women took measured steps to reclaim their own more all-encompassing identity by gradually extending the space between them, the infants were seen to play with loss and triadic exclusion, while still relying on a continuous external frame that remained somewhat pliable.

As the women began to structure their outward path, the interview meetings themselves were experienced as anchor points, providing a grounding that facilitated seeing the world from outside one's own frame of reference, the actual 'other' coming more to the fore as one felt less
caught up in the flow. Structure, linked to anticipated leaving in the mother’s mind, served as a means to re-define her boundaries and re-locate her self inside her own psychic skin. Thrown into relief with each re-visiting, are deep seated conflicts which may either be held up to the light and worked through or buried deeper to become even more entrenched. By the ninth month, with a reliable grounding framework once again in place, the women's tight hold on structure was seen to loosen considerably, giving birth to a renewed flexibility.

As each mother and infant reached toward relationships outside the maternal, their shared internal space opened out to incorporate a third differentiated figure, representing a reference point from outside their closed dyadic system. Structure in this respect, acted as a bolster against rigidity, widening the viewing lens by introducing a third pair of eyes, through which to view experience. With the father’s role no longer collapsed within the maternal in the mother’s mind, the spouse came to be seen and sought for his differentiated role in reciprocal adult interchange, inviting each member of the triad to shift more readily between the alternating positions of participant and observer. The external link with the third became in a sense, the mother’s sounding board, representing a grounding consensuality, her identity with her child becoming more circumscribed around this time. Her re-investment in external relationship was seen to re-establish an emotional grounding in reality, freeing the baby up to develop more realistic contact with himself and with others. The third differentiated outpost became the third pole in the structural frame, which the woman themselves sought at this time and which inadvertently came forth to meet them on their self-initiated journey outward from ‘primal fusion’ from the sixth month on.
Figure 1. Developmental Overview

First month transition

- Striving to obtain a sense of psychic boundedness
- Maternal figure
  - Spouse maternalized shared parental function
  - Boundary diffusion
  - Boundary permeability
  - Porous quality of psychic skin
- Infant figure
  - Emotionally volatile
  - Persecutory fears of dissolution
- Parental figure
  - Internal cleaning to house infantile state
  - Sense of identity dislodged

Mutual Projections

- Transcendental looping
- Shared parent function
- Timelessness

Maternal figure

- Legacy of mothering received in infancy
- Awe: in tune with the cycle of life
- Panicked fear of dissolution/loss

Maternal Space

- Formless, unbounded
- Sensory, somato-sensory: womb-like merger, "maternal pool"
- "Dark continent"

Breaking confinement

- Relational orbit expands

Third month transition

- Social awakening
  - Increased vocality
- Dawn of first smile
  - Vibrant sensuality
- Curiosity split
- Other "feasts" beckoning
  - Split urge to stimulate

Dyadic exchange

- Reciprocal gaze
- Vocal dance

Parental imago

- Impacting

Triadic Space

- Shifting dyadic positions
- Negotiating being one of three adult partners

Six-ninth month transition

- Leaning toward third
- Recognizing change
- Playing with mother's comings & goings [9th month]

Rivalry Possessiveness

- Triadic engagement
- Confines of Maternal space

Re-sexualization of couple: spouse perceived as differentiated adult partner

Boundary re-definition

- Firming up of self-other boundaries
- Possession of bounded internal space
- Greater flexibility by 9th month

More definitive outward-turning

- Yearning for adult contact

Gradual wean:

- Withdrawing to let the world in

Re-structuring

- Standing outside maternal frame
- Re-presenting experience as grounding mechanism
Chapter Eight: Summary, Implications and Outcomes

Overview

This final chapter will proceed with a summary of the study in brief from its inception to the findings of the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, including a consideration of possible limitations of the study. The original knowledge derived from this analysis will be positioned in relation to the review of the literature outlined in chapter one, with the findings of this research investigation distinguished from the prior research summarized in the literature review. The outcomes of the investigation in terms of personal and social meanings and implications and their relevance and contribution to current developmental theory and clinical practice will be discussed. Based on the understanding of shifts in the experience of holding and being held in mind in mothers and infants that emerged from this study, suggestions for possible future studies that would advance knowledge in the area will be outlined. The chapter will conclude with a brief overview of both the participants’ and the researcher’s experience of participating in this research process, which highlights the layered quality of the containing process and its potential transformative function.

Summary of Study

In chapter one, I described the impetus for this study as originating in my observation of the general dismissiveness in society at large of the intense emotional and mental impact of being in the early holding relationship and its significance for the growth of the whole family. While an acceptance of the importance of what one should do for one’s infant was acknowledged, the overlooking of the more ongoing experience of being with one’s infant in traversing these first developmental hurdles was noted. I drew specific attention to the expectation on women to perform the maternal function against a backdrop of neglect of the maternal experience of revisiting developmental turning points alongside one’s dependent infant.

In the same chapter, I reviewed the relevant literature on mutual influence in the early “holding relationship” and found a scarcity of investigations that focused on both infant and maternal experiences. In fact, the literature itself was found to be divided between developmental studies of infancy on the one hand, which comprised experimental interaction and naturalistic observation studies, honing in on developmental outcomes in infancy, and predominantly qualitative studies on the maternal experience of the transition to motherhood on the other, which were found to be situated within a separate discourse that rarely integrates infant factors. In
reviewing both of these sources, I identified a gap in the literature on mutual influence in the early holding relationship, which culminated in the twofold research question: What is the essence of the maternal experience of holding an infant in mind and how is this seen to change across four developmental transition points in the first nine months; and what is the infant’s experience of being so held at each of these junctures? A delineation of the conceptual framework that guides this study, which describes aspects of early development and maternal containment originating in psychoanalytic research and practice, followed. This was taken as a developmental point of departure and used in the later interpretive analysis.

In chapter two, I examined the hermeneutic phenomenological research approach with its objective of uncovering the intersubjective through interpretation and reviewed its epistemological roots. Here, I integrated the psychoanalytic (Object Relational) strand, wherein meanings rather than causes are taken as the central point of reference and phenomenological relatedness the point of entry. I sketched a parallel between these two approaches in terms of their objective of uncovering meanings, which prompt further thinking about aspects of human experience. Seen as operating in the tension between experience and the thinking about that experience, the methodological approach adopted was described as simultaneously drawing one into the experience under investigation, while prompting a deeper reflectivity, depicting the inherent tension on more than one level, between pre-reflective and reflective experience. The phenomenological method of seeking descriptions which retain the original texture of a phenomenon in an effort to keep it alive and not explain it away was emphasized. A background to the development of the research instruments—the interview and the observation of the interaction—was provided, followed by an outline of the procedures involved in the generation of data and the method employed in organizing and analyzing the data.

In chapter three, I introduced the four women and their infants by way of selected excerpts of the women’s narratives of their experience of holding an infant in mind as a means to contextualize the phenomenological analysis, and I selected excerpts from the interaction observations to give voice to the infants’ experience and to provide a descriptive account of the relational dynamic in flux.

Chapter four elucidated the textures and underlying structures of the experience of holding and being held in mind in the first transition period: the first five weeks. I discovered that the developmental hurdles, which the infants faced, were revisited by each of the four women, and re-negotiated through an adult lens, although this was not always explicit. Four essential themes were discovered: 1) boundary definition and diffusion, which pertained
respectively to the infants' observed pull for contact in an effort to achieve a sense of psychic boundedness, and the women's related experience of a partial diffusion of self-body boundaries, which facilitated their intuiting what their infant needed; 2) "transactional looping," defined as the mutual back and forth rhythmic exchange between mother and infant that perpetuates a transactional exchange cycle, which was found to be very much bound to bodily experience and to the feeding experience in particular; 3) the unitive moment--the transitory experience of fusion with one's infant against a backdrop of acknowledged separateness and generational continuity--which was seen to serve both transcendent and defensive functions; and 4) the felt exigencies of inner space: from ecstasy to terror, in which the phenomenology of "maternal space" was described as comprising the infants' experience of the holding mother and the mother's experience of the evocative impact of being present to her infant's state of mind, with awe (in response to perceived beauty) and panic (in response to perceived terror) representing the two predominant sub-structures of experience.

Chapter five elucidated the four core themes of the second transition period (third month), which included the emerging sociality of the infant and the related social awakening in the mother; their mutual lived curiosity with its perceived split focus; the birth of routine, and the resurgence of anxiety in the wake of feeling torn.

The sixth month represented a significant turning point for both mother and infant. Four essential themes of the experience of holding and being held in mind were discovered between the sixth and ninth month, described here as the early weaning period, two of which were derived from the sixth month data: 1) interfacing with the world: preserving and relinquishing omnipotence, which described the infant's struggle in coming to terms with change and the reality function, and 2) crossing the desert: the arduous process of weaning, which comprised two sub-structures of maternal experience: holding on and letting go. Two further core themes common to the sixth and ninth month data included: 3) re-structuring the maternal frame: reflectivity returned, which outlined the women's re-erecting structure in accordance with the return of perspective, and 4) the birth of "triadic space," which described the felt entry into maternal space of the third parental figure. These four essential themes of the early weaning period were presented in chapter six.

In chapter seven, I provided a developmental overview of the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, which traced the experience of holding and being held in mind as it was seen to shift across transitions. It documented the closely correlated developmental progression in the maternal and infantile experience of self-body boundaries, maternal space, and
structure across the four transitions. I discovered the re-evocation in each mother of
developmental conflicts specific to each transition in being continuously and intimately engaged
with her infant's state of mind. Holding an infant in mind across these early developmental
hurdles was seen to re-ignite a brush with existential beginnings for better or for worse in the
constant re-looping that was brought about through intimate engagement.

**Consideration of the Study’s Limitations**

The findings of this study are not depicted as generalizable to all mother infant
relationships, but seen as specific to the experience of the eight participants of being in a holding
relationship in this specific culture at this moment in history. Nor is it suggested that this study
could be replicated by using a comparable sample to yield the same data, given that the
interpretive analysis is bound by the nature of the exploratory space created between the
researcher and each participant, as well as the researcher's own viewing lens. I chose the
hermeneutic phenomenological method to allow an in-depth exploration of the underlying
structures of the experience of holding and being held in mind that would retain its essential
ambiguity. What made it onto the page represents a certain stage in the wondering about the
containing experience. While it is my final word for now, the exploration is ongoing and
hopefully continues in the reader. I have presented the findings in such a way as to prompt
further thinking about the holding experience as it confirms or challenges the reader's own belief
system and ways of being in interdependent relationships.

The fact that the four women who participated in this study were all over 29 years when
the study began and had all obtained third level education may be said to have introduced a bias
to the findings. All of these women were articulate and interested in thinking about their
evolving relationship with their infant, which was one of the prerequisites for participation. I had
presented the study to a number of prenatal groups with different backgrounds and had hoped to
receive a more diverse sample, but those who expressed an interest in participating were all
relatively older, educated women, which is an interesting finding in itself and one that has left
me wondering about the experience of younger or less articulate mothers.

Another limitation of this study that might be raised pertains to the function of the third
party in the holding equation. In this study, the father's role was portrayed through the eyes of
the mother. Considering that the containing function of the third party was seen as crucial to the
experience of both the maternal figure and the infant in the holding relationship, it might have
been fruitful to interview the father or the maternal grandmother regarding their role as container
of the dyad. My own inclination in the present study however, was to document the mother’s experience of both containing and feeling contained in her mothering role. Accordingly, the mothers’ subjective experiences in the relationship were tapped as the child’s movements were tracked in an effort to uncover internal workings.

*Position of Current Findings in Relation to Prior Research*

In chapter one, I organized the relevant studies on maternal containment and the holding relationship into three main categories: 1) mutual influence in mother-infant interaction studies; 2) mutual influence in psychoanalytic infant observation studies; and 3) maternal studies on the transition to motherhood. Below, I will position the findings of the current study in relation to the review of the literature outlined in chapter one, commenting on the similarities and differences between the current studies and the findings in each of these categories.

In the first category, located primarily within the developmental, infancy and attachment research literature, the focus was on documenting the *mode* of interchange between mother and child. This differs from the current study’s focus on the phenomenological *experience* of each member of the dyad of being in the early holding relationship. The findings in a number of these studies however (Harding et al., 1997; Murray, 1991; Trevarthen, 1977, 1979), provided evidence of the baby’s active role in the shaping of the relationship from the start that was corroborated in the present study. Trevarthen’s (1977) work on intersubjectivity in early mother infant relations had delineated how mother and infant co-construct a pattern of intention from the start, which was seen to shift over time, with the infant initially preoccupied with the intersubjective dance itself and only later (at nine months) seen to integrate factors external to the nursing relationship, including vigilance to the mother’s own intentionality. A similar shift in the nature of dyadic interchange in each of the four dyads over the course of the first nine months was observed and described in greater phenomenological detail in the current study. In short, dyadic interchange revolved more around a process of *mutual* projection in the first transition, with phantasy life appearing more predominant; this was seen to evolve into a more reality-based reciprocal interchange in the second transition, as reflected in their reciprocal gazing and the emergence of a more vivid vocal dance; by the third transition, each of the four infants demonstrated an evolving recognition of change, including vigilance to their mother’s expanding relationships with a third party and this was even more evident by the ninth month (fourth transition). Murray’s (1991) finding that even six week olds demonstrate sensitivity to details of an other’s expression was consistent with the observed vigilance of the infants in the first
transition to their mother’s expression and way of holding, and included their attempt to either sustain or avert the mother’s attention in different situations. In this study, a phenomenological description of this experience was derived.

The emphasis in a number of the experimental studies cited however, was on the impact of the quality of maternal factors on infant development, and this differed from the predominant focus in the present study on the impact of shifts in the infant’s state of mind on the women’s experience of being in maternal space. While Fonagy et al. (1991b) operationalized the maternal containing function, pinpointing parental reflective capacities as crucial to the transgenerational process, this study honed in on the maternal experience of feeling caught in the tension between immersing oneself in the experience and standing back and reflecting on the experience. In the present study, the extent to which the women themselves felt contained as they ‘lived’ the intensity of infantile emotion was seen to colour their overall experience of ‘being there’ for their child. This corroborates and further contextualizes Kershner’s (1993) findings that fathers’ internal representations of relationship from infancy were strongly associated with mothers’ sensitivity to their infants at the point at which fathers were seen to perform a holding function for mothers. An additional finding in the present study was the gradual return of the women’s reflective capacities in accordance with their infants’ development as the months progressed. In the first transition, the women described feeling more generally immersed in the experience with the child and the gradual return of a more objective perspective was seen to coincide with the emergence of the infants’ own reality function.

In the present study, the experience of one member of the dyad feeding the experience of the other in a transactional cycle, which I termed “transactional looping” was evident from the start. This is consistent with the findings of Harding et al.’s (1997) qualitative case study comparing two dyads, which demonstrated that differences in the way choices were perceived and constructed within each dyadic communication system either enhanced or inhibited the infant’s development of intentional communication by affecting the way in which s/he came to “share minds” with an adult. Their concept of co-construction elucidates a possible mechanism for dyadic interchange that has both cognitive and affective components. The present study focused more on describing that experience.

In the second category, comprising psychoanalytic infant observation studies, the qualitative nature of the holding relationship was explored primarily in terms of the impact of the mother’s containing capacity on the infant’s mental and emotional development. As such, these studies were seen to set the stage for the current study by paving the way toward exploring the
other arm in the equation on mutual influence, namely, the maternal experience of containing the infant’s state of mind. Internal infant factors, which Perez-Sanchez’ (1990) found to be at play in the earliest relationship, were also observed in this study, with the themes seen to emerge in his month by month account found to be consistent with some of the themes that emerged in the present study; for example, his characterization of the first month as a “state of unintegration” is consistent with the theme of “contact and boundedness,” as derived from the data of the first transition. The findings of this study went further however, in more specifically linking infant and maternal experience. While Perez-Sanchez referred to the mother’s adjustment to the baby’s dependent need through inference, this study provided a phenomenological description of the women’s own experience in this regard. His observation of mother (and the family at large) and infant as reciprocally influencing each other and mutually dipping back into the unintegrated state of early infancy when containment of either party was wanting, was also evident in the case of the four dyads observed.

The baby’s sensitivity to the mother’s emotional and mental state, related in particular, to the extent to which she either felt contained herself or not in the moment, was a common theme that ran through a number of the observation studies cited (Balbernie, 1997; Briggs, 1997; Perez-Sanchez, 1990) and corroborated in the present study in the infants’ reactions and accommodations. Here, the women’s articulated experience of containing their infant’s state of mind was seen to correlate with the extent to which they themselves felt contained or supported in their maternal role. Two of the women felt they got this support from their spouses or their own mothers; one felt more isolated and frustrated in the maternal role in being distant from her own mother, and the other felt she had created this supportive network herself, despite her own mother’s emotional unavailability.

Hopkin’s (1996) study had drawn attention to the impact on development, of the mother’s capacity to develop alongside her child, while gradually leaving more space for the baby’s initiative. Some of the women in the present study found it easier than others to stand back and follow the baby’s lead and leave room for the baby’s inherent expression and this pattern became evident in the rhythmic dance that was seen to develop between them. Lubbe’s (1996) unveiling of the onset of weaning as creating emotional turbulence in both mother and child was looked at in this study more from the perspective of the mother and described phenomenologically as a period of ‘holding on’ and ‘letting go’ with all the attendant ramifications. The infant’s ambivalence in dealing with loss at around six months, to which Perez-Sanchez (1990) had referred, was observed in the push-pull behaviours of the infants in this study in the face of
change. In this study however, its essential nature was elaborated, in addition to its experienced impact on the four mothers. The containing role of the observer was not as explicit in the present study as was deemed to be the case in the observation studies cited, given that in the latter, many of the case studies involved dysfunctional holding relationships. In this study, the presence of an observing third party served more to enhance the women’s reflective capacities, which may in turn, have implicitly affected their experience of containing their infant’s state of mind. Given their state of emotional/mental health however, the impact of the observer’s presence on the experience of the four infants themselves is considered minimal.

In the third category of study, emanating mainly from the nursing and life span research, the maternal experience of the transition to motherhood honed in on the women’s experiences to the exclusion of the infant’s. That said, the findings in a number of these studies closely replicated the current findings both in discerning shifts in experienced identity, and in the process of integrating ambivalent feelings in dealing with loss. The findings of Lewis and Nicholson’s (1998) study, which re-defined postnatal depression as a realistic response along a continuum of responses to the pressing needs of a dependent infant, were consistent with the current findings, which highlighted the process of mourning and loss as a significant dimension in the experience of holding an infant in mind from the third transition onward. This study went further however, in finding a parallel for aspects of maternal depression in the infant’s experience of coming to terms with loss, at the point of coming to realize the mother’s separateness. The present study also expanded on what is depressing about the maternal containing experience at each juncture and how this shifts over the course of the first nine months. It went beyond a number of the maternal studies cited, in linking the mother’s experience developmentally to the infant’s as this was seen to change over time. The developmental studies of Cramer (1993), and Papousek and Hofacker (1998) had designated the postpartum as a time of specific vulnerability for both mother and infant without describing the women’s actual experience in the postpartum. Mothering was also described as a developmental opportunity in a number of the studies cited in this category (Antonucci & Mikus, 1988; Benedek, 1959, 1970; Bibring et al., 1961; Domash, 1988; Parker, 1995), entailing a re-visiting of earlier developmental conflicts. The present study provided a detailed description of the specific nature of such “re-visiting.”

Parker’s (1995) highlighting maternal ambivalence as crucial to maternal empathy and developmental integration was further developed in this study through its phenomenological description of shifts in the women’s experience of ambivalence at the different transitions, along
with its role in bringing the women existentially closer to the cycle of life, including a recognition on a deeper level, of its essential finiteness. Bergum’s (1989) phenomenological study on women’s transition to motherhood is probably the closest to the present study in terms of focus and methodology with respect to the maternal experience. While she interviewed women at different phases in the transition, she chose not to fragment the process of becoming into separate stages, but to capture the essence of the experience as a whole. In integrating the infant’s active role into the phenomenological description of the holding relationship, the present study incorporated what were observed as the infant’s changing demands and their experienced impact at each of four transitions following the birth. Bergum’s (1989, 1997) research had highlighted important themes in the experience of becoming a mother, many of which were confirmed in the present study, including her finding that having a child on one’s mind is a body/mind experience, giving rise to love and pain; that the transition to motherhood is a movement from one mode of living to another that potentially transforms women’s lives; that mothering is experienced as a moral responsibility that develops through reciprocal engagement with one’s child in the moral move from self to other; that becoming a mother gives birth to a more intimate and humble relationship to the birth-death cycle. The present study further dimensionalized these themes and included others, which were organized developmentally, as an outcome of incorporating the infant’s experience and looking at what the infant’s vulnerability invoked in the women participants at each transition. Here, the evocative impact of the dependent infant was seen to induce a developmental re-visiting that was seen to change qualitatively across the four transitions. The finding of this study expanded on Stern’s (1995) concept of the “motherhood constellation” by pinpointing developmental shifts in both the mother’s and infant’s experience, including the experienced (re)-integration of the third oedipal figure in the internal world by the sixth month.

Mothers’ experiences of feeling split in their maternal role and sense of space, and torn with respect to experienced identity changes in the transition to motherhood, as documented in the qualitative studies by Zimmer (1999), Smith-Pierce (1994) and Smith (1990), were consistent with the findings of this study, although here, detailed descriptions that were more closely linked to the evocative impact of infancy were provided. Smith’s discovery that pregnancy as a psychological preparation for motherhood involved both a turning inward and linking with significant others, was borne out in the current finding that women both turn inward away from the external world and toward the infant in the initial stages, as well as making social contact with maternal figures. The present study went further in documenting a qualitative shift in the
women's turning outward toward others beyond the maternal holding function as the months progressed, which was seen to coincide with the infant's growing awareness of the third familial figure.

I cited two studies from this third category, which explicitly weaved the role of the infant into the research exploration: Eagan (1985) noted gross developmental parallels between mothers and infants who were followed from pregnancy to the ninth postpartum month, which were not replicated in the current study, although some of the more subtle parallels were. Her strict adherence to Mahlerian theory--specifically her reading of an autistic phase in both the mothers and infants in her sample--appeared to narrow her viewing lens and perhaps bias her findings. Eagan gave examples of women who in the third and fourth postpartum months, described a better relationship with their child when working outside the home, without drawing attention to the contradictory draw of the infant that was found in the women in the present study to tap into their own core ambivalence. While Wynn's (1996) finding that dyadic intercorporeality has its origin in pregnancy lends support to the ongoing transactional nature of mutual influence as uncovered in the present study, her investigation remained predominantly at the level of inter-corporeal interchange and did not take into account the mother and infant's mutual negotiation of underlying developmental hurdles that came to the fore at each transition. The method of attending to both ongoing infant and maternal factors in the present study facilitated a linking of the mother's and infant's experiences of being in the holding relationship as these were seen to overlap in the course of development. The findings in this study can be said to have bridged somewhat the identified gap in the literature on mutual influence in the holding relationship.

**Main Contribution to Current Body of Knowledge**

The main contribution of the findings of this study to the current body of knowledge on the holding experience in mother infant relations is its delineation of the maternal holding experience as an evocative re-visiting of earlier developmental turning points through the process of continually bearing witness to an infant's state of mind. In honing in on both the infant's and the mother's experience, what emerged from this study was a descriptive rendering of the experienced impact of the infant's salient developmental experiences on the maternal care-giver at each of four transitions over the first nine months, with the impact of circling states of mind on the development of both parties implied. The study revealed the maternal "carrier" as re-experiencing the raw ecstasies and fears/terrors of early life with her adult mind as she
temporarily dipped into the primitive world of infancy in the early weeks, and her re-defining her boundaries and re-erecting structure between the sixth and ninth postpartum month, in accordance with her infant's reaching own toward externality and his dawning awareness of change. The manifestation of maternal and infant anxiety witnessed at each transition was not perfectly matched, but significantly correlated.

The construct, 'maternal space' was derived from the women's first hand accounts to describe the shifting phenomenology of internal space, encompassing the primitive world of infancy, into which the women felt they temporarily fell in being emotionally available to their infant's mental and emotional state. The nature of this experience was seen to shift in accordance with observed developmental shifts in the infants from a more phantasy-dominated existence in the early weeks through to a more reality-based experience in the ninth month. Both infant and maternal factors were seen to interlink in shaping the experience of being in a holding relationship. A detailed phenomenological reading of the nature of that link that remains close to the women's experience was provided, which uncovers its underlying meaning and should strike a cord in those who have either gone through or are going through the experience.

**Theoretical Contribution**

The findings of this study might be said to go some way toward releasing the maternal holding function from its prescriptive confines in both the psychoanalytic and developmental literature. Winnicott's account of 'good enough' mothering, as was suggested in chapter six, merely paid lip service to the maternal strand in the holding relationship. This study's integration of infant need factors on the one hand, and the maternal experience of attending to those needs on the other, brings the maternal experience of containing an infant's mental/emotional state over an extended period back into the viewing lens in a way that has a direct bearing on theories of development. In this study, I have taken this experience, spread it out, laid bare its manifold textures and magnified its underlying structures in an effort to uncover its essence. The outcome is a rich phenomenological account of shifts in the maternal experience of containing an infant's changing states of mind, including a developmental description of how these were seen to evolve over the first nine months. Numerous studies as outlined in the literature review in chapter one, had already documented the developmental impact of the mother's containing function on infant development. This study went beyond that in incorporating into the feedback loop, the women's own experiences of being in a holding relationship, including the extent to which they themselves felt contained. This exposition could conceivably take the sole responsibility for the
developmental outcome in infancy off the shoulders of maternal caregivers, onto which it is commonly placed in developmental theories of infancy, and shift the onus onto the wider family and society at large. An image of a container with an infinite number of recesses comes to mind.

The finding that the women re-visited earlier transitions over the course of this relatively short, though intense period of development through intimate involvement, wherein coming into contact with the infant’s state of mind induced a re-evocation of primitive experiences, has wider implications for development. The findings more generally revealed life as proceeding along a developmental cycle, entailing the re-visiting again and again of core developmental dimensions of experience through a series of looping movements via intimate encounters with dependent others. Containing an other’s state of mind is seen to temporarily induce inner experiences of merging, clashing, or a complementary crossing over that culminate in either further growth or stagnation in circumscribed areas of development, depending on where one is in the developmental cycle. By implication, the meeting of inner worlds at other major life transitions may be seen to provide further opportunities for psychological growth through interdependent relationship, with birth/maternity representing but one such transition.

While maternity has already been characterized as a developmental opportunity (Antonucci & Mikus, 1988; Benedek, 1959, 1970; Bergum, 1989; Bibring et al., 1961; Domash, 1988; Parker, 1995), this study went beyond the prior research in describing both the extent to which an infant’s volatile mental/emotional state evokes different modes of anxiety in the maternal parent at each transition, and the way in which a re-encounter with beginnings potentially brings one in contact with deeper aspects of one’s humanity through a process of emotional resonance. Here, the maternal process of containing an infant’s state of mind was experienced as a “lesson” in coming to terms with human limitation and the finality of life, to which each of the women in this study were seen to respond from their own place on life’s journey.

**Social Implications**

This study both confirmed the infant’s active role in the shaping of the first relationship and illuminated the emotional weight on maternal care-givers of containing an infants’ state of mind that has implications for the development of both parties in the holding relationship and for the emotional well being of the family in general. The findings have direct implications for both maternal care in the postpartum and child-care policy and practice. It is not enough to outline what the infant needs, or to set prescriptive standards for parents or caregivers without
considering its impact on those who are called upon to provide that care. This study points to the need to remain cognizant of what containing an infant’s state of mind means to those who take it on. The understanding of what it is like to continuously hold an infant in mind that was revealed in this study could potentially influence what kind of supports are made available to parents and those who care for children over this crucial developmental period.

The delineation of the shifting experiences of women in the postpartum derived from the first hand accounts of the mothers in this study has implications for the type of support that might help alleviate some of the strain of containing an infant’s state of mind in a culture wherein access to the extended family is effectively shrinking. The women’s own accounts of struggling with shifting forms of conflict and anxiety at each developmental turning point could be used to pinpoint the kind of support that would be most helpful in each phase of the postpartum. The themes that emerged at each transition document the core developmental issues encountered by mothers and infants and these could be used by general practitioners as a guiding framework in understanding and tracking the health and emotional well being of mothers and infants in the postpartum.

The detailed account of the women’s changing experiences as derived from the data, supports the view of maternity, specifically the emotional turbulence experienced in the immediate postpartum, as a normal response to a major life transition (for both parent and child) and this information could be thoughtfully applied by those who are in a position to support mothers in caring for their babies. The phenomenological account of the maternal experience of holding an infant in mind as it is linked to the infant’s rapidly changing mental and emotional state could also be inspiring to mother’s themselves in normalizing the experienced intensity of rapid change in the postpartum. The study’s delineation of infant and maternal development over this period might encourage maternal caregivers to see the relationship for what it is, to appreciate its transitory nature and not set the standard too high. The vivid description of the infant’s turbulent inner world and how it impacts mothers’ lives in ways that can inspire and deepen one’s sense of meaning might encourage women to stay with the infant’s experience and to support each other in remaining in contact with primitive mental states instead of trying to back off and “manage” the transition. This study revealed that staying in touch with the feelings evoked in emotionally healthy relationships enhanced the relationship and deepened the women’s relationship to their own lives. Too often are mothers prescribed medication to “dampen” experiences which coming into contact with an infant’s state of mind naturally induces. The information contained in this study might also enhance the empathy of those
adopting a more practical or "paternal" role in the relationship with the infant by concretely helping them to understand and contain the "maternal carrier" through this intense transition period.

The information embodied in the findings of this study might usefully be applied to day care settings as a means to provide a supportive structure for those involved in the direct care of infants. This might include monitoring stress levels of frontline staff and providing supportive groups to deal with issues that arise in the general course of caring for young infants. In maternity wards, the descriptive account of infant and maternal experience in the first transition could be usefully incorporated into the postnatal care of women and their infants.

During the course of this study, it occurred to me, mainly through the women's voiced experiences of what it was like to participate in this study, that something like the holding space that was created for research purposes here, could be inherently useful to mothers in generally traversing this developmental period. It might be useful much in the way that the form of parent-infant psychotherapy, Watch, Wait, and Wonder has been found useful in enhancing the psychological well-being of families encountering difficulties, by creating a holding space in which the parents' themselves may be facilitated in making connections between different aspects of their experience. What is proposed is a preventative approach, promoting healthy relationships in a fast-paced, materially-driven world, its focus being, the creation of a space for thought for mothers and babies during this period of rapid growth and change, which would provide women with an opportunity to share their feelings of ambivalence, explore their re-definition of self in the context of the maternal role and more generally speak to their experience of being emotionally present to an infant. Creating a space for thought for women in the postpartum might be seen as an extension of the holding space which prenatal groups generally provide in the prenatal period, with the derived thematic outline providing a developmental framework. This would be workable in either an individual or group setting, and would invariably involve the direct presence of the infant. The women in this study found the four meetings that were spaced over the first nine months timely, in that it allowed just enough change to happen between meetings to enable them to stand back and see it. They also used the meetings as grounding experiences or "anchor points" in the midst of experiencing chaos and this helped them to see change in the making and to appreciate the transitory nature of the experience. Such a group might create a space in which to explore the more growth-promoting aspects of maternity. Attention to early development is generally considered to serve a
preventive function and to decrease the financial burden on the mental health care system in later years. Maternal care is characterized here as a community responsibility.

The account of the postpartum experience that was derived from the experiences of the women and infants who participated in this study might conceivably be used to facilitate some families in making an informed decision about when to have a child and perhaps which partner might be best equipped to take on the maternal role.

**Implications for Clinical Practice**

Through the process of researching the holding relationship, insights gleaned in the fieldwork inspired my clinical work and vice versa; for example, the descriptive phenomenological account of the shifting inner world of mothers and infants emerging from the data served as a useful guiding tool in tracking core maternal experiences in the clinical situation. Similarly, core themes emerging in psychotherapy with mothers (and with mothers and infants) were seen to match some of the tentative hypotheses regarding the nature of ambivalence felt at the different transitions. The findings of this study provide insight into the inner world of mothers and babies, including where their developmental paths cross in the context of maternity that has direct implications for clinical practice.

The developmental overview derived from the original data, which includes a breakdown of core themes within each transition and an account of developmental shifts in the experience of maternal space, self-body boundaries and structure, can be used as a guiding framework to assess and track psychological adjustment in the postpartum. This framework could be used in the clinical setting as either a diagnostic tool in assessment or in the ongoing evaluation of psychotherapeutic intervention with mothers and infants encountering emotional/psychological difficulties in the first year. It would facilitate the clinician in pinpointing developmental issues in the context of maternity as they arise in the clinical setting. The detailed description of internal maternal states as linked to developmental turning points in infancy, and the delineation of the form of anxiety encountered within each transition, as derived from the women’s first hand experiences, provides an informative account of developmental change in the postpartum that could enhance an understanding of maternal experience in a therapeutic setting and guide treatment interventions during that time. This framework, which describes the internal world phenomenologically could be usefully employed in the differential diagnosis of depressed affect common to the postnatal period and more clinical forms of depression/psychosis requiring intervention in the postpartum.
The finding that the process of holding an infant in mind was an intensely evocative experience for the four women in this study and one that drew on all of their internal resources, points to the particular significance of the containing process in mother-infant intervention approaches in the postpartum, wherein the therapist contains the mother (and the infant) and the infant within the mother, as the mother contains the infant. The clinician’s need to be especially aware of countertransference issues with regard to containing multiple primitive mental states is implied. The extent to which the women in this study themselves felt contained was found to significantly influence the way in which they experienced the postpartum. Insights gleaned both through engaging in this research and from the study’s outcome (the evocative impact on me of witnessing the merging of primitive mental states; the derived invariants across the women’s experience; the importance to the women of feeling supported in their role by other mothers) led me to consider the potential benefit of running a psychotherapy group for mothers and infants encountering adjustment/psychological difficulties in the first 12 months.

Coincidentally, I recently stumbled upon an article by Paul and Salo (1997), whose clinical work with mothers and infants in Melbourne, Australia, inspired an innovative group psychotherapy approach for mothers and infants that draws upon psychoanalytic group work and parent-infant psychotherapy. In this approach, two co-therapists adopt the role of the “thinking parental couple” who bear the experienced chaos in the group and in support of the findings of the present study, provide a differentiated thinking space (“triadic space”) as a veritable supportive frame. Responding from a position of holding the mother and infant at the centre of their attention, they focus as much on the infants’ as on the mothers’ experiences in the group situation and describe the group as “a playground where infants can work out current developmental concerns” (p. 232). Paul and Salo suggest that the infants themselves may process difficult feelings for one another through the process of projective identification in being “held” by the setting of the group. They describe the effectiveness of “infant-led innovations” and the way in which “the infants’ activity was used as a basis for making ‘group as a whole’ interpretations” (p. 219).

What is appealing about this approach in the context of the current findings is its appreciation and application of the infant’s active role in instrumenting change.

The phenomenological information derived in the present study on the holding relationship could be usefully applied to such a group setting wherein containment of the raw-edged emotions of infancy and their inevitable impact on maternal care-givers is essential to the process of change. The methodological approach of providing a space wherein the women could explore their feelings of ambivalence that was adopted in this study, could be usefully applied to
the group setting where experiences of guilt and feelings of blame might have a less persecutory edge and where mothers might feel freer in the company of other mothers who are going through the process, to deal with the darker side of their experience. Paul and Salo (1997) cited Schindler’s finding that the group experience predisposes mothers to more quickly “work on aspects of their relationship with their own mothers and of the meaning of motherhood” (p. 226). They found that the group setting itself potentially acts as a communal container for the experienced chaos spread across the group. The current findings suggest however, that in working clinically with either mothers or with mothers and infants in the postpartum, it might be important not to weigh the focus too heavily on the darker side of maternity, but to integrate into the thinking space, the lighter, more inspiring aspects of the experience as uncovered here, and to bear in mind both sides of the experience, the push and the pull, the forward and backward moves until such time as the mother can, in facilitating the dyad’s psychological move toward a more integrated position.

The findings of this study can be helpful in relationship psychotherapy with adult partners in facilitating their mutual understanding of their respective parental roles and how this may be impacting the marital relationship, specifically the degree to which one or both partners may be re-visiting earlier developmental transitions through the process of emotionally containing their child(ren).

**Suggestions for Future Research**

While the wealth of information gained in this study on the experience of what it is like to move through the developmental transitions of infancy alongside one’s dependent child broadened my understanding of developmental issues in maternity and inspired my clinical work, it raised as many questions as it provided answers, and brought to mind possible new projects that go further afield, which might further our understanding of the holding experience. Below, I will outline some possibilities for future research in the area of gender and the life span that evolved directly out of my engagement in the current project.

**Proposed Gender Study**

In the present study, I explored four women’s experience of holding their infant in mind on a continuous basis over an extended period of time, which was termed here, the “maternal” containing process. It entailed opening oneself up to receive the baby’s shifting states of mind and included what Bion (1962b) referred to as maternal “reverie.” While it is generally women who adopt this role in Western culture, I am proposing here, an exploration of (a) the
complementary experience of what is like to contain from the *paternal* perspective and (b) the containing experience of a specific, though granted small group of fathers who take on the primary *maternal* role from the beginning.

Gender issues with regard to parenting in the feminist literature have tended to focus on the dichotomous split between social and biological determinants of behaviour. While Ruddick (1989) saw mothering as a functional task promoting maternal thinking that is not gender bound, Bergum (1989, 1997), in contrast, saw it as a body-mind experience that is very much tied up with a woman’s biology and in so doing, considered mothering and fathering as distinctive parental experiences which in themselves, merit further exploration. The theoretical framework adopted by Kristeva (1976) and Chassequett-Smirgel (1994) would coincide with the latter viewpoint. The proposed studies might shed light on this debate and would uncover useful information with respect to child rearing practices and gender.

The first proposed study—the “paternal” experience of containing—could conceivably run parallel to the current one, or in employing a similar method, might extend the current study by including interviews with fathers and possibly taped interaction sessions with fathers and infants at each transition to evaluate the different patterns that might emerge. Alternatively, it could be carried out as a single study focusing solely on “paternal” experiences in the holding relationship in situations where mothers adopt the primary containing role. Such a study would differentiate between maternal and paternal experiences of the containing process and highlight significant differences between paternal and maternal roles. The following question might be addressed: What is the father’s shifting experience of ‘paternal’ containing and how does this relate to his own relationship with the infant at the different developmental transitions?

The second proposed gender study might compare two groups of dyads, one with mothers as the primary maternal container and the other comprising a separate group of fathers, adopting a parallel “maternal” role, with view to investigating the way in which men and women take on the “maternal” role and how they each experience the impact of being the primary parent responsible for carrying the infant’s mental state over a continuous period. Some of the questions addressed in such a study might include: Do men take on the maternal role in the same way as women do? Are they as easily impacted by the internal experiences of their infants? Do they loosen their boundaries in accordance with the developmental needs of the infant? Do they immerse themselves in the maternal process or compartmentalize their experiences from the start? Do they experience shifts in identity over the course of the first year? Not having carried the child within or having a physical space inside in which to carry a child, do they experience
the same degree of loss in letting the infant go in the weaning phase? The findings of such a study would shed light on the aforementioned gender debate in the literature and would have implications for parenting for both heterosexual and same-sexed partners.

**Proposed Life Span Study**

An important aspect of the maternal containing function that was revealed in this study concerned the capacity to flexibly move between giving oneself over to the experience of “being with” and standing back and reflecting on that experience. Smith-Pierce’s (1994) study on maternal experience had demonstrated that women who became mothers in later life tended to demonstrate more foresight in being more aware of the need to attend both to the infant’s needs and their own; that is, in balancing what is required in the moment with what is considered sustaining in the long run. While all of the women in the present study fell into one general age category, women’s experience of this aspect of the containing process could be explored further by comparing the experience of women at different phases in development, for example, teen mothers and younger mothers with women over thirty and thirty five in order to test out developmental hypotheses.

The second proposed application of the findings to life span research moves beyond maternal experiences of infancy into other areas of developmental transition. The findings of this study provided evidence of maternity as a developmental transition by specifying how it entails a developmental re-visiting of earlier experiences. This led to the proposal that experiencing other major life transitions alongside a dependent other through intimate relationship might evoke a similar psychological re-visiting leading to potential growth in the maternal caregiver. Accordingly, it might be fruitful to explore the phenomenological inner world of parents living through adolescent change alongside their teen-aged children, or that of middle aged parents who have taken on the role of caring for an aging parent. Such studies would focus on exploring the emotional impact of emotionally containing a dependent other through a major life transition, including its potential for bringing deeper meaning to one’s own life. Exploring the experience of caring for an elderly parent for example, could have implications for the provision of supportive care for those providing continuous care of loved ones through a major life’s transitions that could impact the lives of those receiving the care.

**Closing Comments: The Experience of Participating in the Research Process**

This final section highlights the containing aspects inherent in the research method as experienced by the participants and includes a brief reference to my own related experience of
engaging in the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. The research method was designed not just to broaden the general understanding of the experience of holding and being held in mind through an intense period of developmental change, but to potentially enhance the holding experience of those participating in the project through providing a holding space, which would allow each of the women to stay in touch with her own experience in addition to being emotionally available to her infant. It was not designed to heighten the women’s intellectual understanding of either their infants’ or their own experience, but to facilitate their staying in touch with the immediacy of the experience itself.

In a similar vein, the uncovering of the essence of the holding experience through the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis occurred not through an intellectual analysis on my part, but an indwelling in the primary data of the experience. I discovered that I arrived at a deeper understanding of the holding experience and its underlying meaning only when I had allowed myself to stay with the raw data long enough for it to have an impact. In the case of the participants, I believe it was in being provided a space which facilitated their being in the experience followed by an extended opportunity to reflect on the experience that helped to contain the range of contradictory feelings that were invoked at each transition and to provide a grounding in the face of rapid change. Being provided an opportunity to take time out from the general day to day events to ‘be’ and reflect on being, along with the experience of feeling held in mind by an interested other might have facilitated the participants’ opening up to the experience and their ongoing ability to remain in it. These speculative hypotheses were derived from the women’s voiced experiences.

The “holding” aspect of the research method seemed to facilitate the women’s getting in touch with their innermost feelings with respect to their experience of holding an infant in mind:

I was telling a friend about what you were doing and she said, “I’m really glad that you found somebody that could pull that stuff out of you.” The whole theme I would say, is this business of being there and how there’s no permission to talk about it and the negative stuff ... and that I think has been the greatest gift and I actually mentioned it to another woman yesterday who said, “Boy, I really wish I had had that opportunity because,” she said, “I was in isolation for months before anyone even mentioned postpartum”... I feel that it’s this marginalized experience, almost. It’s like everybody does it, but nobody gets a lot of help with it. You’re just supposed to do it and get on with it ... and nobody says anything. (Sharon-4)

The experience of having regular, though intermittent access to a holding space, which both drew the women into the immediate experience and facilitated reflectivity, seemed to provide a framework which lent perspective, enabling the participants to make sense of what
might otherwise have been an elusive experience, inducing overwhelming feelings of ambivalence:

There’ll be a nagging thought in the back of my mind and often just talking about them brings them out and then I make connections. So it’s like I’ll start to realize there’s a connection between this nagging feeling and something else that’s coming on. To have so many questions, it helps me to think more about what’s been happening ... to actually have a broader perspective on it and to bring all my thoughts together and to understand ... what’s going on ... It starts to come together more. (Rae-2)

The holding space was seen to set the stage for reflecting on the experience in the present in a way that encouraged the participants to stay close to their immediate experience. Carolyn was taken aback by her experience of moving in and out of maternal space in the first interview: “This has actually been strange because I hadn’t really talked about it, just enjoying it. It’s a bit difficult to verbalize, to capture exactly how I’m feeling, but it does make me think a little bit more.” Her reflecting here inspired her to return her attention to her three-week-old infant and address the relationship directly: “Mm hmm, you were very calm today....”

Even though the interviews were experienced as intense, the women seemed to really appreciate having their experiences listened to, reflected upon and tracked: “I was thinking why did I agree to do this, just because of the time ... but I actually really enjoy it ... I find it interesting to talk about it and to have somebody who’s interested in it” (Rae-2). In reflecting on her participation in the research process in the last interview, Rae had this to say:

I think every single time that I met with you and talked, it’s helped me to clarify my thoughts and feelings somewhat. You know, if there’s an issue that I’m trying to deal with or trying to work through, it helps to put it into words more, because you know I don’t often get the chance to do that. It’s always in my head so to actually bring it out and talk about it each time has been helpful. (Rae-4)

The women liked “the idea of capturing” their intimate experience in a way they felt they alone couldn’t by virtue of being so immersed in it. Sharon felt appreciative of the opportunity to “stop and capture” her experience of being there for her child:

For me to process it as it’s happening ... has been invaluable. ... And it’s been a learning experience, like I’m in it, but I’m also able to stand back and look at it. And also you’ve been a support ... like not as therapy or stuff, but it’s like somebody’s tracking this and that’s a neat feeling. (Sharon-4)

The continuity of the meetings over time were experienced as providing a form of structure that in itself was felt as grounding through this period of immense change:

It a little bit of structure and it’s like, I know that it in my mind logically that things are a process but when you’re in it sometimes, it’s like, oh my God, this is never going to end. But knowing you were there ... I knew that it would change ‘cause I could see how it
changed each time I saw you. It gave me some perspective ... and with you being there as someone objective, as just following it, it’s sort of grounding. That’s what I would say too. It’s a grounding technique. (Sharon-4)

The opportunity to read over the transcripts of the interviews between meetings helped to contextualize the women’s experience, and helped them to locate themselves in the present and observe change, rather than feel overwhelmed by it:

I actually appreciate the time to kind of reflect on our relationship and where I’ve been and where I’m going, but I don’t often do that in our regular routine ... It hasn’t been a conscious thing ... Mostly I’m just ... really trying to enjoy the time that we have. Perhaps the one thing it does is remind me of how quickly she’s changing ... and how she is at this time ... I know I’m gonna look back and ... enjoy reading the transcripts of where I was at that time. (Carolyn-4)

Corin described her experience of the meetings as “good,” “interesting” and the questions as “very thoughtful,” which she sometimes felt made it “hard to ... come up with answers.” She described the benefit of having a record of the experience to look back on: “In retrospect like, to look back at the notes, it’s sort of, oh yeah, like it reminds me of a different time and I’m happy that I have a record ... A little bit ... like oh yeah, that’s what I was struggling with then” (Corin-4). Carolyn also referred to the joy in having a record “to pass on to her when she gets older,” so that “she can look back and get a glimpse of what I was going through ... and how special it was ... or wow, that was me back then” (Carolyn-1). Rae felt that having the transcripts provided her with “somewhat of a more objective look” that helped her “to see clearer” (Rae-4). Sharon described reading the transcripts between interviews as “powerful” and as providing her with an opportunity to look at herself: “It’s like seeing the changes in me and how I was so overwhelmed” (Sharon-4). Reading the transcripts helped her to “see where I was and how far I’ve come and how far she’s come. It’s almost like it’s a major learning curve again, how you think you’re not going to get through and how hard it is and how intense it is” (Sharon-3).

When asked to suggest what might have enhanced the experience of holding for participants, Carolyn suggested “having something to ... focus on in between the interviews,” which would extend the process of stopping to focus and reflect on the experience, which the interviews more generally provided:

Say perhaps leaving one assignment, like ... taking just one meal time experience and just writing about that or ... the introduction of the bottle. I think just to consciously focus on that experience, because I think oftentimes we’re just so busy with her... just to stop to think about that experience. (Carolyn-4)
Two of the participants found it difficult at times, to stay with their own experience, feeling stifled by the very experience of sitting with the uncertainty and their own need to know. They seemed to have felt called upon to know, perceiving the questions as perhaps requiring a specific answer rather than an opportunity to explore the nature of their felt experience: “Some of the questions were kind of hard ‘cause I didn’t have an answer” (Rae-1). Corin described some of the questions as “real intense,” but nevertheless seemed to expect to “know” the ‘answers.’ As time went on, she found herself wondering “how other people answer these questions” and at times, she found it “a little frustrating, ‘cause these are questions that I think I should be able to answer easily because they’re sort of my field and I ... think of myself as being that way in touch” (Corin-1).

For my own part, I think the greatest learning took place through the evocative experience of writing the phenomenological text, which inspired a kind of re-visiting of my own. Segal (1991) had compared the creative process to the developmental process of letting go at the point of separation and suggested that the creative work is complete only when it is considered to have a life of its own. Just as there is an internal opposing force to regain an unattainable ideal prior to separation in the developmental context, so too, she suggested, is there an opposing force in the process of creating a piece of written text to make it perfect, to include all the parameters, which in the long run probably places more constraints on the outcome than if one could simply let it go, like a bunch of balloons released into the sky. The whole experience of being immersed in the creative process has a ring to it of being merged with the internal mother in maternal space, but to be creative at all, one must emerge from this, as Stokes (cited in Segal) suggested, and allow the external audience to develop their own relationship to the material.

There was something of that form of anxiety in me as I belaboured the data and tried to organize my thoughts, particularly around the sense of boundlessness that was emerging from the data in the early phase and the painful feelings of ambivalence and loss that pervaded the data from the sixth month on. I discovered however, that the essence, or what might be called the ‘truth’ of the experience, came to light only when I allowed myself to stay with the raw material, quietly wrestle with the very uncertainty to which it gave rise and re-experience its primitive origins as it impacted me; and in doing so, I found, again and again, as Segal (1991) had suggested, that the darkest point of uncertainty preceded insight.

It would appear to be in allowing oneself to dwell in the gap of uncertainty—the space between being in the experience and standing back to take a more objective look—that an opening up to the possibility of discovering meaning arises: the baby’s practicing absence in play
leading to space for thought; the mother’s entertaining the possibility of an external third outside their dyadic relatedness facilitating symbolic linking; and the researcher’s accepting that the whole essence of the lived experience cannot be captured leading to insight. Only gradually does internal space extend beyond the maternal to include the triadic. Only by immersing myself in the participants’ experience could I follow the trail that shed light on the need to leave room for a third perspective, i.e., that of the reader. One moves back and forth. The reflected life in never quite complete, for one has to trust in the capacity to learn from the experience of living it.

This study revealed on a number of levels, the ongoing, cyclical nature of development, the re-visiting again and again of developmental turning points, which potentially moves one forward, while releasing one from the need to draw together all the loose ends. The findings of this study on the holding experience are not prescriptive (which ultimately confines and walls one in). They do not recommend a mother’s delving into the underlying meaning of her infant’s experience, but support her staying with the experience in the here and now, with an openness to being moved by the spirit of the moment. This study revealed that we do not learn or move forward by explaining away experience, but through allowing ourselves to gracefully move through life’s transitions, paradox acknowledged, honouring our own point of entry. One may know this on an intellectual level, but it is in being given an opportunity to witness it through a kind of emotional re-visiting that one comes closer to a way of knowing that effects internal growth and change. In this study, maternity was seen as providing such an opportunity. The four women’s accounts of their experience of holding an infant in mind, along with the portrayal of their infants’ experience, invite the reader to partake in the developmental journey and continue this dialogical exploration from his or her own reference point.

I am indebted to the four women who gave of their time to participate in this study along with their infants and so graciously provided such nourishing food for thought.
References


Appendix A

Letter of Intent

Date __________

Dear __________

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on the intimate relationship between mothers and babies in the first nine months. I value the unique contribution that you can make to this study and look forward to the possibility of your participation in it. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate some of the things we have already discussed and to secure your signature on the participant-release form that you will find attached.

The research model I am using is a qualitative one through which I am seeking comprehensive descriptions of your experience of what it is like to ‘be there’ for your baby at four different transition points. What is required are vivid, descriptive portrayals of what the experience is currently like for you. I am also seeking a descriptive account of the baby’s role in the relationship through four 20-minute recordings of your baby interacting with you. You will be asked to comment on what stood out for you in these interactions.

Through your participation, I hope to understand in greater depth the essence of the experience of nurturing an infant from birth to nine months, including the changing needs of the infant and what it is really like for a mother to attend to those needs.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. I value your participation and thank you for the commitment of time, energy and effort. If you have further questions before signing the release form, I can be reached at (telephone number).

Thank you for considering to be part of my study,

With warm regards,

Vivienne Pasieka
Appendix B

Participant Release Agreement

I, __________________, agree to participate with my baby in the research project of Vivienne Pasieka, a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto, on the evolving intimate relationship between mothers and babies over the first nine months. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and am participating voluntarily. I understand that participation in the study is in the form of four one and a half hour interviews, spaced over nine months including four 20-minute video-taped observations of my baby and I interacting, following an initial introductory meeting prior to the birth.

I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a Ph.D. degree, including a dissertation and any other future publication. I grant permission to tape-recording of the interviews and video-taping of the interaction and understand that the material will be treated as confidential and that I will be assured of anonymity in the writing up of the research. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any point, should I so wish.

_________________________  __________________________
Research Participant/date       Primary Researcher/date
Appendix C
Interview Guide

Opening Statement: “I'd like you to take a few moments to focus on your experience of being there for your baby at this moment in time. Describe in as much detail as possible your experience of being emotionally present to (X); What it is like for you to hold (him or her) in mind; to live life alongside (him/her). Focus on some of the challenges and pleasures you experience in having a baby on your mind at this time, including any ambivalent feelings you may have. Try to give examples of your experience, paying particular attention to how it may have recently changed.”

Questions and Probes
What stands out for you in your relationship to your baby (name) at this time?
- What's changed in the quality of the relationship that you've noticed?
- What does being with her or having her on your mind evoke in you?
- How has this affected other relationships in your life?

What does (x) need most from you these days? What do you sense s/he is struggling with now?
- How does s/he show you what s/he needs?
- What does it feel like to be needed in this way?
- What's it like for you to witness her experiencing life in that way?
- How different is it from how s/he needed you before? How do you experience that change?
- What do you draw on to enable you to be there for (x) in the way s/he needs you to be there?

How does having a baby on your mind affect your experience of yourself?
- What bodily states or changes are you aware of in your self?
- What is your current experience of your own inner world in being a mother?
- Where do you locate your baby in it?
- What do you notice about how this has changed since s/he was first born?
- What does it feel like to hold your baby now?
- Describe your experience of holding her/him in mind and how it impacts your day?

What are you struggling with most in the relationship with your baby at this point in time?
- What are some of the current conflicts that you are experiencing around being there for (x)?
- What are some of the extremes of emotion you've been recently feeling?
- What do you find overwhelming about the experience?

Give examples of times you have felt ambivalent in your role?
- How did you deal with this?
- What do you find you rely on?
- Where are your priorities now?

What happens for you when (x) gets upset and you don’t know what’s going on for him/her?
- What kinds of thoughts cross your mind?
- How does it make you feel?
- What do you feel like doing? What do you actually do?

Is the experience of having a baby on your mind how you’d expected it would be?
- What has surprised you most about the experience?
- What does the experience bring out in you?

What are some of the pleasures in being there for your baby at this time?

What would you say has been the biggest impact of having a child on your mind?

Closure
What else would you like to add to the discussion?
Are there important areas that we have missed?
Have you shared all that is significant with reference to your experience of being there for x at this time?
What was it like for you to talk about your experiences of being there for (x) today?
Can you suggest any ways, in which the interview process might be improved, including ways in which it might be more beneficial to you?
Appendix D
Infant-Mother Interaction
Taped Observation Segment

Instructions to Participant:

(1) First Interview with baby (within first 5 weeks)

(Audio-visual equipment set up prior to interview)
"I will turn the camera on later in the interview, once we have become more familiar with each other. I will let it run alongside the interview for about 15 to 20 minutes to get a picture of the baby’s role in the relationship and also to get a sense of how you relate to one another. I don’t want you to do anything in particular, but just to be with your baby as you normally would. You may either proceed with the interview or take some time out with (x) for the duration of the recording."

(2) Second Interview (3 months)

“At some point in the interview, I will ask you to spend some time with your baby in a way that you feel would be comfortable to both of you. Again, I’m not going to ask you to do anything in particular, but rather to spend time together. I want to get a sense of the relationship at this time.”

Focused questions following the observation:
- What did you notice?
- What stood out for you?
- What struck or moved you about this experience?
- What are some of your thoughts or feelings about it?
- Does it relate in any way to anything you said earlier?

(3) Third Interview (5-6 months)

“This time, I will be more specific in asking you to follow the baby’s lead for as long as that feels comfortable. By following his/her lead, I mean responding to (x), but only at his/her initiative. While it may be difficult, try not to direct the action in any way. Simply, watch, wait, and wonder.”

Focused questions following the interaction:
1. What did you notice?
   - What stood out for you? What leaped out at you from the experience?
   - What are some of your thoughts/feelings about it?
   - What happened inside you? What got evoked in you or moved you?

2. Try to divide the event into scenes or segments and consider what happened inside you at each point?
   - What were you thinking, feeling, doing, remembering or anticipating during each scene?
   - Is this theme a familiar part of your life together?
   - Where might your mood have wandered as you felt ...?
   - What did it remind you of?

3. How did you experience following his/her lead?
   - How does that compare with how you typically are with your baby?
   - How does it relate to what you said earlier?

(4) Fourth Interview (8-9 months)
Same procedure as (3)