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Finding Point Balance: The Functions of Writing in Identifying and Maintaining Equilibrium Among a Working Mother's Life Challenges

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FINDING POINT BALANCE:

THE FUNCTIONS OF WRITING IN IDENTIFYING AND

MAINTAINING EQUILIBRIUM AMONG

A WORKING MOTHER'S LIFE CHALLENGES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Finding Point Balance: The Functions of Writing in Identifying and
        Maintaining Equilibrium Among a Working Mother's Life Challenges

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Working mothers are stressed, juggling various roles and responsibilities both at home and at work, which can result in life imbalance. Writing has the potential to help working mothers to more effectively manage the challenges that cause this imbalance. Previous research and studies have shown that engaging in personal narrative writing can have physical and psychological healing effects, enhance problem-solving, lead to self-discovery, and build social connections, all factors that could potentially provide support to working mothers. This qualitative study explored the specific effects that personal narrative writing could have on the lives of working mothers.

Initial data collection included autobiographical samples from each participant, in which she described her current issues as a working mother, her coping methods, and her previous experiences with personal writing. Over the next five months, participants were asked to write at least two times per week, at least 20-30 minutes per session, or longer if she felt compelled or simply chose to do so. Participants were interviewed four times: once before they began the study writing, once during the five-month study period, and twice during the post-study periods, during which each participant was also invited to share some of her personal writing as data sources.

Analysis of the collected data enabled five themes to emerge: 1) writing can relieve stress; 2) writing can impact problem-solving and memory; 3) writing can impact concepts of identity and self; 4) writers desire to control writing practices; and 5) a relationship exists among motivation, perceived value of writing, and stress relief. From these themes, five recommendations related to establishing balance within the composition classroom were made: 1) balance personal and social elements in composition research; 2) balance personal and social elements in composition instruction; 3) balance personal and social elements through online networks; 4) balance mind and body in composition instruction; 5) balance writing with elements of personal value. From this last recommendation, a Linked Value Balance Model was proposed, which can have applications both for working mothers and within the composition classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Point balance" is a scientific term used in both name and concept by rock balancing sculptor John Felice Ceprano (2008) that refers to the point of equilibrium on an object or system resulting from a perfect distribution of influences on that object or system. In that vein, I could not have maintained my "point balance" throughout this long process without the influence of several people, who have supported and helped in the best ways that each knew how.

First, I want to thank Jeannine Fontaine, my director, for her guidance and support. Jeannine worked diligently in helping me to effectively shape and trim my ideas, always in ways that were supportive and encouraging. As she also wrote her dissertation with her child literally on her back, she brought to the project a deep understanding of the challenges that I encountered while working in these similar circumstances. For her input and influence on this project, I will always be grateful.

I also want to thank Ben Rafoth and Lynne Alvine, my readers, for their indispensible advice and comments, which enriched this inquiry in ways that would not have otherwise been possible. This inquiry is undeniably stronger because of the time and effort that they have so graciously contributed.

For my husband, thank you for your unwavering support throughout this entire process, even in times in which I have wavered myself. For believing in me unceasingly, I thank you. And also thank you for cleaning my computer after I inadvertently downloaded that virus that threatened to destroy all of my work, as

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In January 2008, I gave birth to my second son. I was thrilled to welcome this new baby to our family, as were my older son and my husband. I had no doubts about my abilities to take care of both of my children and manage other household responsibilities, as well as continue to work on my dissertation. I was also preparing to begin online teaching, an opportunity for which I had applied more than a year before and which I did not want to give up. Besides, I thought, I could work on the teaching and the dissertation while the baby slept and my older son was at school. The schedule might not be easy, but it was surely doable. After all, I was a woman who had written and published a book while my first son was still a toddler and then returned for my doctorate after a 12 year hiatus from school. I could handle this, right?

I could not have been more wrong. As Danielle Crittenden (1999), author of *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us*, in which she discusses societal and personal pressures upon today's working mothers, has said, "In the first months after a baby arrives, it seems a miracle if you can get yourself showered, let alone dressed, before six o'clock in the evening" (p. 115). This generalization, in fact, turned out to be the truth in my case. My big mistake was that I foolishly expected adult cooperation from an infant. I had also forgotten that a newborn determines his mother's schedule, and any attempt to reverse this locus of control is met with strong resistance.

Not surprisingly, my baby did not cooperate with my schedule—he did not want to be put down so that I could work, nor was he a good sleeper which would have also freed time for my work. To add to my unexpected problems, my older son needed his mother more, especially given that he felt somewhat insecure since his brother was

born. At the same time, my online class was making demands that I was trying to meet in between the multiple demands of my mothering roles. Needless to say, my dissertation writing dwindled to nonexistent in the face of these other demands.

The point at which I realized that this arrangement was not going to work, however, was a moment when I was trying to work against a set of rigid deadlines, and my newborn would not stop fussing. Frustrated, I picked him up, whereupon he gave me a huge smile because he was finally getting the attention from his mother that he wanted. Understandably, my response was not to smile back but instead to snap, "This is not funny!" His smile instantly faded, and he began to cry. My heart ached at the same time as I felt very angry. I loved my son, but I also needed—and wanted—to work. I felt guilty, desperate, trapped, and extremely frustrated.

At my next opportunity, I wrote an email to my sister-in-law, outlining the situation and asking for advice.

By the time I heard back from her the next day, I had already made my decision: I had chosen to quit my new teaching job. The act of writing to my sister-in-law functioned as a form of problem-solving for me, generating a new perspective about the situation as well as expanding my problem from the personal to the social. Writing about the dilemma helped me to work it out on my own and make a decision that felt right for me.

In describing this problem of balance, I turn to the scientific field, where "balance" represents the point of equilibrium between multiple weights, like a scale being perfectly aligned horizontally. Sculptor John Felice Ceprano (2008) has used this scientific balancing principle in constructing his outdoor rock balancing sculptures, one of which

he has named "Point Balance." Borrowing Ceprano's phrasing, I use "point balance" to describe that point of equilibrium between and among a working mother's various roles and responsibilities. Through my experiences described above, I began to see how personal writing might potentially function in helping to establish this "point balance" in a working mother's life.

Writing as a Solution for Working Mothers

Just as writing was useful for me in a tough maternal-versus-professional situation, I thought that writing may be useful for other mothers who are juggling maternal responsibilities—"mother work" (Greenstone, 2006, p. 35)—as well as professional work. Trying to balance the tasks of nurturing and caring for children with demanding and sometimes unyielding and inflexible school and/or work commitments creates challenging situations and problems for which working mothers need viable solutions. It is for this reason that I have selected working mothers as the group to study for this project.

As clinical psychiatrist Karen Baikie has found with her patients, I believe that personal narrative writing can potentially help working mothers with stress-related symptoms to resolve their work-home issues (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005, p. 343). And as composition instructors Charles Anderson and Marian MacCurdy (2000) have asserted, I believe that personal narrative writing is the medium through which people can achieve "the deepest, most effective, and most profound healing" (p. 8), as well as being, as composition instructor Regina Paxton Foehr (2000) has said, "the single most effective therapeutic tool for healing" (p. 339). Putting together what I had experienced and learned about the challenges of parenting and professional life, and the claims

made about the power of personal writing, I came to feel that personal narrative writing may be a key to finding the solutions that working mothers need.

This chapter provides an introduction to how and why personal narrative writing may be an effective tool for today's working mothers. I first describe the conditions that contribute to what Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1975) refers to as the state of "Zerrissenheit—torn-to-pieces-hood" (p. 50) for many working mothers. This first section also provides the problem statement for the present inquiry.

Next, I situate this inquiry within composition studies, at the same time showing how it is enriched through an interdisciplinary approach. This section also describes the significance of the study and potential applications of study results. I then present the approach that I am taking in this inquiry, as well as the specific research questions that the inquiry addresses, followed by a brief description of the inquiry's qualitative methodological approach which is presented in detail in Chapter 3. Finally, I describe the limitations and exclusions of the study, as well as define the specific terms used in this inquiry.

Describing the Problem Today

Literature and popular culture provide an effective backdrop against which this problem in composition studies can be positioned. Historically, women have worked. Because mothers, families, and communities cannot be separated from national and global influences (Glickman, 1993, p. 20), trends involving working women have changed as society has changed. Factors influencing these trends have included industrialization, urbanization, depression, and war (Banner, 1974).

Economic need has traditionally been the primary factor motivating women to work, especially lower economic class women. During the first half of the twentieth century and earlier, women typically worked not because they wanted to but because they had to, and often quit their jobs when they married. Some believed that women chose to engage in "work that is unnatural to them," i.e., work outside the home, because men made them feel unappreciated, as described in an 1899 *Ladies' Home Journal* article, an excerpt of which is provided in Walker (2000):

> Men have made women feel too keenly that it is what the man does: that it is his profession which moves the world, and that the work which a woman does in her home is, while necessary, yet hardly to be compared with a man's achievements. It is this holding up the greater importance of the work of the outside world which has driven many an ambitious woman into that world to become a part of it, and thus acquire a position of more apparent importance. Not given recognition in their natural work, women have gone out and tried work that is unnatural to them. (pp. 152-153)

But at this time, there were also early seeds of feminism manifesting through women who wanted to attend college and pursue careers, rebelling against the belief that work outside of the home was "unnatural." For example, 15-year-old Crystal Eastman, a later cofounder of the American Civil Liberties Union, said in 1826, "No woman who allows her husband and children to absorb her whole time and interest is safe against disaster" (Senator John Heinz History Center, 2009).

In 1892, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892/1989)—who herself was subjected to a "rest-cure' for mental illness, during which she was forbidden to write and paint and

allowed to read very little—wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper," a short story with mixed images about society's treatment of the mentally ill and women, whom Gilman felt were treated similarly. The narrator envisions a woman trapped behind the bars of the yellow wallpaper, and slowly she, the narrator, becomes that trapped woman. The narrator's voice can be said to be representative of the early feminists of this historical period:

> I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try. Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued. I don't like to *look* out of the windows even -- there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast. I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did? (p. 648)

Unlike Gilman's (1892/1989) narrator, who ruminated about her plight privately, some early feminists did dare to speak out publicly. For example, in 1893, Frances Harper, an African-American poet, abolitionist, and women's rights advocate (as cited in Evans, 1989), proclaimed to the World's Congress of Representative Women, "Today we stand on the threshold of woman's era" (p. 145). But upon college graduation, these women were often forced to choose between marriage and career. Writing originally in 1899, Helen Watterson Moody (1899/2000) said that, for women, working as an artist and marriage/motherhood are mutually exclusive, necessitating a choice of one over the other because the art would rival the man. "A woman, if she love her art, must ordinarily give up dreams of wifehood and maternity and be content with her rich shadows," she said. "The woman must decide, then, whether to pursue her chosen art or to marry will make her happier [sic]. In most cases she cannot be both an artist and a wife" (pp. 158-

160). Consequently, half of college-educated women in the late-nineteenth-century United States never married (Evans, 1989, p. 147).

When many husbands were drawn away from home by war, the general attitudes toward women working changed also, enabling these early seeds of feminism to grow. At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, for example, Nellie Bly—who had previously written about women's issues—became the first woman journalist on the Eastern Front (Senator John Heinz History Center, 2009). And women were now able to gain employment in areas from which they had been previously excluded, such as government clerical work, changing public perceptions of working women (Evans, 1989, p. 171). This changing attitude toward women working likely helped women to gain voting rights in 1920.

In the 1920s and 1930s the number of working women remained relatively stable. However, this number surged again in the 1940s during World War II, when the United States' involvement in the war created well-paying labor opportunities for women of different economic classes. The proportion of these working women who were married and/or mothers also increased greatly (Baxandall & Gordon, 1995, p. 245). At this time, women started to realize not only economic benefits from working but also nonmaterial benefits such as acquiring new skills, helping others, and the satisfaction of succeeding in what was previously labeled "men's work."

After the war, women continued to work through the conservative 1950s, albeit often displaced from industrial jobs into low-paying women's jobs (Baxandall & Gordon, 1995, p. 247). However, alongside these working women, another image emerged in the 1950s, that of the American woman, described in a 1956 *Look* magazine (as cited in

Evans, 1989) as a "wondrous creature" who "marries younger than ever, bears more babies and looks and acts far more feminine than the emancipated girl of the 1920s or even '30s" (p. 249).

In addition, echoing elements from earlier in the century, an article from a 1950 edition of the magazine *Pittsburgh People* also summarizes this viewpoint in its opening line: "It is not unusual for a *Pittsburgh* girl to give up her job in order to become a housewife" (Hutchison, 1950, p. 8). In addition, a woman with whom I spoke who worked in the 1950s, said that she postponed marriage until she was 30 because she enjoyed her job working for a coal company and knew that she would have to quit working when she married (B. Lehner, personal communication, October 20, 2009).

A number of various influences all came together in the 1960s and 1970s, including the phenomena described above, in a type of perfect storm:

- The early seeds of feminism, including the suffrage movement, which took root in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- The women's war efforts during World War I and II (and the material and nonmaterial benefits that women realized from working).
- The 1950s "happy homemaker" June Cleaver images.
- The 1960s' civil rights and antiwar movements.
- Betty Friedan's (1963/1983) initial publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963.

The result was the 1970s feminist movement in the United States, the social movement that has had the greatest impact on working women (Baxandall & Gordon, 1995, p. 287). The women's movement changed the dynamics of working women both in the

United States and around the world by addressing what Friedan (1963/1983) called "the problem with no name…that voice within women that says, 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home'" (p. 32). Thus, work outside the home was seen as able to yield more than economic benefits; work was seen as a way for women to break free from their static identity as homemakers and develop themselves personally and professionally. Rather than just *having* to work, many women now also *wanted* to work.

Writer Judith Warner (2005), who has written about the changing faces of motherhood, said that it is "almost painful," in retrospect, to see how optimistic the 1970s were in terms of working mothers:

Common sense and a kind of can-do approach to solving the conflicts of motherhood set the tone. There was faith: The new generation of fathers *would* help. Good babysitting *could* be found. Work and motherhood *could* be balanced. It was all a question of intelligent juggling. And of not falling prey to the trap of self-sacrifice and perfectionism that had tripped up the generation that came before. (p. 87, emphasis in original)

Perhaps because of this optimism, within the 1980s, the number of working women continued to rise, and, following this trend, the number of working mothers continued to rise as well. At this time, working mothers with children became more the rule than the exception, and, in response, the feminist movement began what Friedan (1981) called a "second stage," a refocusing in which the whole "*personhood of women*" (p. 59, emphasis in original) was emphasized, including addressing the needs of the family. Rather than saying that a woman had to choose between motherhood and

career or emphasize career over motherhood, in this second stage, the feminist movement had fostered new, hybrid expectations that combined traditional feminine roles with new professional or independent earner roles.

Also in the 1980s, the problem facing these working mothers changed. Because many women wanted to pursue both families and careers, they were forced to handle two very different, often not mutually supportive, dichotomies and demands of home and work (Ferree, 1984, p. 59). Because women found it easier to fit into the male standards of work rather than to attempt to restructure them, these women endured "male" jobs while still handling most of the work at home (Friedan, 1981, pp. 17, 58).

This was the era of the Supermom, the working mother who worked, mothered, sewed, cooked, and served: She could, as claimed in a 1978 Enjoli perfume ad as cited in Wallis (1989), "bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan. And never, never, never let you forget you're a man" (para. 3). Her problem was always doing, not knowing how to stop or say no or avoid disappointing anyone (Murdock, 1990, pp. 6-7). Common was the image of the mother cradling a baby in one arm while holding a briefcase in the other.

Not surprisingly, women could not sustain this momentum for long. During the 1990s, what some have called third-wave feminism (Harris, 2003) took hold. The daughters of the original feminists (part of that demographic known as Generation X) were entering the workforce. For this generation, "work, which for the mothers was a hard-won prize, is the daughters' birthright," said Rose Glickman (1993, p. 53). Work was viewed as "the soil from which everything else will grow—marriage, motherhood, friendships, community, and social involvement" (Glickman, 1993, p. 54).

Consequently, some women felt obligations to their feminist mothers to combine work with family. "My mother taught me that ambition was my right and my duty, and that I needed to be careful to structure my life in order to accommodate it," said writer Ayelet Waldman (2009, p. 24), who describes betraying her feminist mother when she quit her job as a lawyer to stay at home with her child (p. 36), an event that she chronicles biographically as well as through her fictional protagonist, Juliet Applebaum (Waldman, 2000). Even some who were raised with stay-at-home mothers say how they felt driven to work, some being encouraged by their fathers to "outstrip their conventional mothers in the achievement arena" (Hunter, 2000, p. 134).

Many of those, like Waldman (2009), who did eventually choose to combine work and family, began to struggle with yet another dichotomy: reconciling their ambition and drive to succeed professionally with what Crittenden (1999) had called "those aspects of life that are distinctly and uniquely female" (p. 22). As in the 1980s' second stage of feminism described by Friedan (1981), women at this period wanted it all: Many women both wanted and needed to work, but they were also starting to more openly acknowledge their internal desires to have and raise children, as well as accepting their feminine nurturing traits and need for personal connections with others (Bolton, 2000; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Murdock, 1990; Gilligan, 1993).

Unlike in Friedan's (1981) second stage, however, women now resisted the male standards of work, where career took precedence in one's life and was central to forming one's identity. At this time, women realized that they could not do everything, at least not effectively. Consequently, the challenge for working women changed again in the 1990s into what Crittenden (1999) calls "the Problem," namely the dilemma of how

to balance work and family in an era that recognizes the impossibility of doing everything.

While the 1980s were characterized by "a great air of congratulation for self-actualizing, self-fulfilled motherhood" (Warner, 2005, p. 88), through the 1990s and into the new century, the romantic image of Supermom seems to have faded. Today's working mother often feels as if she is playing tug-of-war with herself in the middle (Riss, 2008, p. 26). Rather than living what some believe should be the American dream, many of these working mothers often feel as if their lives are a chaotic mess, spinning out of control.

Gillian Bolton (2005) described this contemporary environment when she said that "this world and our lives within it are complex and chaotic: seemingly governed by forces not only beyond our control, but beyond our understanding" (p. 2). *Real Simple* editor Kristin van Ogtrop (2009) referred to this condition as being a "toxic swirl" and offers this modernized myth:

> If Sisyphus were a modern woman, here's how the myth would go: Instead of rolling that boulder up the hill and getting nowhere, he'd have a giant to-do list that grew overnight, every night. No matter how many things S. accomplished on a given day, by the time he woke up the next morning his list would be longer. (p. 23)

Others refer to mothers of this era as the "minivan moms," mothers who were "as [their] wheels implied…on the move, driving to school, piano, fencing, violin practice, Brownies, Cub Scouts, Sunday school, PTA meetings, volunteer work, and some kind of part-time, vaguely edifying, remunerative activity" (Warner, 2005, p. 116), often in

addition to full- or part-time work. Popular culture references to the 1978 Enjoli perfume reflect this "do-all" attitude, such as an excerpt from a 2009 self-help book for working mothers: "Remember the commercial that told us we could bring home the bacon and fry it up in a pan, and then there was something about pleasing a man?" (Greenberg & Avigdor, 2009, p. 67). The current relevancy of this ad's theme was even reflected in a reference to this ad even 33 years after it originally appeared, in a 2011 telesummit for working mothers (Down, 2011).

In addition, the multiple demands of contemporary working mothers have changed the ways in which companies are marketing to these "multi-minding" women; instead of marketing to them through traditional advertising, companies are advised to attract women's attention through engaging in meaningful social relationships with them (Gannon, 2009).

But even the more modest goal of "balancing" work and family makes severe demands on women's energies. In trying to balance so many things, often many of these things invariably become shortchanged. At this time, women are seen as "frantic" and "fatigued" (Holcomb, 1998, p. 20). And no wonder. The current age has spawned an uncomfortable ambiguity between mothering and career. Today's working mother is still struggling to reconcile personal ambition and economic needs with unwavering commitments to her children, often achieving "at the expense of her tender places" (Williamson, 1993, p. 65).

As one sign of this lack of self-care, because of current economic pressures, many new, working mothers are electively shortening their maternity leave times because they need the money or are afraid of losing their jobs, a decision that can

detrimentally affect a working mother's well-being and stress levels (Alvarez, 2009). In

an unstable economic and social environment where the cost of living and divorce rates

continue to rise—and where, unlike in past decades, a woman's income can no longer

be counted on as a means to boost a family's income during an economic downturn

(Schumer & Maloney, 2008)—Lindbergh's (1975) reference to "Zerrissenheit—torn-to-

pieces-hood" (p. 50) becomes even more appropriate and applicable to today's working

mothers.

Feeding into this ambition/economic/familial equation can be inflexible and non-

negotiable professional responsibilities and inadequate family work policies, which can

lead to feelings of powerlessness and maternal guilt, fueled by people—sometimes

even family members—who say that a mother is wrong to work on one hand and,

ironically, wrong to desire to be with her children on the other. "Society puts a lot of

pressure on a woman to do what's right for the family," said writer and working mother

Tina Games (n.d.). "This pressure often comes from well-intentioned individuals who

don't fully understand that for a mother to be at her best, she cannot ignore her own

needs and desires" (para. 7). "I believe when a mother is happy and fulfilled, it's like

dropping a pebble into a pond," added Games (2011). "The ripples from her happiness

make happier families, happier communities, and spread happiness throughout the

world" (para. 10).

Although growth has slowed somewhat, the number of mothers who work outside

the home is rising annually and is expected to continue to rise throughout the world.

Based on recent statistics, the average percentage of working women with children

under the age of six in 23 industrialized nations is 54.3 percent; Sweden has the highest

proportion of working mothers at 76 percent, while the United States is number eight with 61 percent (NationMaster, 2009). Sweden is also considered to be the best country in the world for working mothers (C. Evans, 2009, p. 10), and, generally, European counties have had the greatest success in instituting policies that can successfully integrate mothers into the workforce (Pentland, 2008, para. 7).

Because of rising divorce rates, abandonment of children by their fathers, and abusive husbands, many married women within the United States and in other countries throughout the world are choosing to work so that they can support themselves and their children alone if necessary. In addition, most single mothers work because they are the only financial providers for their children. "Prince Charming is dead, buried, and unmourned, at least as a provider," reported Glickman (1993, p. 55).

Reflecting a constant quest for balance, working mother/actress Amy Brenneman has commented in a recent interview with Riss (2010), "I can't throw myself away. I can't pretend that I don't exist. I need to try to find some sort of balance for all of these needs. Knowing, of course, that it's not going to be a perfect balance" (p. 50). Echoing Brenneman within academia, and in spite of optimism that she has seen in popular literature about the ability to successfully be a working mother, English professor Kelly Walter Carney (2004) has found more pessimistic "scholarly research in the realm of business and management, which is pretty grim regarding the likelihood that a woman will be able to combine motherhood and management roles" (p. 18).

Unfortunately, concrete examples from both popular culture and the academic environment reinforce Carney's (2004) assertions. Ann Crittenden (2001), a Pulitzer Prize-nominated writer for *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*, said when she became

a mother, she "shed status like the skin off a snake" (p. 12). Plus, there has been a school of thought—and judgments that often come, ironically, from other women—that holds that young infants with mothers who work are at a higher risk for illness and other detrimental effects than those infants whose mothers do not work, effects that, actually, a recent Columbia University study has found to not be as extensive as commonly thought (Blake, 2010).

Within academia, there are similar examples of women who find an incompatibility between the timing and responsibilities inherent in the academic tenure track and the women's limited reproductive years (de Vise, 2010, para. 2), a disproportionate representation of women in the unranked positions of instructor and lecturer (O'Reilly, 2008, para. 4), the nonexistence of part-time and job-share arrangements, as well as on-campus childcare (Kajitani, 2009, p. 172), or the inflexibility of professors in granting paper extensions to a doctoral student suffering from pregnancy complications (E. Evans, 2009, p. 52). Elrena Evans (2009) refers to the academy's "'floating head' syndrome," where "people are expected to function as disembodied brains, not connected to bodies or families or any sort of life outside of academic pursuits" (pp. 51-52).

Trying to negotiate maternal and professional responsibilities also leaves many working mothers feeling physically exhausted from what Crittenden (1999) calls an "*existential* lack of time, a feeling of constantly being pulled…between two highly pressured worlds" (p. 123, original italics). The testimonies of Brenneman (as cited in Riss, 2010), Crittenden (1999, 2001), and E. Evans (2009), combined with the many voices beyond those cited here, move the problem of the present inquiry into clear

focus: Crittenden's (1999) "Problem" has become bloated and swollen into its current form: women who are both mothers and professionals, whether by choice or circumstance, face tremendous challenges and need help in effectively negotiating and managing their problems and challenges.

Moreover, even though stressors can be similar and can arise from the same basic dynamic (here, balancing multiple roles), individuals can react to the same stressors differently; so, working mothers need adaptable, flexible solutions to help them to more effectively manage their physical and psychological stress, problems, personal development issues, and social relationships.

Problem Statement

Previous research and studies have shown that personal narrative writing can produce physical and psychological healing effects: In particular, writing can enhance problem-solving, lead to self-discovery, and build social connections, all outcomes that could potentially provide support to working mothers. As the academic field that deals with writing research and instruction, composition studies offers theories, research, and practices that can be expanded to address the problems of balance faced by the working mother. Based within composition studies, the main theme driving this inquiry was as follows:

How can personal writing help with issues of balance specifically within the personal and professional lives of working mothers? In other words, what positive personal effects related to her various challenges and problems can a working mother experience through her personal narrative writing, judging from her personal testimony about personal narrative writing?

Positioning the Problem Academically

As noted in the previous section and in the introduction, the plight of working mothers is often portrayed through popular media. However, because this inquiry draws from theories on writing, the present study falls within the domain of composition studies' expressivist paradigm. Also, because writing plays a role in many disciplines, this inquiry bears some relationship to research and theories in depth psychology, therapeutic counseling, medicine, management, education, mathematics, and literature, as well as some popular culture and literature resources. Elements from these disciplines were used as needed to help to clarify the problem of this inquiry.

The pedagogical basis for this inquiry is contemporary expressivist pedagogy, which can be said to require the writing of a "phenomenology of self" (Burnham, 2001, p. 25). Expressivist writing assigns the "highest value to the writer and her imaginative, psychological, social, and spiritual development and how that development influences individual consciousness and social behavior" (Burnham, 2001, p. 19). In Chapter 2, related literature is used to position this study within the expressivist paradigm of composition studies.

This study's basis also relates to elements of process pedagogy, which, like expressivist pedagogy, combines the teaching of writing skills with a focus on the personal growth of students. Like the college freshmen researched by Brenda Pittman (2005) in her study of self-care, participants in this inquiry wrote expressively to discover aspects of their personal issues, values, goals, desires, aspirations, fears, and joys, as well as to achieve other personal-growth benefits.

Significance of the Study

This inquiry builds upon research on writing for healing, personal development, problem-solving, and social aspects of writing, as well as narrative inquiry, within the field of composition. Although links have been made between composition studies and women's situations (Flynn, 1988/1994; Hairston, 1985), this study is unique in its approach and line of inquiry because no academic study before this has approached the problem of managing a working mother's work-life issues through the medium of personal writing. This study has contributed information to the field of composition studies concerning the role that writing can play in helping working mothers with the various balance challenges involved in juggling multiple roles, based upon qualitative data from the personal perspectives of the working mother participants.

Through its interdisciplinary approach, this inquiry also pushed the existing boundaries of writing for healing within the field of composition. Some instructors, such as Nancy Kuhl (2005) believe that personal writing for healing does not have a place in the composition classroom. "The idea that writing is therapy, however," said Kuhl, "is so counter to a productive workshop that I have taken issue with it often and early in my classes" (p. 7).

Other instructors believe that writing for healing in the classroom has not received enough attention or development. Composition professor and researcher Molly Hurley Moran (2004) has termed this combination "the fledgling interdisciplinary field of Writing and Healing" (p. 93), a complex emerging field that encompasses psychology, neuroscience, and composition (p. 95). Composition professor and researcher Alice Brand (2000) corroborates Moran's viewpoint, and at the same time implicitly calls for

the development of this new area, when she points out that the field has "studied language from virtually every vantage point except from that of its potential for healing" (p. 216). Like Brand and Moran, Wendy Bishop (1993) has asserted that writing within the classroom can have therapeutic functions, independent of any intension of the instructor; therefore, Bishop has said, the instructor is obligated to consider the role and implications of therapeutic writing in the classroom. "We need to understand the degree to which writing may be a therapeutic process and the degree to which teachers and administrators can or should undertake counseling roles," she said (para. 3).

This inquiry is also related to the current debate within composition studies concerning the role of the personal narrative within the composition classroom, which encompasses issues including the relevancy of personal experiences to academic discourse, as well as the ways in which this writing might inappropriately or even dangerously place the composition instructor in the role of personal therapist.

The present study's results could be applied to working mothers' improvement of their quality of life, home environment, academic and/or work performance, and other balance issues. At the same time, it may provide insight for working mothers themselves as to how they might enhance their social relationships, including those with their children. The study could also have classroom applications, including balance issues for freshman transitioning to the college environment, as well as applications in maintaining other balance issues within the composition classroom. The Linked Value Balance Model introduced in the final chapter explains in more detail how this study's results can be applicable to classroom balance issues.

Just as Alice Trupe (1997) found that the chaotic lives of reentry women students affected their classroom work, the similarly chaotic lives of working mothers would likely also impact the classroom, so these study results can also be useful to post-secondary composition instructors who are interested in incorporating personal writing into the classroom and effectively instructing both traditional and nontraditional students, many of whom are mothers. In addition, because the psychological state of a mother can impact her children, findings from this study can increase awareness of the effects that behavior can have on one's children. The study results should also be of interest to other professionals, such as psychologists, medical doctors, and therapists, who may use personal writing in their work.

Overview of the Study

I have conducted a qualitative case study/narrative inquiry into the experiences of working mothers who engage in personal writing. Participants were 15 women, each having at least one child (age 14 or younger) and holding a working professional role. Each participant was between the ages of 27 and 40 at the time of study onset, and the age of the participant at the study onset was the age associated with the participant through the course of the study.

Being within this age range, participants all reflect the demographic group known as Generation X, most of whom work full time and many of whom also attend school and have children at home; this demographic group is also well-educated and is more culturally diverse than the population at large (*Generation X*, 2004). This generation of women has been referred to as daughters of feminism (Glickman, 1993) and third-wave feminists (Harris, 2003).

I have studied how personal writing has affected the lives of these working mothers, judging from their own perspectives. The inquiry's research questions included questions about whether and how personal writing can help these women to handle the issues of stress management, problems and challenges, personal development, and aspects of their social relationships.

Research Questions

This was the overarching research question for this inquiry:

How does personal narrative writing impact the various balance issues with a group of working mothers, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal narrative writing over a five-month study period? Specifically, this inquiry addressed these five underlying research questions:

1. How does personal narrative writing impact stress (both psychological and physical) in participants' lives, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

2. How does personal narrative journaling impact problem-solving or coping strategies in participants' lives, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

3. What other personal effects do participants experience through their personal writing, including effects on personal relationships and concepts of self and identity, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

4. What types of writing practices do the participants find to be most effective, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

5. What potential positive effects and drawbacks could personal writing have for other working mothers, judging from participants' perspectives about personal writing?

Overview of the Methodology

The study included three main parts, including preliminary pre-study work, the study itself, and post-study follow-up. During the pre-study period, which ran for one month, I interviewed each participant and asked her to write a 500-word autobiographical piece, as well as presented her with a list of writing prompts. During the study, which ran for five months, I asked each participant to write at least two times per week, at least 20-30 minutes per session, or longer if she felt compelled or simply chose to do so. I also conducted an in-progress interview of each participant. During the post study, which ran for one month, I interviewed each participant two more times, once right after the study ended, and once approximately two weeks later to gain additional demographic data which enriched the inquiry data that had been collected. During these final interviews, I also invited each participant to share some of her personal writing to provide additional data.

My role within the study was that of participant-observer, as I also engaged in personal writing with the other study participants. I also completed a researcher's reflective journal in which I reflected on what I was learning from writings and interviews as the data were collected. In embracing this practice, I explored the research from

three distinct types of selves: research-based self, brought self (embodying my historical, social, and personal selves), and a situationally created self (Lincoln & Guba, 2003, p. 283).

I also kept in mind composition instructor Carol Ellis' (2002) practice of self-participation in her women and journaling course. In the spirit of such ventures, my participation in this inquiry brought a unique, organic perspective to the inquiry because, as Harriet Greenstone (2006) has said, "there is no better way to understand a phenomenon than to live it" (abstract).

Definitions

This section provides definitions of certain key terms as they have been used in the context of this inquiry:

Expressive Writing

Expressive writing is writing about the self (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 12); some say that expressive writing is the written discourse that is closest to speech, through which a person "actualizes himself" onto the tangible page (Britton, 1982/2003, pp. 158, 169). Expressivists stress the importance of writing about personal subjects, with journal writing being "an absolute essential," according to Richard Fulkerson (1979, p. 345).

Christopher Burnham (2001) expanded this definition: "Expressivism places the writer in the center, articulates its theory, and develops its pedagogical system by assigning highest value to the writer and her imaginative, psychological, social, and spiritual development and how that development influences individual consciousness

and social behavior" (p. 19). Expressive writing also features both personal and social elements of writing (Burnham, 2001; Pickle, 2007).

As with narrative writing, through expressive writing, writers can "examine the relation between past and present and…speculate upon their futures" (Burnham, 1992, p. 508). Expressive writing can also create "links between cognition and affect," achieving "a harmony of connection" (Britton, 1990, p. 182).

In expressive writing, which is the type of writing usually found in personal journals, the writer's voice, feelings, and attitudes are clear (Greenstone, 2006, p. 83). Expressive writing can also be defined as writing about both an event and the personal emotions associated with the event (DeSalvo, 1999; Klein, 2002; Pennebaker, 2004).

Journals

Journals are "records of events, thoughts, and feelings about a particular aspect of life" (Bolton, 2005, p. 164) where writers are able to "reflect on their relationship with the world and to evaluate and better understand the implications of those relationships" (Greenstone, 2006, p. 83). Journaling as a self-development technique became formalized when psychologist Ira Progoff (1992) introduced his Intensive Journaling Method in the 1960s, following his army experiences in World War II. Progoff felt that his method, which involves a series of reflective writing exercises, was suited for people wanting "to break through situations of stalemate where their lives had seemed to reach a dead end…the difficult and confusing transitions in our lives" (pp. 6-7).

Journals are used in both personal and academic applications and can include learning journals, diaries, dream books, spiritual journals, professional/qualitative research journals, reading-response journals, and electronic journals or blogs

(Hiemstra, 2001, pp. 20-23). Although some aspects of academic journals may be shared, journals are typically private, written without the intent of an external audience.

For the purposes of this inquiry, the physical description of "journal" was open-ended and subject to the participant's choosing, which can include physical or virtual, personal or shared, venues.

Personal Narrative Writing

For the purposes of this study, "personal narrative writing" is defined as "using language or another symbolic system to imbue life events with a temporal and logical order, to demystify them and establish coherence across past, present, and as yet unrealized experience" (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 2). This writing seeks to convey the essence of one's experiences through associated feelings and emotions (Hunt, 2000, p. 12) and thus make meaning out of these experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Within this inquiry, all personal narrative writing (with the exception of the initial autobiographical piece) took place in venues of the participant's choosing. The phrase "personal writing" has been used interchangeably with "personal journaling" to reflect this personal narrative writing.

Personal Growth Benefits

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, previous research has shown that personal narrative writing can yield personal growth benefits related to healing, problem-solving, identity formation/modification, and social relationships. Through "personal growth benefits," I mean that the person would theoretically experience a positive change in the way in which she thinks, acts, and feels about a particular aspect or concept.

Problems and Problem-solving

In defining what constitutes a problem, I use Linda Flower's (1998) illustration that a problem exists when a person is at point "A" and wants to get to point "B" (p. 40). Research on problem-solving, then, "explores the wide array of mental procedures people use to process information" in order to reach point "B" and thus achieve their goals (Flower & Hayes, 1977, p. 450).

Problem-solving and decision-making can be said to be similar but still exhibit some differences, where decision-making can involve making a choice between alternatives, while problem-solving is directed toward achieving a goal (Smith, 1988, pp. 1489-1490). However, because this inquiry is not deeply focused on problem-solving, for the purposes of this inquiry, decision-making is considered to be a form of problem-solving.

Self and Identity

The concepts of self and identity are widely debated within psychological and sociological traditions. For this inquiry, the "self" is seen as being malleable, affected by varying social contexts (Williams, 2006, p. 4). In this sense, "self" can be interchangeable with "identity," which can be said to be comprised of one's social identity, personal identity, and ego identity (Goffman, 1963; Reneslacis, 2005). A person, then, can be said to have multiple selves and identities.

Stress

Although defined in a variety of ways, a common understanding is that "stress occurs when there are *demands on the person which tax or exceed his adjustive* [sic] *resources*" (Lazarus, 1976, p. 47, emphasis in original). Stress can be considered to be

both good and bad, the former acting as a motivating factor, and the latter occurring when stress builds into distress that can lead to exhaustion and ill health. In addition, stress can have both psychological and physical effects on a person, phenomena that were addressed through the first of this inquiry's secondary research questions.

Moreover, reactions to the same type of stressor can vary from person to person (Lazarus, 1976, p. 48), likely because of transactions between internal stress factors ("arising from the biological makeup of the person"), which a person can theoretically control, and external stress factors ("aris[ing] from the external physical and social environment"), which she theoretically cannot control (Lazarus, 1976, p. 45). For the purposes of this inquiry, stress is thought of as being the "bad" type of stress, where there is a personally detrimental imbalance between demands and coping abilities and at least a partially internal origin, allowing the person to engage in activities with the potential to affect the stress.

Working Mother

The term "working mother" as used in this study refers to women who are mothers as well as professionals working for income inside or outside of the home.

Inquiry Overview

This chapter has presented an overview of this inquiry, including the research problem and its historical background, the research questions, and an overview of the qualitative methodology that was used in conducting this study. Chapter 2 provides a review of related literature, specifically exploring how related literature has addressed the function of writing for healing, problem-solving, personal development, and aspects of the social. Because writing can be thought of as being a means of learning (Emig,

1977/2003), which can be affected by personal motivation, this chapter also covers relevant learning theories, the nature of motivation, and narrative theory, which integrates the aspects of writing, learning, and motivation as they relate to this inquiry.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used to gather this inquiry' data, and Chapter 4 through Chapter 10 present the inquiry's data, organized using emergent themes. Chapter 11 and Chapter 12 review the inquiry's findings and present recommendations and suggestions for future research that can advance the understanding of personal writing within composition studies.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of research and literature as they relate to this

inquiry's primary, overarching research question, which concerned the impact that

personal narrative writing can have in addressing balancing issues for working mothers.

This inquiry was intended to study the effects of personal narrative writing in

terms of healing and problem-solving, as well as subsequent effects on personal

development and social relationships. Therefore, this literature review first presents an

overview of writing for healing, which encompasses healing from traumatic or disturbing

events, stress, and other psychological and physically taxing circumstances, some or all

of which could theoretically impact working mothers. The review also covers literature

related to problem-solving, as well as some of the effects of writing on personal

development and aspects of the social, including narrative theory.

Not surprisingly, as writing can be thought of as being a "mode of learning"

(Emig, 1977/2003), data as they emerged in this inquiry revealed that the ways in which

personal narrative writing functioned in the lives of participants were related to different

ways of learning, as well as participants' motivation for learning. Therefore, this chapter

reviews relevant learning theories from John Dewey (1897/1959, 1916, 1938), Lev

Vygotsky (1978, 1986), and Jerome Bruner (1960), as well as a discussion of motivation

as it is related to writing.

Because this inquiry is based in composition theory, and writing can be said to

incorporate elements of creativity in the form of "creative composing" (Hesse, 2010, p.

50) and even in the ways in which the individual chooses to relate to the world (Harrell,

2011), this chapter concludes with a discussion of creativity and the benefits of creative expression.

In addition, because the issue of mothers working is one of concern both inside and outside the academy, this inquiry would not be complete without including some of the ideas, perspectives, attitudes, and images that comprise popular culture and popular literature at various times in history. This approach is also relevant in that elements of popular culture are being incorporated more and more into the classroom. Fulkerson (2005) describes how "cultural studies has been the major movement in composition studies" since 1992 (p. 659) and points out that the discipline's currently predominant social-construction viewpoint, as well as critical and feminist approaches, involve analyses and interpretations of various cultural issues (p. 660).

Although I attempted to differentiate between academic and popular sources, at times these sources overlap and are not easily delineated. By integrating popular culture references with academic resources, this inquiry acknowledges the broad arranges of influences on the inquiry's problem, as well as situates the origin of the problem within the larger context of society. My need for thematic and topical consistency and desire to provide the most representative presentation of the inquiry problem outweighed a need to flag and define each individual reference for its popular or scholarly value, but the list of references will enable readers to further explore this issue, as well as each individual source, as desired

By grounding the exploration within composition studies, which has the richest collection of writing research and theories, as well as pulling from other academic disciplines that have experiences in using writing for personal growth, this inquiry

activates the theories and processes that have the greatest potential in finding feasible solutions for effectively managing balance issues, both inside and outside the classroom. In this vein, Figure 1 presents the different categories of literature that will be reviewed throughout this chapter, as well as the primary academic theorists and practitioners who have informed each category.

Milner (2005)
Beatty (2003)
Greenstone (2006)
Ellis (2002)
Heller (1997)
Moran (2004)

Hesse (2010)
Nicholls (2009)
Bolton (2000)
Waterman et al. (2003)

Creative expression

Healing

Motivation

Garn et al. (2010)
Waterman et al. (2003)

Flower & Hayes
(1977, 1981/2003)
Flower (1998)
Kellogg (2008)
Berthoff (1981)

Problem-solving

Composition studies ⇒
Expressivist writing

Dewey (1897/1959, 1916, 1938)
Moffett (1982, 1983)
Elbow (1981/1998, 1994, 2000)
Clandinin & Connolly (2000)
Pagnucci (2004)

Personal development

Moffett (1982, 1983)
Macrorie (1985)
Milner (2005)
Elbow
(1981/1998, 1994, 2000)
Perl (1980/1994, 2004)

Social aspects

Learning theories

Dewey (1897/1959, 1916, 1938)
Vygotsky (1978, 1986)
Bruner (1960)

Elbow (1998)
DeSalvo (1999)
Britton (1982/2003, 1990)
Pagnucci (2004)
Clandinin & Connolly (2000)

Figure 1. Literature review schematic. This schematic presents the major topics to be covered in the review of related literature, as well as the primary theorists and practitioners who have informed each topic and will, therefore, be discussed in reference to each topic. The "Composition studies ⇒ Expressivist writing" section consolidates theorists from the previous sections to show how related literature positions this inquiry within composition studies' expressive writing paradigm.

Writing for Healing

As described in Chapter 1, working mothers are dealing with an environment that can cause both physical and psychological stress, creating a need for healing. This stress issue can be readily seen even in popular literature, such as a 2009 *Working*

Mother reader survey in which respondents reported that high stress was their top challenge (Eckel, 2009, p. 50).

Stress Issues

"Psychological stress occurs when an individual perceives that environmental demands tax or exceed his or her adaptive capacity," said Sheldon Cohen, Denise Janicki-Deverts, and Gregory Miller (2007, p. 1685). Cohen et al. said that psychological stress, with its influence on the regulation of immune and inflammatory processes, has the potential to cause physical stress conditions, including the following: depression; infectious, autoimmune, and coronary artery diseases; and some cancers (p. 1685). Repetitive exposure to stress can also detrimentally affect learning and memory (Coutu, 2008, para. 11).

One source of stress that often affects working mothers is a need to "do it all." This issue has been explored in a recent quantitative psychological study, which studied the relationship between perfectionism and perceptions of work/family conflict (Mitchelson, 2009). Perfectionism, which can encompass high personal standards, a need for order, and the discrepancy between standards and perceived performance (p. 351), can, not surprisingly, affect women more than men and can be exhibited both at work and at home.

"The more clearly defined workplace expectations, compared with the more ambiguous expectations at home, provide the opportunity for women to lessen their perfectionistic tendencies at home," Michelson (2009) explained. "However, the current findings suggest the ambiguity at home may operate against perfectionists. Specifically, participants reported more discrepancy and high standards at home compared with at

work. Although setting high standards at *work* may be more straightforward as the criteria for good job performance may be more explicit than the criteria for being a good parent or family member…, the ambiguity in high standards at home may allow the perfectionists' naturally high standards to emerge" (p. 361, emphasis in original). Furthermore, a perfectionistic attitude can affect a person's perception of self through an "all or nothing" mentality, where the woman either succeeds or fails in all areas (p. 363).

Writing for health benefits. Qualitative and quantitative studies and academic, peer-reviewed articles within composition studies and other academic disciplines have substantiated the claims that writing can be good for one's health, can decrease stress, and can lead to improved feelings of well-being. Conversely, repressing emotions can lead to both physical and psychological health problems (Mate, 2011; Pennebaker, 2004).

Physically, personal writing has been shown to lower blood pressure, slow heart rates, and increase the production of lymphocytes, white blood cells that improve the immune system, as well as reduce stress hormones and increase production of pain-fighting endorphins. Expressive writing, expressing both event details *and* associated emotions as opposed to descriptive writing that simply described the details of an event, was also found to increase hepatitis B antibody concentrations in a study of medical students (Booth & Petrie, 2002).

In addition, writing has been found to help women to manage chronic pelvic pain (Norman, Lumley, Dooley, & Diamond, 2004) and cope with breast cancer (Stanton & Danoff-Burg, 2002), as well as to reduce symptoms in patients with asthma or

rheumatoid arthritis (Smyth, Stone, Hurewitz, & Kaell, 1999), reduce health center visits, self-reported illnesses, and depressive symptoms (Smyth, 1998), as well as to manage chronic stress-related medical conditions (Howlett, 2004) and improve sleep (Mosher & Danoff-Burg, 2006).

Referring to the Smyth et al. (1999) study of writing and the management of asthma and rheumatoid arthritis, David Spiegel (1999) recognized the healing potential of writing, yet acknowledged the general reluctance to embrace this healing method because the basis of writing's effectiveness is not as clearly understood as other, pharmaceutical, approaches to healing. Spiegel said, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*,:

> Were the authors to have provided similar outcome evidence about a new drug, it likely would be in widespread use within a short time. Why? We would think we understood the "mechanism" (whether we did or not) and there would be a mediating industry to promote its use. Manufacturers of paper and pencils are not likely to push journaling as a treatment addition for the management of asthma and rheumatoid arthritis. (p. 1329)

Spiegel concluded that, despite the lack of distinction that much of the mainstream medical community makes between psychological and physical healing, "in this and a growing number of studies, it is not simply mind over matter, but it is clear that mind matters" (p. 1329), indicating that further research is needed in these areas. The relationship of mind and body and how they collectively relate to writing will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

Within composition studies, Laura Milner (2005) has found that her students who wrote about the death of their parents within the classroom reported feeling better about the situation after the writing. Writing has also been found to assist in the treatment of addictions (Beatty, 2003; Williamson, 2004); specifically, Beatty (2003) has studied how recovering alcoholic women use writing "to compose a new, sober, and relatively serene and sane life" (p. 25), yielding feelings of improved wellness.

In studying how writing can be used as therapy for mothers of children with special needs, Greenstone (2006) has found that every participant reported beneficial effects from their writing participation in her weekly writing group meetings, including help with their stress management. Personal writing has also been found to assist with women's reentry into the academic environment (Trupe, 1997), professional development (*Women writing,* 1997), fostering self-care (Pittman, 2005), and contributing to multiple identity negotiations (Reneslacis, 2005).

Furthermore, in the wake of a troubling or traumatic situation, some instinctively turn to writing for its healing benefits, especially those who are already familiar with the study of composition. During the period when Ellis (2002) was teaching her "Writing and Healing: Women's Journal Writing" course, 9/11 occurred, and the "fear across the curriculum" that ensued inspired some students "to write for the silenced women of Afghanistan and the absence of the Twin Towers" (abstract), efforts that helped these students to process this tragic event.

In addition, the day after 33 people were killed on the campus of Virginia Tech in 2007, Sarah Allen (2007) of the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg sent out a listserv appeal for "suggestions for writings that I can do with my students today to

help them deal with, talk about, write in response to what's happened" (para. 1).

Similarly, during the semester following Hurricane Katrina, composition professor Sarah DeBacher (2008) of the University of New Orleans turned to email, blog, and letter writing for personal healing, while actively looking for classroom applications of writing for healing (p. 88). Finally, after the devastating earthquake and tsunami that affected Japan in 2011, former academic and current journaling certification student Laurie T. (2011), based in Tokyo, planned journaling programs to help both her and her country to heal.

New learning, new perspectives, and empowerment through writing. Writing can also function as a tool for healing in that it enables the writer to learn more about the topic or issue through the process of writing about it. The translation of experiences from abstract, prewriting concepts into more concrete, verbalized concepts in writing forces a kind of structure not only on the words but also on the experiences themselves. As new associations are made, the writer also makes new discoveries about the topic, experiences new learning, gains new knowledge, and becomes empowered.

Writing can lead to learning, said Emig (1977/2003), because both writing and learning involve corresponding patterns of whole-brain cognitive involvement. Through the writing process, memory schemas stored in long-term memory change because writing as a process lets knowledge develop (Flower and Hayes, 1981/2003). The new schemas create new ways of presenting or framing the emotion and memories associated with an experience, leading to new ways of perceiving an experience and new learning, and also making the study of learning theories relevant to the study of writing for healing.

In terms of healing, these new discoveries, perspectives, and meanings made possible through writing also enable a person to shift her perspective to a different, healthier approach. Researcher and teacher Louise DeSalvo (1999) explained how writing does not change the facts of a situation but simply one's vantage of it:

We are the accumulation of the stories we tell ourselves about who we are. So changing our stories…can change our personal history, can change us. Through writing, we revisit our past and review and revise it. What we thought happened, what we believed happened to us, shifts and changes as we discover deeper and more complex truths. It isn't that we use our writing to deny what we've experienced. Rather, we use it to shift our perspective." (p. 1)

Maria Nemat (2008) experienced through her writing the type of perspective change described by DeSalvo (1999). After she had been imprisoned, tortured, and almost executed in a prison in Tehran, Nemat was drawn to writing to gain insights to help her to heal from her trauma. "I need to get this on paper so that I can look at it and understand it," said Nemat. "I can make sense of things, connect them, and understand what happened to me" (audio). She has emphasized, "I have no doubt that writing saved my life and helped me understand myself" (2008, p. 22).

Personal perspectives in writing can change, in part, because the new perspective enables a separation of the self from the experience. Ruth Folit (2011), founder of the International Association for Journal Writing, explained how this shift happens. "Writing something down gives you distance, makes your experience a separate story rather than an integrated part of your life," she said. "This new perspective creates new understanding" (audio).

Allowing oneself to adopt a different perspective about an experience via writing also helps to objectify the experience, which can lead to healing from the experience (Moran, 2004, p. 97); this objectivity is gained without losing the right for subjectivity. In shifting back and forth from subjective to objective perspectives, Macrorie (1985) has said that the person is seeing from both the perspectives of "I" and "The Others," while Britton (1982/2003) describes these perspectives as being "participant" and "spectator." DeSalvo (1999) has also discussed how looking at a situation from different vantages can be beneficial. "We regard our lives with a certain detachment and distance when we view it as a subject to describe and interpret," she said (p. 73). Becoming an observer, DeSalvo added, is a way to develop resilience, which can lead to healing.

In training journal therapists and facilitators, Adams (2010) requires students to simultaneously act as participant and observer as a part of their education. In this exercise, a student first engages in personal journaling about a particular topic, followed by writing a "reflection piece" concerning the original journaling that assesses "the outcome of your observation on the writing process you just engaged in" (para. 3). These dual writing roles enable the student to experience, on one level, her organic writing, and, on another level, an observation of that writing "with a sort of detached curiosity" (para. 5). In this way, these students have the skills to guide their writing clients to engage in participant-observer writing that can result in healing and personal growth benefits. Writing from these different vantages can lead to the development of both self-awareness, which is a deeper understanding of "what is going on in one's own interior," and the multidimensional meta-awareness, which is "taking awareness itself as an object of attention" (Jordan, 2001, para. 1).

Just as writing can lead to new discoveries about both the syntax of the writing itself as well as the writing topic, the new knowledge and perspectives that a person can gain through writing simultaneously provides the person with power (Foucault, 1977), which also gives her a sense of control and ownership of the topic or situation. In this way, writing can lead to a sense of symbolic control over what may have appeared to be previously uncontrollable circumstances. Paulo Freire (1974) says that shifting this locus of control helps people to help themselves, "plac[ing] them in consciously critical confrontation with their problems,…mak[ing] them the agents of their own recuperation" (p. 12). Empowered, the writer then becomes the agent for her own change and healing (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 7).

Many women have experienced the learning, empowerment, and healing that is possible through engaging in the writing process. For example, the disadvantaged women in the San Francisco-based Tenderloin Women Writers Workshop studied by Caroline Heller (1997) engaged in various struggles, using writing to reinvent themselves by "casting themselves as agents, as heroes against the political and social worlds they knew all too well" (p. xv) and meeting the human needs of self-expression, hope, and meaning (p. 7).

Similarly, Moran (2004) struggled with a "surreal, limbo-like existence" for a period between the times when her sister disappeared and when her sister's murdered remains were found; she shaped stories about her experience, having an intuitive sense that "if I could frame the experience, I could thereby control it" (p. 94). Writing and publishing the book *Finding Susan* did finally empower Moran to take control of her situation and to begin the healing process.

Similar to Moran's (2004) experience, DeSalvo (1999) described how a former student, Catherine Kapphahn, whose mother had died from uterine cancer, wanted to use her writing to put both the reader and herself in her mother's place by describing her mother's experiences with chemotherapy. DeSalvo reported, "Thinking about her mother's chemotherapy in this way, Catherine said, 'calmed' her and put her in a 'powerful position,' for she could express feelings and thoughts she had previously repressed" (p. 50). Through writing, Catherine was able to regain a sense of power and understanding that had been lost with her mother's death.

Supplementing the documentation provided in the academic literature, popular literature provides a rich array of sources that discuss ways in which women have historically used writing for healing purposes.

Women engaging in personal writing for healing and new learning can be traced to the Japanese pillow books in the tenth century, in which women recorded their dreams and thoughts in poetry and images. Since that time, women have used personal writing to record elements of their daily lives, the words creating a "safe place," as well as assuming the roles of friend, confidante, and "self-repair kit" and being a method to process abuse, sickness and death (Gannett, 1992, pp. 139-140). Women have also written in journals to record their dreams and to keep their artistic sides active while caring for young children (Schiwy, 1996, p. 17).

For some women, writing was a means for survival, both in actuality and for posterity. Similar to Nemat's (2008) assertion that writing saved her life, Pulitzer Prize winning author Alice Walker, as cited in DeSalvo (1999), began writing to pull herself out of suicidal depressions: "I have not had an easy life," said Walker. "I started writing

to save my life" (p. 153). Also reflecting writing as a lifeline, Anne Frank's (1991) diary, which she named "Kitty," became the friend that she turned to while hidden in the Secret Annex during World War II, a relationship that helped her to tolerate her harsh living conditions. Although she did not name her diary, Clara Kramer (2009), like Frank, kept a diary during World War II as a means of survival for both herself and her family's history. Kramer and her Jewish family hid in an underground bunker in Poland for 18 months, and Kramer's mother encouraged her to keep a diary of their experiences, as Kramer described: "'Write, Clarutchka, write,' [her mother said]. If every Jew in Zolkiew was destroyed, there would at least be my diary to tell the story" (p. 224).

In addition, although she did not write her memoir during World War II, Alicia Appleman-Jurman (1988) wrote about her Holocaust experiences several years later, experiences which had, at the time, influenced her to change her name to "Ada." Writing her memoir was difficult emotionally because Appleman-Jurman had to relive the traumatic situations which she had already experienced; however, the writing process ultimately led to healing. "When I finally finished writing I felt as though I had come out of intensive care after a painful and very dangerous operation," she wrote (pp. 432-433). In the book's Foreword, her husband, Gabriel Appleman (1988), also talked about Appleman-Jurman's healing through writing. "With this book," he said, "[Alicia] is at peace with herself and wishes to resume her real name" (p. xiii).

Even though her memoir was written many years after she experienced her traumas, Appleman-Jurman's writing brought her the peace that her traumatic experiences had stolen those many year before, resulting in healing through which she was able to again assume her birth name and the identity and associations that it

encompassed. As Appleman-Jurman's writing shows, disclosing traumatic events even many years later seems to lead to healing benefits, findings which have also been substantiated in a quantitative study of disclosure among other Holocaust survivors (Pennebaker, Barger, & Tiebout, 1989).

As Frank (1991), Kramer (2009), and Appleman-Jurman (1988) have found, writing can help with survival, of individuals within traumatic situations and also of the stories themselves. Interestingly, though, in Kramer's case, her writing contributed to survival within the external reality of others beyond her underground bunker. After the Russians had liberated the Jews in Zolkiew, Poland, Valentine and Julia Beck, the couple who had hidden Kramer (2009) and her family, were arrested for treason and scheduled to be shipped to Siberia. At the urging of her friend, Kramer hand-delivered her diaries to the new Russian party secretary to prove that the Becks were not spies, an act that led to their release from prison and the saving of their lives.

Writers of literature often cite personal circumstances—and the need to control them—as being the impetus for their work. In an interview with Nancy Nichols (1989), fictional writer Carolyn Chute, who grew up in poverty, said that writing was a way to control her world. "If I can be writing," she said, "I can take a certain amount of control when so much around me is upsetting" (p. 190). Bestselling mystery author Lisa Scottoline also engages in personal writing via the medium of fiction; she admittedly incorporates autobiographical aspects into her novels through basing protagonist Mary DeNuzio on herself. Then, when Mary triumphs at the end of her books, Scottoline learns personal growth lessons for her own life, saying, "I'm writing pep talks to myself" (L. Scottoline, personal communication, February 28, 2008).

Writing for Problem-Solving

As was discussed in the previous section, writing can be a way in which a person can experience learning and the development of new perspectives about a situation. In finding these new perspectives, the writer is also engaging in a form of problem-solving, in which the new perspective can be seen as being a type of solution to—or a resolution or restructuring of—a problem. Writing for problem-solving is similar to writing for healing, especially stress reduction, in that resolving the imbalance between demands of a situation and a person's coping abilities through writing is essentially a problem-solving process

Problem-solving through writing can involve seeing the writing process itself as being a "thinking problem" (Flower and Hayes, 1977, p. 450); Ronald Kellogg (2008) has also said that "thinking is so closely linked to writing, at least in mature adults, that the two are practically twins" (p. 2). Writers, therefore, can be said to be solving problems as they think through the process of writing. Berthoff (1981) has said that this thinking is dialectical and that "the composing process…is empowered from beginning to end by the dialectic of question and answer" (pp. 75-76), also revealing how writing can be a form of problem-solving.

Flower and Hayes (1977, 1981/2003) have developed a cognitive process model of writing, which shows how the writing process can simultaneously function as a problem-solving process. A problem, as defined by Flower (1998) is a need to get from point "A" to point "B," and problem-solving involves the process—the heuristics—that a person can use to reach point "B" and achieve the desired goal.

The problem-solving process begins when the writer identifies her particular problem, which can include the rhetorical situation and audience, as well as her personal goals (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003, p. 279). The writer also plans how she will approach the problem, or gets a sense of the abstract background knowledge that she may be using (1981/2003, p. 280); Flower (1998) has referred to this process as grasping a "gist," or getting "a summary statement of the essential things you want to say" (p. 73). The writer may ask herself how what she wants to know relates to what she already knows.

As the writer continues to write, she uses continual and more conscious guided guessing to recall what she knows and make new associations. Flower (1998) has charted these associations through memory networks, which can show ideas with many links (that are easily remembered), as well as ideas that have fewer links (concepts that one knows but cannot always recall) and ideas that have unusual cognitive connections (pp. 74-75). Moreover, as the writer writes she can alter her goals as her knowledge changes, adjusting where she want to go in terms of her writing based on what she is learning through her writing (Flower and Hayes, 1981/2003, p. 290).

Writing for problem-solving has been used directly with mothers. In her study of how writing can help mothers with special-needs children, Greenstone (2006) linked problem-solving and writing, appealing for parent participants for a workshop in which they could "develop problem-solving strategies, through therapeutic writing techniques, to deal with parenting issues of concern in their personal lives" (Appendix C).

Research in disciplines outside of composition studies also explores the ways in which writing for problem-solving has been integrated into various other disciplines.

For example, some researchers (Badii, 2007; Pugalee, 2004; Reilly, 2007) have found that an interdisciplinary joining of mathematics with journaling enhances the solving of mathematical problems. Mary Edel Reilly (2007) has found that mathematics students, particularly females, used writing "to explore alternative solutions to problems and also to check and reflect on their understanding of new mathematical concepts" (abstract). Coding of the mathematical journaling studied by David Pugalee (2004) also reflected a meta-cognitive framework used in solving mathematical problems, similar to the problem-solving composition heuristics discussed by Flower (1998) and Flower and Hayes (1977, 1981/2003).

Memory Improvements Through Writing

Writing has also been found to positively impact working memory, which can, in turn, positively impact problem-solving capabilities. As cited in Moskowitz (2008), University of Missouri-Columbia psychologist Nelson Cowan said that problem-solving abilities go hand-in-hand with working memory; when a person has a better working memory, she also has better problem-solving abilities (para. 15).

Writing helps to consolidate and streamline memories by providing organization and structure to experiences, resulting in more efficient mental functioning. Specifically, psychologist Kitty Klein (2002) has found that expressive writing (which she defines as writing about both stressful event details and emotions) provides concrete verbal meanings to these abstract concepts. This "cognitive reorganization" (Lutgendorf & Ullrich, 2002, p. 178), in turn, enables a person's working memory to function more efficiently, which in turn can improve a person's problem-solving and decision-making abilities.

Writing has also been found to reveal hidden memories, as new associations trigger other connections to the past. In writing about her traumatic experiences as a prisoner in Tehran, Nemat (2008) found that writing about an event triggered memories about other events, enabling her to recollect a coherent narrative about her experiences.

Writing for Personal Development

In addition to stress relief and problem-solving effects, writing has been found to have effects on personal development, including aspects of self, identity, and voice. Within the field of composition, there are currently debates concerning the nature of self, identity, and voice, as well as the relationships among these elements. These topics are far too broad to cover exhaustively, but I will present a selection of ideas that best convey the roles that writing has played in defining self, identity, and voice as they can relate to working mothers.

Writing for Elements of Self and Identity

Based upon contemporary expressivist pedagogy, personal writing and journaling can establish links among language, meaning making, and development of the self (Burnham, 2001, pp. 24-25), the latter of which can be viewed as being malleable, changing as social contexts change (Williams, 2006, p. 4). Personal writing and journaling have been found to be a safe space for self-reflection, self-expression, and self-exploration.

Some people who have experienced traumatic or emotional events have used writing as a way of understanding the experiences through redefining a post-traumatic self and/or identities. "Many of us reinvent ourselves after every uprooting," said Schiwy

(1996). And while the writing can help to adjust identities affected by trauma, it can also provide that thread of continuity "among various careers and lives" (Schiwy, 1996, p. 165).

In her study of students who had lost parents, Milner (2005) found that the students used writing as a tool to try to "reconstitute and re-envision their lives,…reconstituting a self that incorporates but is not defined by the loss or event" (p. 178). Within the social sphere, this reassembled identity, said Milner, "allows one to be seen and heard by those who have *not* suffered, who represent the original state of innocence that preceded the violence" (p. 178, emphasis in original).

Specifically, personal narrative writing has the potential to help a woman to move beyond defining herself solely by her roles, a characteristic of Belenky et al.'s (1997) state of received knowledge (p. 134). As a woman experiences this movement, she becomes able to acknowledge and trust her voice in a state of subjective knowledge and then leverage this new sense of self into a new way of thinking through constructed knowledge (p. 135). Knowing definitively who she is, having a concrete sense of self and identity, and being able to articulate this through her unique voice are all elements that could benefit women, including working mothers.

Expressing voice through writing. Just as each person has a unique speaking voice, with a unique "voice print," like a fingerprint, Elbow (2000) has said that each person has a unique writing voice that mirrors the unique timber and range of her speaking voice (p. 194). Macrorie (1985) and Elbow (1998b) have both said that freewriting is one of the most effective techniques to tap into one's voice. "Finding the right voice will help you write better than you ever thought yourself capable of writing,"

said Macrorie (1985, p. 159). "When words carry the sound of a person—whether in fiction, poetry, or an essay—they are alive," added Elbow (1968). "Without it they are dead" (p. 120). When a person's voice reflects that person's essence, Elbow (1994) said that the person is using her "resonant voice," with the sound of the person resonating from it (pp. xxxiv-xxxv).

Likely reflecting elements of the writer's unique voice, a writer engages in internal dialectical dialogue as she writes, "the dialogue in progress when [she is] looking and classifying in the act of perception" (Berthoff, 1981, p. 75). This internal talking has also been referred to as "internal dialogue" (Moffett, 1987), the "rich dialectic of self-doubt and self-awareness" (Bolton, 2000, p. 10), "internal rhetoric" (Nienkamp, 2001), a "still small voice" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 54), and "inner, soundless speech" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 87). As was discussed earlier, this internal dialectical dialogue can contribute to writing as a problem-solving process.

Because writing is empowering, it can also allow "for the development of a self that is sufficiently integrated to be capable of knowing" (Gannett, 1992, p. 146). This new sense of self can also lead to a woman's finding of her own voice, which also can, conversely, be her way of gaining control over her life (Belenky et al., 1997). Elbow (1998a) even called one's voice her "only source of power" (p. 7), although he also cautioned that some may avoid using their real voices precisely because they are afraid of the power they wield, as well as the accompanying need to accept responsibility and credit for their words and actions (p. 310).

A person can also be said to have multiple voices that reflect the multiple components of a person's conglomerate identity. Voices can also be transient and

malleable like the selves or identities themselves. Elbow (1994) has said that selves tend to evolve, change, take on new voices, and assimilate these voices (p. xxxvi) and that people will often use different voices to deal with different situations (1981/1998, p. 293).

As cited in Schiwy (1996), writer Mary Hamilton has found that she writes in three different voices in her journal, reflecting three identities: Good Mary (society's idealized woman), Eve or Bad Mary (her repressed instinctual side), and Medicine Woman (who mediates between the other two with feminine wisdom) (p. 168). Thus, one can have multiple voices, and each voice can have different nuances. "Speaking and writing with your own voice does not mean silencing parts, but integrating them," said Hackett (2002, p. 92). Using a genuine voice can both reflect an authentic self or selves and identities, as well as lead to a deeper, richer understanding of the self.

"Felt sense" in writing. Related to the concept of voice and writing is Perl's (1980/1994, 2001, 2004) concept of felt sense. Borrowing from Eugene Gentling, Perl (1980/1994) has said that felt sense is being able to judge the effectiveness of what one has written based on bodily responses, what she calls "inchoate pushes and pulls, these barely formed preverbal yearnings or leanings" (p. xiii).

Felt sense, said Perl (2004), helps to "clarify the dynamic relationship between language and thought" and demonstrate that they are both "inextricably linked in the body" (p. 9). Brand (2000) also emphasized the mind-body connection, saying that "the mind-body relationship is so powerful that it is humanly impossible to dissociate the two without grave consequences" (p. 217), and Julie Cheville (2001) has described this "interdependence of mind and body" as being "embodied cognition" (p. 7). This mind-

body connection is also evident in a relatively new field of medicine known as psychoneuroimmunology, "the science of the interactions of mind and body, the indissoluble unity of emotions and physiology in human development and throughout life in health and illness" (Mate, 2011, p. 5).

Not surprisingly, Perl (1980/1994) has suggested that felt sense may be synonymous with voice (p. 102). In her directions to journal therapy and facilitator students regarding writing a reflection piece, Adams (2011) has incorporated elements of felt sense, asking students to, in part, reflect on what was happening in their bodies as they wrote (para. 3). And in studying writing and outdoor experiential education, Pickle (2007) discussed and explored "the connection between the mind, body, and learning and the way this connection shapes learning and writing" (p. 10).

Many women instinctively use this felt sense, referring to it as their intuition or feelings. Belenky et al. (1997) interviewed a Columbian-American woman named Inez who described her way of knowing her world in this way:

> I can only know with my gut. I've got it tuned to a point where I think and feel all
> at the same time and I know what is right. My gut is my best friend—the one
> thing in the world that won't let me down or lie to me or back away from me. (p.
> 53).

Similarly, Murdock (1990) described a filmmaker in her forties who had said, "When I look inside, I don't know who's there. The only thing I am sure of is a yearning to whole my heart. The only thing I can trust is my body" (pp. 7-8). Both Inez and the filmmaker are involved in the state of subjective knowing, Belenky et al. (1997) would say, although the filmmaker is just on the brink, whereas Inez has already moved "from

passivity to action, from self as static to self as becoming, from silence to a protesting inner voice and infallible gut" (p. 54). And felt sense within writing can not only play a dynamic role in a woman's knowing herself and her world, but it can help a woman to verbalize an internalized voice and heal a disconnection between mind and body.

Writing for self-nurturing and spirituality. Many women, who equate goodness with self-sacrifice (Gilligan, 1993, p. 80), have given so much to everyone else that they have nothing left to give themselves. Mothers often find themselves in this situation: Waldman (2009) has said that "the single defining characteristic of iconic Good Motherhood is self-abnegation" (p. 10). This self-neglecting approach has even been dubbed "Giving Tree Motherhood" after Shell Silverstein's children's book *The Giving Tree*, where the boy character takes and takes from the tree until there is nothing left of her but a stump (Warner, 2005, pp. 61, 63).

Because of the myriad responsibilities and obligations constantly spinning around a working mother, maintaining her center is especially necessary for a woman in this position (Juergens & Wright-Dilbert, 2009). Centering herself concerns a working mother's taking time for herself and can even be seen as a form of spiritual development, which can be related to the mind-body link inherent in the concept of felt sense (Perl, 1980/1994, 2001, 2004).

In studying the role that writing can play in spiritual growth and healing through Alcoholics Anonymous, Beatty (2003) has said that "writing is believed by many to play a role in connecting the writer to some type of spiritual experience" (p. 19) which can involve "spiritual sites of composing" (p. 1). In fact, much of modern self-help journaling has been influenced by Alcoholics Anonymous' 12-step recovery program. "The

relationships between 12-step recovery movements, spiritual practice, and the culture of self-help are complexly intertwined," said Whitney (2005).

This type of spiritual self-discovery, like writing for healing purposes, remains on the fringes of the composition discipline (Campbell, 1994, p. 246), yet has been explored through concepts such as Moffett's (1982) discussion of inner speech and meditation, Fulkerson's (1979) concept of reestablishing "psychic equilibrium" through writing, and Perl's (1980/1994, 2001, 2004) advocacy of felt sense within writing.

Within popular culture, mother and CNN co-anchor Soledad O'Brien (2009) has described how her own working mother's key to cultivating her personal, unique identity while also emotionally supporting her family and maintaining her job as a teacher, was taking time for herself and her own interests. This self-nurturing also provides a good example for a working mother's children. "How your life plays out is perhaps the deepest lesson your child will receive," said family writer Ian McGrady (2008, p. 53). Citing author and family therapist Michael Gurian, McGrady added, "As parents pursue and express their identities, perhaps through art, it gives their children psychological permission to pursue what they love" (p. 53).

Unfortunately, the reality for many working mothers is that they leave no time for themselves. Congressional representative Michele Bachmann (R-Minnesota) has said that her two priorities are her children and her job, with no room for personal time (Bachmann, 2008), a sentiment echoed by lawyer-mom Melissa Bianchi who, in an interview with Riss (2008), said, "One of the challenges of my life is that I have little time for things other than family and career" (p. 24).

Writing for Aspects of the Social

All people need to have a social connection, a concept that forms the basis for narrative inquiry. Research has found, however, that women more than men thrive on establishing what they see as meaningful relationships and connections with others (Belenky et al.,1997; Bolton, 2000; Gilligan, 1993). While writing can be a key to expressing one's inner voice, this voice can simultaneously shape and be shaped by these social relationships (Vygotsky, 1986). Furthermore, if a woman's voice reflects what Gilligan (1993) calls the "conventional feminine voice," then the voice will base its worth on these social relationships, the woman's "ability to care for and protect others" (p. 79).

Narrative Theory and Narrative Inquiry

The basis of narrative inquiry is a social approach to language, where people share their personal stories with other people. Gian Pagnucci (2004) has stressed that narrative theory is based on the concept of collaboration, adding that "we need to exchange stories with each other in order to make sense of our worlds" (p. 3). "Other people's stories send us scrambling through our own story looking for correlations, similarities, or different possibilities," said Baldwin (2005, p. 125), insights which Progoff (1992) says can then be assimilated into the people's own lives (p. 34).

Even when writing is approached as a personal endeavor, within the expressivist paradigm, it can have social implications that can connect the writer with the larger social community. Writers and researchers have used different images and metaphors to describe how writing can connect one person to another:

- Progoff (1992) used the metaphor of individual, personal wells all drawing from the same universal underground stream (p. 34).

- Henry Miller (1961), similar to Progoff, said that writing "lifts the sufferer out of his obsessions and frees him for the rhythm and movement of life by joining him to the great universal stream in which we all have our being" (p. 273).

- Donald McAndrew (1997) referred to people's "underlying webs of interconnectedness" (p. 38).

- Elbow (1998b) used the metaphor of a string to illustrate how one's writing is cast out "to connect yourself with other consciousnesses" (p. 73).

- Woolf (1985) said that everyone is connected together by art, of which we are all part: "Behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art" (p. 17).

- Britton (1990), referring to Gordon Pradle, has said that people are engaged in "the conversation of mankind," which he says can also lead to "'the dialogic imagination'—the creative possibilities of cooperative talk" (p. 182).

These interconnections made possible through writing can result in personal growth for both the storyteller and the audience.

Sharing stories takes advantage of social connections, enabling people to learn from one another, keeping people connected with each other and assuring both speaker and audience that they are not alone, said Miriam Divinsky (2007), a medical doctor specializing in a new type of writing application known as "narrative medicine" (p. 203).

Through the sharing of their stories, patients benefit through personal disclosure, and doctors benefit through increased empathy and decreased burnout.

These benefits of sharing stories are evident in popular culture sources as well. For example, working mother Michelle Trumpler (2008) has said that she is drawn to the writing in *Working Mother* magazine specifically because "it always makes me feel as if I am not alone" (p. 11).

Metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Also crucial for learning, experiences are at the crux of narrative inquiry; this area includes the conveying of prior experiences through personal narrative writing and, in the process, the formation of new ones. Personal writing uses language to establish coherence across past, present, and as yet unrealized experience (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 2).

In order to figuratively study the function of experience within narrative writing, narrative researchers J. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2000) have proposed a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space based on Dewey's (1938) experiential theories. In this metaphorical space, one dimension reflects interaction, or personal and social elements, one dimension reflects continuity (past, present, and future time), and a third dimension reflects situation (place) (p. 50). The metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space provides a context for showing how a person's writing can both generate and be influenced by her motivation and resulting experiences.

Dewey (1938) said that in order for an experience to be positive, leading to personal growth benefits, the experience must have positive shifts in both its interaction (personal and social elements) and continuity, shifts which can be seen within the three-

dimensional narrative inquiry space. When someone engages in personal narrative

writing, her writing theoretically begins at a certain point within the space and, through

the writing process, the writing is moved to another point within the space as new

experiences reflect shifts in interaction and continuity (which can include new

discoveries/new learning and problem-solving, as well as a connection with the social

sphere). This movement—these new experiences—can result in personal growth

benefits.

Within this metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, the personal

writing process can both affect and be affected by other elements within the narrative

inquiry space. In addition, the source of energy generating the writing process can be

said to be the "quintessentially human" drive (Pagnucci, 2004, p. 41) to make narrative

connections with others, and the need for people to both understand their experiences

and share them with others. This energy can also be said to be the person's

"motivation" in a particular situation.

Situating writing in these terms illustrates contemporary expressivist pedagogy,

in which personal introspections through writing can have social implications and

applications.

Mother Advocacy

Advocacy can be a strong motivator for mothers to write, where they want to help

others by sharing their experiences and insights, an element that also emerged through

this inquiry. From popular literature, writer Valerie Weaver-Zercher (2008) has

described how mothers can "agitate and march and advocate from a deeper place

within ourselves than we had known existed. It is possible that we will act from that

cavity our children have hollowed out of us, that place where breath begins" (p. 321). The desire for advocacy was also observed academically by Greenstone (2006) in her study of mothers with special-needs children, in which she found a recurrent connection between writing and advocacy, where the mothers felt empowered and hopeful through their personal writing and translated these feelings into motivation to help others through sharing their insights and experiences.

Sharing elements with both feminist pedagogy and community-service pedagogy, the expressivist pedagogy upon which this inquiry is based encourages what Freire (1974) calls "praxis," which is moving back and forth between reflection and action, where insights and new learning gained through reflection can then be used to help others. "Education," said Freire, "could help men [and women] to assume an increasingly critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it," education gained through reflection, reevaluation, and an awareness of the learner's role in the dialectical relationship of self and society (p. 30). Writing can be one source of this education, and new learning that can then have social implications and applications.

In terms of advocacy, mothers are concerned with effecting positive changes outside of their families, in part by work within the family, namely being positive role models for their children. Reflecting on the discrimination that she has felt as a mother within the academy, E. Evans (2009) has consciously contemplated the effects that her decisions and actions will have on her daughter. "Is this the legacy I want to pass on to my daughter, that Mama and so many others like her subject their personal lives, biological clocks, medical needs, and emotional health to a system that is unjust at best?" she questioned (p. 53).

Within popular culture, this desire to be positive role models exists as well. As cited in Riss (2010), actress Amy Brenneman described being reminded of this goal by fellow actress Tyne Daly:

> I remember sitting in the makeup chair at 6 a.m., crying. Tears were streaming down my face. I was sitting next to Tyne Daly, who played my mother on *Judging Amy*, and without any preamble I turned to her and said, "Why am I doing this?" And she said, "Because you're a working artist who is demonstrating and modeling for her daughter what being a woman of grace and talent is in the world." (p. 50)

As was discussed previously, engaging in the writing process can help a woman to find her unique voice, and that concept of voice also has a role in writing for advocacy. "What new dimensions will emerge, in every field, when women begin to find that different voice, their own voice, and use it in medicine, law, theology, architecture, in all the arts and all the sciences?" Friedan (1963/1983) first asked in 1963, her sense of voice carrying with it the sense of power as described by Belenky et al. (1997). In this inquiry, one participant actively used her found voice within the social realm, moving from personal writing to political advocacy.

Relevant Learning Theories

Writing for personal growth purposes often involves new learning as new perspectives and insights are developed. Therefore, I will review the relevant learning theories of Dewey (1897/1959, 1916, 1938), Vygotsky (1978, 1986), and Bruner (1960) as they pertain to this inquiry.

Dewey: Experiential learning and progressive education. Dewey (1897/1959) asserted that learning originates from an individual's personal experiences, saying that "the child's own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting point for all education" and that there is an "organic connection between education and personal experience" (1938, p. 25).

These personal experiences do not occur in a vacuum, however, but instead are influenced by a person's social environment, "sources outside an individual which give rise to experience" (1938, p. 40) and which have "an educative or formative influence unconsciously and apart from any set purpose" (1916, p. 20). Therefore, education and learning involve both psychological (individual) and sociological (social or environmental) influences, with the psychological influences being the basis. Moreover, "neither can be subordinated to the other or neglected without evil results following" (Dewey, 1897/1959).

Dewey (1938) was an advocate of "progressive education," which he called more "humane" than traditional education because it takes into account all facets of experience: past, present, and future. The basis of progressive education is that education builds upon past experiences and depends upon the influence of future experiences, making up a pattern that he called "continuity": "The principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35). Dewey also emphasizes that continuity of experience equals personal growth, specifically defining growth as "cumulative movement of action toward a later result" (1916, p. 49). Thus, progressive education involves positive experiences that result in

personal growth. Dewey's educational theories form the foundation for Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, which was discussed previously.

Classroom applications of Dewey's theories include creating curriculum that is based in student interests and past experiences. To enhance learning, teachers can also create bridges between subject matter and student interests. This practice calls to mind Dewey's (1897/1959) educational principle that "the true center of correlation on the school subjects is not science, nor literature, nor history, nor geography, but the child's own social activities" (p. 10).

This associative teaching is similar to the scaffolding technique inspired by Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development, which will be discussed in the next section. In addition, Dewey's concept of progressive education being the cumulative effect of experiences is related to Bruner's (1960) principle of spiral education, which will be discussed in a subsequent section.

Vygotsky: Inner speech and scaffolding. Like Dewey, Vygotsky (1978, 1986) viewed social experiences as playing an integral role in learning, the development of new learning and new perspectives which can result from personal narrative writing. Vygotsky believed that there is an associative relationship between an individual's social environment and the development of both external and internal speech, which helps to shape thought and lead to learning.

Social environment is the catalyst for language development in a child, Vygotsky (1986) said, initially yielding what he called "external speech," which is essentially mimicked speech devoid of reasoning. As the child grows, this external speech evolves

into "social speech" (speech for others) and "egocentric speech" (speech for one's self). Egocentric speech then evolves into "inner speech," although the functions of egocentric speech and inner speech are similar:

> [Egocentric speech] does not merely accompany the child's activity; it serves mental orientation, conscious understanding; it helps in overcoming difficulties; it is speech for oneself, intimately and usefully connected with the child's thinking. (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 228)

Inner speech specifically has a role in learning, according to Vygotsky. While social speech is the "turning of thoughts into words, their materialization and objectification," inner speech is the reverse, as "overt speech sublimates into thoughts" (p. 226). Through inner speech, learning occurs as words become "saturated with sense" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 247), uniquely concentrated for the individual. Internal speech then helps to organize thoughts, also contributing to learning (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89). Moreover, Vygotsky said that written speech can be said to be a reflection of inner speech (p. 182) and thus can also be a factor within this learning equation. This concept relates to the concept of individual writer's voice that was discussed in a previous section.

Inner speech, rooted in social experiences and the key to learning, can be developed through social dialogue to maximize what Vygotsky has called a person's "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), "*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*" (1978, p. 86, emphasis in original). Vygotsky

also said that the ZPD identifies those functions that are not yet fully developed but are instead in an "embryonic state" (1978, p. 86). Thus, these functions indicate areas of potential development for the individual, areas which can be developed through associative relationships with social elements, including the classroom teacher.

Within the classroom, teachers have implemented Vygotsky's (1978) theories by encouraging social dialogue to help to develop a student's inner speech that can lead to learning. Teachers can even build upon the associative nature of learning in order to teach not only the subject matter but also higher-level cognitive processes. For example, one college professor of English literature with whom I have been in contact has said that his ultimate goal is to teach abstract skills such as problem-solving; English literature becomes the conduit through which he teaches these abstract concepts (M. Oles, personal communication, September 26, 2008). In addition, teachers apply Vygotsky's ZPD in the form of "scaffolding," in which teachers build a virtual knowledge support system between current functions and new concepts to help students to bridge this chasm of development through language, a process which can lead to new learning.

Bruner: Constructivist model and spiral learning. Bruner (1960) offered another learning theory to help to explain how new learning and new perspectives can emerge from personal narrative writing. Like Vygotsky, Bruner believes that learning should involve the teaching of both specific skills and general understanding. Bruner has asserted that effective learning involves four themes 1) structure in learning; 2) readiness for learning; 3) intuition; 4) desire or motivation to learn. Each of these

themes will be discussed below in terms of how they can apply to the type of learning resulting from personal narrative writing.

Structure in learning. Bruner (1960) claimed that structure plays a primary role in education, so that general concepts can be built upon to further advance learning: "In order for a person to be able to recognize the applicability or inapplicability of an idea to a new situation and to broaden his learning thereby, he must have clearly in mind the general nature of the phenomenon with which he is dealing" (p. 18). In other words, as the individual learns subject matter, she also learns how elements of that subject are related to other elements. Structure in teaching also enhances memory retention of the material; this approach parallels how structure in writing improves memory by streamlining cognitive resources, as was discussed in an earlier section.

Readiness for learning. Bruner (1960) also said that readiness for learning is another important element for effective learning. Readiness for learning involves not delaying the introduction of basic information. Instead, this basic information can be laid as a foundation, upon which further, more complex learning can be sequentially built.

As layers are added through the teaching process, learning evolves through three almost-simultaneous processes:

1. Acquisition—New information or refined information is introduced.

2. Transformation— Information is manipulated to fit or adapt to new tasks.

3. Evaluation— Information is evaluated as to whether it has been manipulated appropriately to fit the task. (pp. 48-49)

Because a student simultaneously acquires, transforms, and evaluates information, the student can be introduced to complex concepts at early stages in the learning process.

This approach could be useful in introducing writing concepts to people who are intimidated by the idea of writing and/or view themselves as poor writers.

Intuition. Intuition is also an element of learning that Bruner (1960) considers to be important. He defined intuition as "the act of grasping the meaning, significance, or structure of a problem or situation, without explicit reliance on the analytic apparatus of one's craft" (p. 60). Intuitive thinking is contrasted with analytic thinking in that, instead of following systematic, analytical steps, it involves cognitive jumps that "involve maneuvers based seemingly on an implicit perception of the total problem" (p. 58). The repetitive development of knowledge through spiral learning helps to provide the cognitive resources for effective intuitive thinking.

As discussed in an earlier section, many women already rely on their internal sense of intuition especially for making decisions in their everyday lives. Furthermore, several composition researchers (Belenky et al., 1997; Brand, 2000; Fulkerson, 1979; Moffett, 1982; Perl, 1980/1994, 2001, 2004; Pickle, 2007) have discussed the role of intuition in the writing classroom, revealing the potential of intuition for enhancing the teaching and use of personal narrative writing.

Desire or motivation to learn. A personal desire or motivation to learn is Bruner's (1960) fourth element of effective learning. Similar to Dewey (1938), Bruner says that effective learning should be rooted in elements of personal value for the individual: "Ideally, interest in the material to be learned is the best stimulus to learning, rather than such external goals as grades or later competitive advantage" (p. 14). Motivation rooted in elements of personal interest is an expression of intrinsic motivation, one of the types of motivation associated with positive growth (Garn,

Matthews, & Jolly, 2010). Types of motivation will be discussed in the related section later in this chapter.

Within the classroom, Bruner's educational philosophy is used by teachers who structure their curriculum to build on students' existing knowledge, similar to the application of Vygotsky's ZPD technique in scaffolding student learning. Working with elements of value for the students is another way in which Bruner's ideas are used in the classroom. Some teachers also work at developing students' intuitive thinking. For example, Perl (1980/1994, 2001, 2004) has done extensive work in using felt sense in composition instruction, which, as was discussed previously, is a honing of the mind-body relationship in judging writing effectiveness.

Positioning the Inquiry Within Expressivist Writing

As has been discussed, this inquiry builds upon research on writing for healing, personal development, and social aspects within the context of the expressivist writing paradigm within composition studies. The significance of the study is that it has contributed information to composition studies in terms of expressivist writing, showing the potential roles that personal expressivist writing can have in managing the various balance issues of working mothers.

As stated earlier, the contemporary expressivist pedagogy upon which this inquiry is based draws from both personal and social influences:

Expressivism places the writer in the center, articulates its theory, and develops its pedagogical system by assigning highest value to the writer and her imaginative psychological, social, and spiritual development and how that

development influences individual consciousness and social behavior. (Burnham, 2001, p. 19)

Expressivist writing within composition studies has its historical basis in the learning philosophy of Dewey (1897/1959, 1916, 1938), who said that an individual's personal experiences should be the basis for education, with the recognition that these personal experiences are also influenced by the individual's social experiences. The primary goal of expressivist writing is "to help students grow in their ability to understand their own experiences" (Fishman & McCarthy, 1992, p. 654). The ways in which this development happens is through an individual's thinking and learning derived from her socially influenced inner speech, which, in turn, influences her social environment.

Based upon the philosophies of Dewey, these tenets of personal voice and external expression continued to be developed by Moffett (1982) and Elbow (1981/1988, 1994, 2000). Moffett has described how "writing and meditating are naturally allied activities" (p. 231) and has said that all writing is a revised form of an individual's inner speech for a purpose and an audience (p. 233). Elbow has stressed the importance of developing one's individual voice, hoping, as Stephen Fishman has said in referring to Elbow's viewpoint, "to increase our chances for identifying with one another and, as a result, our chances for restructuring community" (Fishman & McCarthy, 1992, p. 649).

These expressivist connections between the personal and the social continue to be explored in practicum and research through narrative theory and research as developed by Clandinin and Connolly (2000) and Pagnucci (2004). The present inquiry stands upon these expressivist building blocks to apply expressivist pedagogy and

research to managing the balancing issues faced by working mothers, and then extrapolates these findings into balance applications within the composition classroom that teaches both traditional and nontraditional students, many of whom are themselves working mothers.

Nature of Motivation

Inherent within the learning theories used in composition studies is the concept of motivation, which will be covered in some detail here since it has played an important role in the participants' perceived experiences with personal narrative writing. Motivation is a term that has been defined in a variety of ways, most often as being a justification for behavior. Similar to internal and external elements working in tandem in expressivist pedagogy, motivation is thought to be shaped by a combination of personality traits and social environments (Garn, et al., p. 263). Motivation can comprise three facets:

1. Rooted need: A psychological or biological feature that makes a person want to move toward a desired goal.

2. Reward from need fulfillment: What the person expects to receive through this action.

3. Value of need fulfillment: The element that gives purpose and direction to behavior, or what is important to the individual. A value can be said to be an element that a person believes has the potential to enhance the world, in contrast with the common sense that values are what are morally or socially acceptable (Kupperman, 1998, p. 3).

These three facets combine in different ways to determine whether motivation in a particular circumstance is categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic. Self-determination theory

(SDT) is an ideal lens through which to examine motivation because it encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Garn, et al., 2010, p. 264).

Self-determination Theory (SDT)

Among the many approaches to classifying motivation, a recent theory called self-determination theory (SDT) has been chosen as both the most recent and the most sensitive system for coding the factor of motivation in the participants of the present study. Self-determination theory describes intrinsic motivation as "engaging in behavior for the inherent value of enjoyment of participation" and being "the most internal, healthy, and self-determined type of motivation (Garn, et al., 2010, p. 264). The roots for intrinsic behavior are within the person, and the rewards are internal as well, often in the form of personal satisfaction. Intrinsic motivation is also seen as being crucial for positive psychological functioning, as well as being connected with aspects of self-determined identity (Waterman et al., 2003, p. 1447).

Extrinsic motivation focuses on behavior directed toward external outcomes. SDT differentiates between four types of extrinsic motivation, differentiated by the source of their roots and whether or not the roots are value-based:

1. Integration: Behavior is rooted in an individual's value system based on a potential external reward, such as needing praise for good grades.

2. Identification: Behavior is rooted in an internal commitment made by the individual, which is directed toward receiving an external reward, such as a personal commitment to receiving these good grades.

3. Introjection: Behavior is rooted in values that are not personal or for solely reasons of social approval, such as studying to please one's parents.

4. External motivation: Behavior is rooted in strictly external behavior that is non-value-based for the satisfaction of a social demand, such as completing homework to avoid punishment.

The first two forms of extrinsic motivation (integration and identification) can be said to be "internalized" forms because the root is internal; like intrinsic motivation, these forms of extrinsic motivation have been associated with positive psychological functioning, as well as positive academic and well-being effects. The second two forms of extrinsic motivation (introjection and external motivation) can be said to be "controlling" forms because the root is external (Garn, et al., 2010, p. 264); these forms of extrinsic motivation have been associated with negative effects on psychological functioning, academic performance, and well-being. See Figure 2.
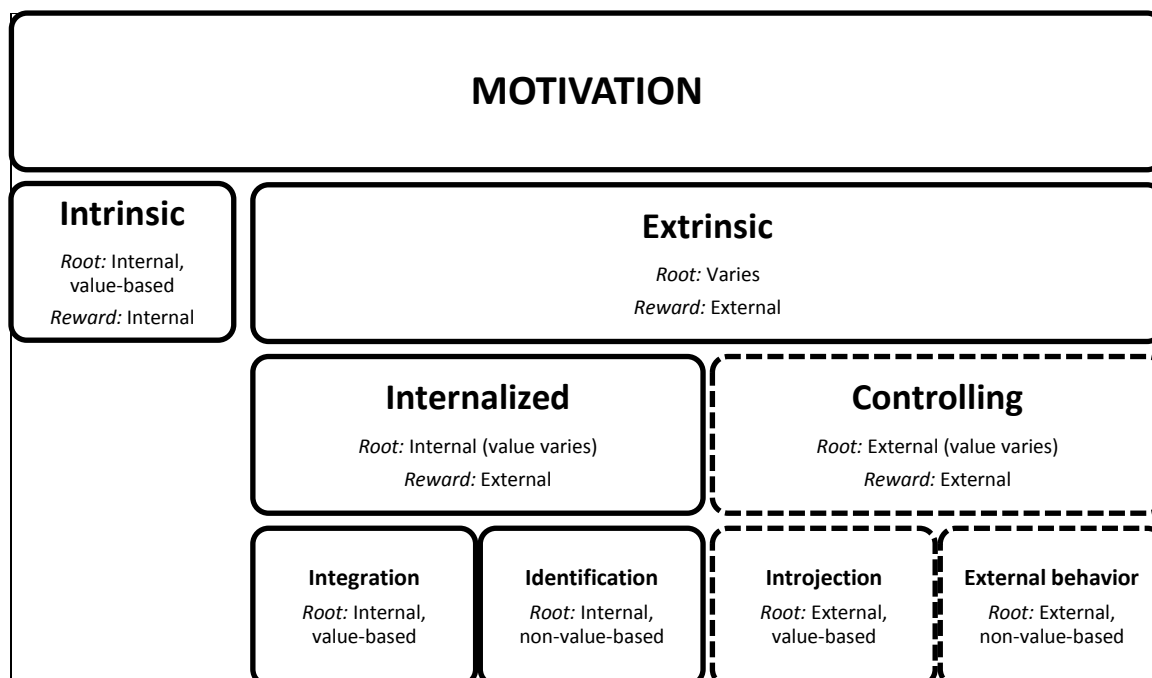
Figure 2. Self-determination theory (SDT). SDT categorizes motivation as being intrinsic or extrinsic, further breaking down extrinsic motivation depending upon the individual roots of the motivation and whether or not they are value-based. Motivation in which the root is internal (intrinsic and internalized forms of extrinsic motivation) has been shown to yield positive psychological functioning, academic performance, and well-being effects. Motivation in which the root is external (controlling forms of extrinsic motivation) has been shown to yield negative psychological functioning, academic performance, and well-being effects, these components being indicated in the figure by the dotted lines. (Garn et al., 2010, p. 264).

Creative Expression

According to the self-determined theory of motivation that was discussed in the previous section, people are likely to enjoy activities that they believe are interesting, that they feel competent in performing, and where success is personally valued (Waterman et al., 2003, p. 1448). Specifically, when activities are personally meaningful—when a person is intrinsically motivated to engage in them—a person can experience the following:

- An unusually intense involvement.

- A special fit or meshing with the activities.

- A feeling of intensely being alive.

- A feeling of completeness or fulfillment.

- An impression that this is what the person was meant to do.

- A feeling that this is who one really is. (Waterman et al., 2003, p. 1449)

Furthermore, when the activities for which one is motivated are creative in nature, research has found that these activities can yield benefits similar to writing, including benefits related to personal growth, memory improvements, problem-solving, healing, and identity formation. Hesse (2010) said that writing can fulfill personal and social interests similar to other creative endeavors, such as woodworking, knitting, baking, fishing, scrapbooking, singing, and photography (p. 47). Additional research has found that creative activities such as knitting, scrapbooking, or decoupage can result in memory and healing benefits similar to writing: "Crafts like knitting can boost short-term memory recall, delay memory loss, reduce chronic pain, and improve attention span and motivation," said writer Lora Shinn (2011, para. 3).

In addition, like writing, creativity has also been found to enhance problem-solving (Hoxworth, 2010). For example, one study has found that Hurricane Katrina survivors with higher scores on creativity measures had better coping skills, while another study of amateur female musicians found that higher creativity correlated with lower stress levels (Orenstein, 2011, pp. 149-150).

Creative activities, including writing, also have the potential to bridge personal and professional identities (Bolton, 2000, p. 7), enabling people, including working mothers, to develop "alternative identities that may allow the connection of professional identities with internal desires and senses of self" (Williams, 2006, p. 2). Identifying elements which may help a person, including a working mother, to develop her creativity

and experience the benefits of creativity are connected with elements of motivation for creative activities.

It seems that the effort of being creative, whether through writing or other activities, can be personally beneficial, with the caveat that the person needs to be personally motivated to participate in the creative activity. Participating in creative activities may also help to foster the self-nurturing that many women are lacking. Unfortunately, however, many women thwart or underplay their creative side, in part, said Marty Makridakis (2011), because "society in general can tend to view creative pursuits as lightweight" (audio). "For some," added Gail McMeekin (2000), childbirth remains the only safe realm of female creativity" (p. 19).

Summary of Related Literature

In numerous studies across disciplines and in numerous sources, writing is found to be a tool for positive change. Writing can lead to both physical and psychological healing benefits, assist with solving problems, help to define, shape, and reshape the concepts of self and identity, and strengthen social connections. All of these are personal growth benefits that can potentially enrich the life of a busy, multitasking, "multi-minding" (Gannon, 2009) working mother.

While the literature is overwhelmingly positive concerning writing's potential to yield these benefits, writing may not work for everyone. Just as Elbow (1994) has said that each person has a unique writing voice, like a fingerprint, McMeekin (2000) has said that each person also has a unique "fingerprint" for perceiving and feeling. This uniqueness of the individual indicates that the same solutions (in this case, writing) will likely not work in the same ways for everyone. "Of course, there will always be those for

whom writing will result neither in an artistic product nor in therapeutic benefit," according to Hunt (2000, p. 187).

In spite of the positive benefits of personal writing, incorporating this type of expressive writing into classroom practice can, detrimentally, force a teacher into the position of "scholar/practitioner" (Tirrell, 1990), where she may find herself in the unfamiliar and uncomfortable role of counselor or therapist. As Bishop (1993) has advised, "We need to understand the degree to which writing may be a therapeutic process and the degree to which teachers and administrators can or should undertake counseling roles" (para. 4). If expressivist writing is to be used within the composition classroom regularly, then this issue would need to be explored in more depth, as both Bishop and Moran (2004) have recommended.

The following chapter describes the methodology for my inquiry concerning the effects that personal writing has had on working mothers. This study helped to determine the personal growth benefits that a working mother can realize through engaging in personal narrative writing, as well as provide insights for how the inquiry findings can be effectively applied within the composition classroom.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

Women who juggle professional responsibilities in a job or as students and who are also mothers face unique challenges within the areas of healing, problem-solving, identity formation/modification, and social connections. When coping with demands fostered by factors such as historical trends involving working women, social causes like the women's movements, and economic conditions, contemporary working mothers often feel overworked and overwhelmed, metaphorically describing their lives as whirlwinds, toxic swirls, or hurricanes.

As reviewed in Chapter 2, interdisciplinary research has shown that personal writing can lead to healing, problem-solving, identity formation/modification, and social connections, the same areas in which working mothers may need help. This inquiry holds as its main assumption, therefore, that personal writing can have the potential to help working mothers with these issues, although no previous study has looked at the effects of personal writing on this sample population. In addition, this research pushes the existing boundaries of writing for healing within the field of composition, an area which has not yet been explored in depth.

Therefore, the problem of this inquiry looks at the effects of personal writing in helping a working mother to manage her various issues, broadly grouped under four categories: healing, problem-solving, identity formation/modification, and social connections. Like Greenstone (2006), who studied how writing could help mothers with special-needs children, I want to explore how writing can benefit this different sampling of mothers. And like Beatty (2003), who studied how writing helps recovering alcoholic

women, and Caroline Fitzpatrick (2007), who studied women's discourse within a quilting circle, as well as Pickle (2007), who studied the role of writing in outdoor experiential education and Trupe (1997), who studied writing and reentry college women, I am interested in taking composition theory out of the classroom and studying the function of writing within a select group of women in their everyday lives.

This inquiry is based upon expressivist pedagogy—which holds that the writer is at the center of the writing, but her personal insights can also have social applications and implications. The study also uses narrative inquiry, which is based in the social sharing of personal experiences. Therefore, the inquiry's methodological approach is qualitative, an approach which Janesick (2004) calls "participatory, dialogic, transformative, and educative" (p. 10).

As with other naturalistic inquiries, because this inquiry's problems were embedded in the individual realities of the participants, said David Erlandson, Edward Harris, Barbara Skipper, and Steve Allen (1993), the problem definition and study refinement could continue even after the study has begun (p. 42). Therefore, the study design remained open and emergent. Figure 3 depicts the different components of the study, with the dotted borders of each component reflecting the flexibility among components. These flexible components will be discussed sequentially in the sections that follow.
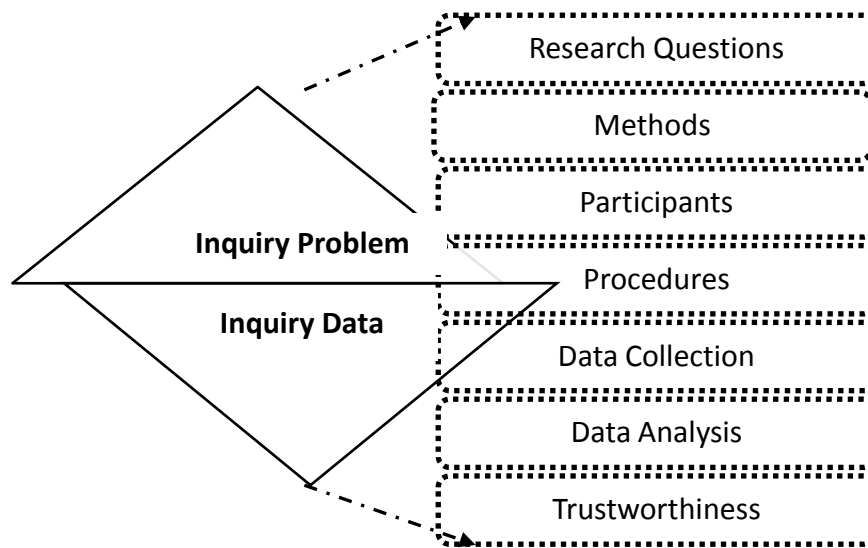
Figure 3. Data collection and analysis model. This model presents the inquiry's methodology in terms of its flexible components (depicted by the dotted borders). These components are extrapolations of the inquiry problem in order to obtain accurate and reliable inquiry data.

Research Questions

Janesick (2004) said that qualitative research typically begins with a question addressing, "What do I want to know?" (p. 3). Within this inquiry, the primary, overarching research question has been the following:

How does personal narrative writing impact the various balance issues with a

group of working mothers, judging from their personal experiences with and

testimonies about personal narrative writing over a five-month study period?

Through a qualitative approach, the inquiry participants' personal experiences presented in their own terms informed the study and determined its results, where the results were grounded in the inquiry's data (Maxwell, 2005). Specifically, this inquiry sought personal participant feedback for these secondary exploratory research questions:

1. How does personal narrative writing impact stress (both psychological and physical) in participants' lives, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

2. How does personal narrative journaling impact problem-solving or coping strategies in participants' lives, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

3. What other personal effects do participants experience through their personal writing, including effects on personal relationships and concepts of self and identity, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

4. What types of writing practices do the participants find to be most effective, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

5. What potential positive effects and drawbacks could personal writing have for other working mothers, judging from participants' perspectives about personal writing?

Primary Research Methods

This inquiry explored the experience of personal narrative writing (journaling) engaged in by 15 working mothers between the ages of 27 and 40 in 2009 (born between 1969 and 1982). Each participant worked in a professional job, as well as being the mother of at least one child under the age of 14.

The study ran for five months and also consisted of one additional month of pre-study work and one additional month of post-study follow-up. The underlying elements

that I brought to the present research included personal narrative writing, journaling, interviews, and my role as a participant-observer, all of which also served as data sources for the study.

Personal narrative writing. To convey personal experiences, including their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and ideas, as well as to make meaning from these experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the primary form of writing within this inquiry took the form of personal narrative writing. Most of the personal narrative writing took place within the participant's personal journal, with the exception of the autobiographical piece that each wrote during the pre-study period.

Journaling. Tapping into a long tradition of personal narrative writing, this inquiry required personal journaling by study participants, as well as by me, since I took part in this venture as both researcher and participant.

Participant journaling involved personal narrative writing in a personal journal of each participant's choosing at least twice a week for the course of the five-month study. The subjects for a participant's writing were self-generated, although I provided a list of 10 writing prompts drawn from various sources and pertaining to relevant topics, which she could use for idea generation at her discretion. See Appendix B for these prompts with reference information, and Appendix C for prompts as the participants saw them.

It is worth noting, however, that none of the participants adhered to the required writing instructions, and very few even used the writing prompts provided. This factor became a limitation of this study, as will be discussed in the final chapter, yet it also revealed interesting data regarding how participants chose to control their writing processes, as will be explained in Chapter 11.

As a participant-observer, I also kept a participant's journal, as well as a researcher's reflexive journal in which I reflected on what I was learning from writings and interviews as the data were collected. Janesick (2004) has advocated reflective researcher journals and has said that, as a powerful heuristic tool, they can accomplish several goals within qualitative study:

1. Refine the understanding of the role of the researcher through reflection and writing, much like an artist might do.

2. Refine the understanding of the responses of participants in the study, much like a physician or health care worker might do.

3. Function as an interactive tool of communication between the researcher and participants in the study.

4. Function as a type of connoisseurship by which individuals become connoisseurs of their own thinking and reflection patterns, and indeed their own understanding of their work as qualitative researchers. (p. 144)

A researcher's reflexive journal goes beyond mere reflection, which Bolton (2005) has said is "an in-depth consideration of events or situation outside of oneself" (p. 9). A researcher's journal should also contain elements of "reflexivity," which Bolton describes as "making aspects of the self strange: focusing close attention upon *one's own* actions, thoughts, feelings, values, identity, and their effect upon others, situations, and professional and social structures" (p. 10). In addition, Lincoln and Guba (2003) have said that "reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human instrument'" (p. 283).

Relating to Bolton's (2005) reference to self and tying into the concept of having multiple selves or identities, Lincoln and Guba (2003) have said that the researcher brings three categories of selves/identities to the research: research-based selves, brought selves (involving historical, social, and personal selves), and situationally created selves (p. 283). Reflexivity demands that the researcher interrogate herself about how the research is affected by these facets of self (p. 283). As such, the researcher's reflective/reflexive journal not only enriches the inquiry but also adds to the inquiry's trustworthiness.

Interviews. Within this inquiry, each participant was interviewed four times: before the study began, during the course of the study, immediately after the study was completed, and then a final time during the post-study period. Interviews were conducted both in-person and via email. Email was the preferred interview method for most of the participants because of personal circumstances (distance, schedule conflicts, etc.).

For the interviews that were conducted in person, each interview was approximately 30 to 45 minutes in length and was semi-structured where I entered the interview with a list of questions derived from the inquiry's research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 74) but allowed for emergent question modifications as the interview progressed, as well as in subsequent interviews and brief follow-up emails or telephone calls for clarification. For the email interviews, these semi-structured interview questions were emailed to participants, and subsequent clarifications were completed via subsequent email communication.

Interview questions included main questions, which encompassed facets of the research problem; probes, which asked for clarification of ambiguous answers; and follow-up questions, which ensured that I would receive complete and accurate information on the topics discussed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Appendices D-F present the questions for the three series of interviews.

All in-person interviews were recorded, transcribed in a summary-transcription format (documenting the questions and answers), edited for clarity, and sent to participants for member checking. Email interviews were stored intact to maintain the authenticity of the participant's words, and any follow-up emails or telephone calls to clarify ambiguities were documented, dated, and stored in related memos. With this type of member-checking validation, the interviews then became an accurate component of the ongoing narrative record (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In addition, using techniques similar to Pickle (2007), I took detailed notes during each interview, as well as wrote a reflective memo following each interview in which I recorded my ideas and personal reactions as they pertained to that particular interview. Through these memos, I engaged in what Maxwell (2005) describes as "serious reflection, analysis, and self-critique" (p. 13), as well as documented suggestions for additional concepts, themes, or events that I wanted to clarify (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 205).

Participant-observer role. My role within this inquiry was that of participant-observer, because, as a mother-professional myself, I brought a first-hand, organic perspective to this inquiry. As described above, as a participant-observer, I kept both a researcher's journal and a participant's journal. These dual acts of writing served to enrich the inquiry. "Writing that is accompanied by reflection on that writing," said Janesick (2004), "often leads to new questions about the research act and the study being reported, and questions in general about society, social justice, and responsibility" (p. 143). My dual roles as participant-observer "require[d] that [I as] the naturalistic researcher be able to experience what the 'natives' experience and to see that experience in the way that they see it" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 81); I was "the inquirer experiencing the experience and also being a part of the experience itself" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81). I turned inward as I recorded a participant's perceptions, and turned outward as I recorded my researcher's experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 86), "writing up" as I recorded field notes and "writing down" as I recorded my personal writing (Lincoln & Guba, 2003, p. 283).

Like Greenstone (2006), I also "realized I was uniquely positioned to understand, examine, and synthesize the…effects of mothers' writing, reading, and storytelling, and understand the social environment that fuels it"; like Greenstone, "I also recognized its value as a rich, yet relatively unexplored, source of knowledge" (abstract). The participant-observer data was crucial to not only a full understanding of the phenomenon but also to the trustworthiness of the inquiry.

Participants

Although the time frame can vary slightly from source to source, women born between the years of 1969 and 1982 are considered to be part of the demographic commonly called Generation X. Sandwiched between the baby boomers and the millennials (Generation Y), women within Generation X are the targeted participants for this inquiry because, within this bracket, most women within this demographic work full-time (*Generation X*, 2004, p. 152), many are still in school (p. 14), and many have children under 18 years old at home (p. 186).

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, women from this generation rode the crest of the women's movement wave as it tumbled into its second stage (Friedan, 1981) and formed into a third wave (Harris, 2003). Thus, Glickman (1993) has referred to women within this age bracket as generally encompassing "the daughters of feminism" (p. xiii). This demographic grew up with working mothers and the realities of divorce and job insecurities. Many admit taking for granted the rights fought for by previous generations, including self-esteem, economic independence, and reproductive rights, although do not call themselves activists or feminists (Glickman, 1993). And although they do not view marriage and children as necessary for personal fulfillment, many choose to try to balance work and family.

Each of the 15 participants in this study can be said to be part of the Generation X demographic because each participant was between the ages of 27 and 40 in 2009, or, in other words, was born between 1969 and 1982. The 15 participants represented a purposive sample drawn from a group of approximately 25 potential participants and were purposively selected based upon these criteria:

1. Having a personal desire to participant in a personal writing-related study.

2. Having one or more children age 14 or younger at study onset.

3. Holding a working professional role.

4. Falling between the ages of 27 and 40 at study onset.

The purposive sample also provided a range of respondents within the demographic, including a geographic representation as participants came from seven different states. "Purposive sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study," said qualitative researcher Michael Quinn Patton (2002, p. 228). Purposive sampling also fulfilled two of Joseph Maxwell's (2005) goals for purposeful selection: 1) to achieve a representativeness of the desired population, and 2) to represent the range of variation, capturing the population's heterogeneity (p. 89).

Participants were obtained through referrals of candidates who fit the required profile. Participants signed consent forms and provided member checks for interview transcripts. Participants were also asked to share some of their personal writing generated during the inquiry period as a data source for the study.

Exclusion criteria for participants included not being a professional working mother, as well as not having at least one child age 14 or younger. American and international women were approached to be participants, although only American women were interested in participating.

Out of these 15 participants, 10 core subgroup participants were chosen based upon consistencies in participation and richness of provided data. Data from this group

were used to address the overarching research question concerning balance, as well as the five secondary research questions.

Procedures

    Pre-study. Before the study began, I interviewed each participant to inquire about her previous experience with writing, as well as to gain information about how she currently manages her multiple roles. At this point, I also asked each participant to write an autobiographical piece of about 500 words that described her work life and home life and how she balances them. Participants were asked to give this writing to me before they began the personal writing for the study.

    During the pre-study period, I also provide participants with guidelines for the study. These guidelines included instructions and suggested writing venues (Appendix A), and 10 writing prompts that they could use at their discretion for writing topic ideas (Appendix C).

    Study. During the course of the five-month study, I asked each participant to write at least two times per week, targeting 10-15 minutes per session. All writing topics were self-generated, although the participant was able to use one or more of the provided writing prompts at her discretion.

    In addition, the participant was able to complete her writing in any venue of her choosing. These could have been private or social venues and may or may not have been shared with the rest of the inquiry group, although none of the participants chose to share their writing with other participants. Letting the participants choose their writing venues provided valuable data related to the physical and/or virtual places in which working mothers prefer to write, and also whether these places tended to be private or

social. Giving participants the opportunity to control their writing practices also enabled me to see if participants preferred handwritten journals versus typewritten journals, hardcopy versus electronic. In addition, I was able to gain feedback about whether the participant preferred to self-generate her writing or to use provided writing prompts.

During the five-month study period, I interviewed each participant about how the writing was currently impacting her maternal and professional lives. Again, each interview was semi-structured, ran approximately 30 minutes, and was recorded, transcribed, member-checked, and coded, or was conducted via email with the integrity of the responses kept intact, with the responses subsequently being coded.

Post-study. Following the study, I again interviewed each participant regarding her personal responses to the writing, as well as her perspectives regarding the personal benefits that she may have received from the writing. Interviews were semi-structured, ran approximately 30 minutes, and were recorded, transcribed, member-checked, and coded, or were conducted via email with the integrity of the responses kept intact, with the responses subsequently being coded. Participants were also asked if they would like to share some of their personal writing as data sources for the study. By enabling participants to pick and choose the writing they would like to share, and in turn enabling them to knowingly write only for themselves as audience if they so chose, I was able to elicit richer and more genuine journal responses.

During data analysis, I also interviewed each participant a fourth time via email, asking for clarifications and augmentations to the data provided in the first three interviews, the autobiography, and any submitted writing samples. The integrity of the responses was kept intact, with the responses subsequently being coded.

Data Collection

In describing qualitative research, Janesick (2004) has used the metaphor of stretching in preparation for dance or yoga, stretching which can include "observation skills, interview skills, and the role of the researcher skills," which can then yield a sequence of dance steps of "participation, transformation, and education" (p. 10). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have described a qualitative researcher acting as a *bricoleur* (quiltmaker) or a worker of montage (cinematic editor), the choice of research methods being picked and chosen depending on research questions and context (p. 6).

If quilt-making can be said to be the process, then quilting fabrics are the tools for completing the process—the qualitative inquiry's data sources. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have said that these data sources are collaboratively obtained: The researchers, they say, "must become fully involved, must 'fall in love' with their participants, yet they must also step back and see their own stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which they all live" (p. 81). Thus, the data sources become a mixture of participant and researcher, mutually influenced and collaboratively collected.

In this vein, the collaborative data sources for this inquiry were the following:

- participants' autobiographical personal writing (elicited at the beginning of study);
- reflexive researcher's journal containing field notes from shared experiences and researcher observations;
- reflexive researcher memos;

- participant journal records, which may include stories, letter writing, creative writing, life experiences, family stories, and drawings (submitted at the participant's discretion);

- interview member-checked transcripts from four series of interviews;

- interview notes;

- interview memos.

I used the MemoMaster software program (http://www.jbsoftware.org) as a means of recording and organizing memos related to different aspects of the research process.

Erlandson et al. (1993) have said that the purpose of qualitative data collection is "to gain the ability to construct reality in ways that are consistent and compatible with the constructions of a setting's inhabitants" (p. 81). Using the diverse sources of data as described above as obtained from a purposive-sampled group of participants provided a representative picture of how personal writing can affect working mothers.

Data Analysis

The goals of data analysis, said Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin (2005), are to "reflect the complexity of human interaction by portraying it in the words of the interviewees and through actual events and to make that complexity understandable to others" (p. 202). To create this representative picture of how personal writing can affect mother professionals, I took these steps of data analysis:

1. Developed a start list of codes.

2. Unitized the data within each data source.

3. Consolidated data.

4. Looked for emergent patterns.

5. Identified negative case analyses.

6. Bridged, extended, and surfaced data.

Each of these steps as applied in this inquiry is described in more detail in the following sections.

Developed a start list of codes. In preparation for data coding, Matthew Miles and A. Michael Huberman (1994) have suggested developing a start list of codes and coding categories in a coding matrix. This matrix can be structured around the inquiry's research questions, as well as relationships, settings, perspectives, processes, strategies, and methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 240, 61) and concepts, themes, events, and topical markers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 207). Supporting the research questions, these potential matrix components were identified through background research literature and researcher notes and memos and remained emergent as data analysis progressed.

Unitized the data. Erlandson et al. (1993) have said that unitizing the data involves breaking the data down into the smallest units which can stand alone, their codes. Working with the list of start codes, I systematically read through each data source and applied appropriate codes. To assist with coding organization, I used the qualitative software coding program Weft QDA (http://www.pressure.to/qda), which enabled me to input the emergent coding categories and flag the data that fit into each coding category, adjusting the codes and recoding the data as the study progressed.

Interviews were transcribed, member-checked, and coded immediately following the interviews, as were the interview notes and memos. The remaining data sources were coded following the study's completion. In the coding process, after coding all of

the data sources once, I read through them again, consolidating, recoding, and readjusting the codes in the coding matrix as necessary. If the situation required it, I coded and refined the data a third time.

Although qualitative data coding can continue almost indefinitely, Miles and Huberman (1994) have suggested that coding may be adequate "when all of the incidents can be readily classified, categories are 'saturated,' and sufficient numbers of 'regularities' emerge" (p. 62). I used these general guidelines in order to gauge when this inquiry's data coding was complete and ready to be consolidated.

Consolidated the data. Once the data had been coded, the sections with the same codes were consolidated. Again working with the modified start list of codes and coding categories, I sorted each coded unit into appropriate categories and developed specific descriptive category labels (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 118) within the coding matrix. Rubin and Rubin (2005) call this "sorting the data" and suggest consolidating all data units with the same code into a single computer file (p. 208); I stored the coded data within categories organized within Weft QDA.

Looked for emergent patterns. Once the data were sorted and segregated, I identified any themes or patterns suggested by the data. Rubin and Rubin (2005) have said that this "*final synthesis* involves combining the concepts to suggest how the overall culture operates" (p. 208, emphasis in original). In this phase, I triangulated among the various data sources within the coded materials, thereby limiting the biases of a particular data source (Maxwell, 2005; Erlandson et al., 1993). I examined how these emergent patterns addressed the inquiry's original research questions, as well as formulated potential answers, or hypotheses and propositions, for these questions,

thereby grounding my tentative conclusions within the data results themselves (Maxwell, 2005).

This inquiry's emergent findings involving motivation and value attached to writing necessitated a coding reorganization, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Identified Negative- or Special-case Analyses

In looking at the data's emergent patterns, I was also able to identity a negative or special case. Such a case encompasses, "pieces of data that would tend to refute the researcher's reconstruction of reality" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 121). Negative or special cases can be used to illustrate an important minority opinion (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 121), as well as further illustrate the majority opinion. Considering negative or special cases can "stretch the hypotheses that are being formed" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 121), as well as to add richness and a greater transferability to the study. In this case of this study, one participant's personal experiences intensified her personal motivation for healing, influencing her to engage in unexpected avenues of writing for healing outside the parameters of the study.

Bridged, Extended, and Surfaced the Data

Also when examining the data's emergent patterns and formulating hypotheses and propositions addressing the research questions, I engaged in appropriate bridging, extending, and surfacing of the data, as described by Erlandson et.al. (1993):

- Bridging: Noticing not-previously-seen links between two or more data pieces or categories, suggesting a previously unidentified link. A "'missing link' hypothesis"

can provide "direction for the researcher when interviews, observations, and other data collection procedures are resumed."

- Extending: Further data collection ensued when an emergent category seems viable but incomplete.

- Surfacing: Data analysis shows that "unexplored, potentially rich sources of data exist" within the context boundaries already defined by the data. (p. 122)

Bridging, extending, or surfacing the data required additional data collection. In this inquiry, I added a fourth, unanticipated personal interview during the process of data analyses to ask more in-depth questions about participants' personal literacy background, as well as to drill down on specific questions raised by an individual's previously submitted data. This additional data was analyzed following the same steps outlined above and appropriately integrated into the original data and used in the final analyses and conclusions.

Trustworthiness

Validity implies an attainable truth, but in a post-positivist sense, an objective reality or truth can never be completely apprehended and therefore validated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Rather, this inquiry provided an experience-based, individual understanding of a reality, which can include descriptive, interpretive, theoretical, and evaluative judgments based on researcher and participant feedback within the inquiry context (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). In this sense, the study's trustworthiness reflected these four basic components, as described by Erlandson et al. (1993):

- Credibility: Is there truth in the inquiry's findings regarding both the subjects and the contexts?

- Transferability: Can the findings be applied to other subjects and contexts?

- Dependability: Will the findings be repeated if the inquiry were to be repeated with similar subjects within a similar context?

- Confirmability: Are the inquiry's findings a result of the data and not of the researcher's biases?

In addition to leading to rich data collection, the qualitative research techniques that I have incorporated into this inquiry contributed to the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the inquiry results and conclusions, as discussed in further detail below.

Credibility: Supporting research techniques and data sources. The research techniques described below all contributed to this inquiry's credibility and were supported by the inquiry's data sources as described. These research techniques included prolonged engagement, persistent observation, thick descriptions, referential adequacy, member checks, researcher's reflexive journal, and triangulation. Each of these techniques is discussed in more detail below as each pertained to this inquiry.

Prolonged engagement. Being that researcher and participants collaboratively influence each other within a qualitative research context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), prolonged engagement "serves to temper disorientation caused by the researcher's presence (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 136), as well as allow for enough researcher-participant together time so as to build trust and rapport between the researcher and participants (p. 133). In this inquiry, prolonged engagement was built through the four interviews and related follow-up communication with each of the 15 participants.

Persistent observation and thick descriptions. An active form of researcher attention, persistent observation involves the researcher noting items of interest and purpose within the research setting, as well as irrelevancies (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 137).

Persistent observation also involved thick descriptions on the part of the researcher, which entailed using all of one's senses to accurately record the ambiance of a context (p. 146), not unlike using elements of Perl's (1980/1994, 2001, 2004) felt sense in recording observations. Persistent observations including thick descriptions were recorded in this inquiry's memos, as well as in the researcher's reflexive journal, especially involving detailed documentation of the researcher's psychological and emotional responses to the data collected and the research process.

Referential adequacy. Erlandson et al. (1993) have described referential adequacy materials as being "context-rich, holistic materials" that can support data analysis and enrich inquiry conclusions (pp. 139-140). Referential adequacy materials also serve to provide a detailed enough description of the participants that they can be accurately compared with other participant samples (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279). The autobiographical pieces written by the participants prior to the study, as well as the detailed inquiry memos, served as referential adequacy materials in this inquiry.

Member checking. Member checking enables "members of stakeholding groups to test categories, interpretations, and conclusions" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 142). Within this inquiry, member checks were initiated following each interview, where the participant had the opportunity to review the interview transcript and make any comments or changes, which were then incorporated into the transcript and become

part of the ongoing narrative record. For email interviews, responses were unaltered and stored in their original submitted form, maintaining the member-checked integrity of the provided participant data.

Researcher's reflexive journal. The reflexive journal is a self-study in which the researcher can record thought, memories, and perceptions (Pickle, 2007) on a regular basis throughout the inquiry. The researcher's reflexive journal, researcher's reflexive memos, interview notes, and interview memos have brought the elements of reflexivity to this inquiry.

Triangulation. Triangulation was used in this study to contribute to credibility because it involves using different sources or multiple sources of data and different collection methods (such as observations, interviews, and documents) and then comparing these data (Erlandson et al., 1993, pp. 137-138). Triangulation was reflected in this inquiry through the variety of data sources and data collection methods that were used.

Furthermore, Erlandson et al. (1993) have recommended that triangulation involve expanding each piece of information with another source (p. 138). In this inquiry, for example, the multiple interviews served as triangulation data for each other, and the related researcher memos and reflexive researcher's journal served as triangulation data for the interviews. In this vein, triangulation among data sources was able to yield a richer and more accurate account than either could have alone (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94).

Transferability: Purposive Sampling

In addition to thick descriptions and a reflexive journal, an inquiry's applicability can be enhanced by purposive sampling. Purposive sampling enables participants to be

chosen purposively so as to reflect both typical and divergent data (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 148). Purposive sampling allows for a representative pool of participants, as well as allowing for the emergence of negative or special cases within data analysis. Purposive sampling can lead to Lincoln and Guba's (2003) conception of fairness, where all stakeholder voices are reflected and biases avoided (p. 278).

The participants within this inquiry were purposively selected as each potential participant was initially chosen because she 1) fell within the age guidelines of participants; 2) was a working mother with at least one child age 14 or younger; 3) acknowledged at least potential problems with balance issues; and 4) was interested in engaging in personal writing and participating in an inquiry pertaining to personal writing.

Dependability and Confirmability: Audit Trail

In addition to the reflexive journal, both an inquiry's dependability and confirmability can be established through the inquiry's audit trail. Providing organized and tangible evidence of a study's trustworthiness, the audit trail can include the information below, according to Erlandson et al. (1993, pp. 148-149), referring to Lincoln and Guba. Data collection sources from this inquiry are listed after each audit trail category listed below:

- *Raw data:* Semi-structured interview responses; interview recordings and member-checked transcripts; member-provided email interview responses; interview notes; interview reflexive memos; participants' journals; participant's autobiographical writing.

- *Data reduction and analysis products:* Coding matrix; list of codes; files consolidating same-code data.

- *Data reconstruction and synthesis products:* Data analysis sheets; reports; conclusions.

- *Process notes:* Researcher's reflexive journal; researcher's reflexive memos.

- *Materials related to intentions and dispositions:* Inquiry proposal; Research Topic Approval Form; IRB approval; methodology; participant-signed approval forms; pre-study information (instructions, web address for online format, writing prompts, writing techniques) provided to participants.

- *Information relative to any instrument development:* List of sources used for data analysis and synthesis.

Chapter Summary and Subsequent Inquiry Overview

This chapter has presented the methodology that was used in developing and implementing this inquiry. As illustrated in Figure 3, this inquiry's methodology consisted of flexible components that supported the inquiry's overarching problem, as well as the data that were collected in order to address the problem. This inquiry's flexible components were the inquiry's research questions, methods, participants, procedures, data collection and data analyses procedures, and steps to ensure trustworthiness.

The following chapter, Chapter 4, provides an introduction to the participants, including information on their backgrounds and the experiences that they brought to the study that helped to shape their participation. Because this inquiry revealed the integral roles that motivation and value held in determining the effectiveness of a participant's personal writing, Chapter 5 discusses the motivation with which each participant

entered the study and how that may have impacted the inquiry data. The five chapters after that present inquiry data as they address the five secondary research questions:

- Chapter 6 addresses the impacts of writing on psychological and physical stress.

- Chapter 7 addresses the impacts of writing on problem-solving issues, including memory.

- Chapter 8 addresses other effects of personal writing, including impacts on social relationships, identity and voice, and exercise.

- Chapter 9 discusses effective and non-effective writing practices as defined by participants.

- Chapter 10 expands the potential applications of the inquiry's data, presenting potential effects of writing for other working mothers.

The final two chapters merge data findings, integrating the findings with each other, as well as with the inquiry problem and related literature that were discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 11 presents the inquiry's finding and interpretations in terms of five inquiry themes that emerged through the data. Chapter 12 provides the researcher's recommendations, research suggestions, and final perspectives, including a proposed Linked Value Balance Model that can be useful for effective writing use within the working-mother demographic, as well as within the composition classroom in terms of both traditional and nontraditional students, many of whom are working mothers.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

Being a working mother is tough, with no black and white solution to balancing the varied roles, responsibilities, and identities that come with balancing the multiple roles involved. As reviewed in Chapter 2, juggling work and family responsibilities can raise balance issues related to stress management and problem-solving, as well as posing challenges related to identity and social relationships. This qualitative study, focused on the role of writing in helping working mothers, confirms some of these claims, as well as raises other issues of importance for working mothers.

Grounded in the inquiry's data (Maxwell, 2005), the study results revealed interesting perspectives on the potential role of personal writing in helping working mothers to manage their various balance issues. Some of these results were expected; others were surprising.

Study Synopsis

Over the course of seven months (September 2009 through March 2010), including pre-study and post-study periods, I conducted a qualitative study intended to identify the personal effects that personal writing can have for working mothers. I collected data from 15 women between the ages of 27 and 40 who were working mothers in a variety of occupations, each of whom has at least one child 14 years old or younger.

Each participant was first asked to submit an initial autobiographical statement that described her work life and home life and how she balances them. Each participant who chose to continue with the study was then asked to write privately at least two times per week, targeting 20-30 minutes per session, in any venue of her choosing over

a period of five months. All writing topics were self-generated, although writing prompts were provided for use at the participant's discretion.

Each participant was also interviewed four times: pre-study, mid-study, immediately post-study, plus one later time after the study was completed. Appendices D, E, and F provide the main three sets of interview questions; the questions for the fourth interview, based upon the responses to the earlier three interviews, consisted of probes, and follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 13).

Because of the geographical spread of the participants, most of the interviews were conducted via email, although face-to-face interviews and telephone and email follow-ups were used in some of the cases. In the course of these interviews, participants were asked to share samples of their writing at their discretion. Nine of the original fifteen participants (and of the ten who continued as the core subgroup, as explained below) provided writing samples.

Introduction to Study Participants

All of the study participants were Americans, and most are at least partially of European ancestry, although one (Julie) also has some Native American ancestry. In addition, another (Renee) is wholly of Indian heritage, while yet another (Liz) is half Trinidadian. Participants grew up primarily in middle-class, intellectually focused households.

Additionally, most of the participants' children are their natural children, although one participant has a stepdaughter, while another has an adopted son. Two of the participants have twins. A few participants have lost unborn children due to miscarriage, stillbirth, and elective termination. Two of the participants are single, divorced mothers,

while the remaining participants are married. Participants are from central and eastern portions of the United States, specifically from Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Tennessee, New Jersey, and Florida. Information on the specific social and cultural background of the participants is provided in the individual description for each participant in the next section.

This study included 15 women who submitted autobiographical statements; of these, only 12 women chose to continue with the study for differing durations, which is perhaps a reflection of the very phenomena that were of interest, that is, the competing stresses in these women's lives. In fact, even of these 12, two do not feature in the 10-member core subgroup that I identified as discussed below. In cases where participants chose not to continue with the study, I secured final interviews to gather data as to why they were unable to complete the study.

Core Subgroup

Data from all 15 original participants were used to present the inquiry's general results as with a wide-view camera lens. However, to most effectively address the inquiry's primary and secondary research questions, I have identified a group of the ten most active participants, those whose data are most complete.

This core subgroup included those who participated in the study from start to finish, as well as three additional partial participants (Amy, Renee, and Ellen), who, although they did not participate in all the study's activities, were included because they provided multiple data sources which added rich data to the study. I present brief pictures of these three participants here, by way of justifying my decision to include them in the core subgroup:

Amy: Although Amy did not complete all of the study writing, she did provide both an autobiography and a final writing sample for analysis, as well as participated in both the first and the third interviews.

Renee: I met Renee after the study had begun, so she was only able to partially participate. I have included her data because she offers the unique perspective of a single mother who works as a professional marketing writer. Of particular interest was the fact that Renee had experience prior to the study in using writing as a tool for healing and identity formulation: She had used writing in her personal struggle to emerge from an abusive marriage and to reclaim her voice and identity.

Ellen: Ellen is included in the core subgroup because she was able to provide an autobiography and two other writing samples for data analysis, as well as informal interviews throughout the process that provided information related to her tragic and unique positioning. Ellen is a working mother who lost two unborn daughters during the study duration (in November and March) and who used writing as a tool outside of the parameters of this inquiry to help to cope with these losses.

This core subgroup allowed for in-depth data analyses and provided a basis for the emerging generalizations presented in a subsequent chapter.

Table 1 summarizes the study participants, their occupations, and the number and ages of their children, as well as identifies the core subgroup. Pseudonyms are used to identify participants, except for "Sandy," identifying me as the participant-researcher and providing transparency between my participant data and my researcher evaluations.

Table 1

Individual Participant Descriptions

Name[a]	Age	Occupation	Children[b]	Sex and age[c]
Lynn	38	School bus driver	2	Boy, age 10; girl, age 7
Mary	39	Accountant	2	Boy, age 11; girl, age 9
Ann	28	Insurance executive	1	Boy, age 7 months
Amy*	40	College fundraiser	2	Boy (adopted), age 10; girl, age 7
Brooke	37	Guidance counselor	2	Boys, ages 2 & 4
Nancy	39	Marketing specialist	2	Twin girls, ages 11
Ellen*	30	Government analyst	1	Boy, age 2
Renee*	35	Marketing writer	1	Boy, age 14
Molly*	27	Pediatric nurse practitioner	1	Girl, age 7 months
Pam*	31	Insurance broker	1	Boy, age 8 months
Jane*	39	Accountant	1	Girl, age 8
Sandy*	39	Teacher/ professional writer	2	Boys, ages 2 & 10
Julie*	33	Editor	3	Twin boys, ages 1; stepdaughter, age 9
Grace*	36	Insurance adjustor	1	Boy, age 6
Liz*	34	Math teacher	2	Boy, age 3; girl, age 2

[a]A name followed by an asterisk (*) indicates a member of the 10-member core subgroup. [b]Number of children at study onset. [c]Sex and ages of children at study onset.

Table 2 shows in gray shading the duration for which each person participated, as well as provides the participant-provided reasoning for truncated participation where relevant. As noted earlier, participants differed in the degree of their involvement in the study. Some chose to submit only autobiographies. Others chose to participate in a portion of the study; in these cases, the participant-provided reason for partial participation is given.

Table 2

Individual Participation Durations

Name	Autobio.	Participation duration (months)[a]							Completed[b]	Reasons[c]	Interviews[d]
		Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar			
Lynn	★	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	no	Non-professional job	1
Mary	★	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	no	Dislikes writing	1
Ann	★	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	no	Lack of time	1
Amy*	★				--	--	--		no		1, 3
Brooke	★					--	--	--	no	Lost interest	1, 2
Nancy	★				--			--	no	Competing demands	1, 2
Ellen*	★				--	--	--	--	no	Pregnancy losses	1, 2
Renee*	★	--	--	--					yes	Joined study late	1 (late), 3, 4
Molly*	★								yes		1, 2, 3, 4
Pam*	★								yes		1, 2, 3, 4
Jane*	★								yes		1, 2, 3, 4
Sandy*	★								yes		1, 2, 3, 4
Julie*	★								yes		1, 2, 3, 4
Grace*	★								yes		1, 2, 3, 4
Liz*	★								yes		1, 2, 3, 4

[a]Includes both pre-study and post-study periods. Gray shading indicates the months in which each person participated, while dashes indicate months of nonparticipation. [b]Indicates whether a participant completed the study. [c]Participant-provided reasons for partial study completion. [d]Indicates the number of the four total interviews completed.

Individual Participant Descriptions

Information for the individual participant descriptions that follow has been drawn from the autobiographies and the four interviews in order to provide a broad perspective on the background and individual motivations with which each participant entered and progressed through the study. I have included background information about participants' early family experiences here, because these may have exerted formative effects on the way they now view their relationship to family (and sometimes professional) issues.

Lynn, Mary, and Ann. Of the 15 women who participated in the study, three chose only to submit autobiographical pieces. Lynn, 39, mother of a boy (age 10) and a girl (age 7), was raised in a small, rural, blue-collar farming community and currently lives near the neighborhood where she grew up. She did not attend college. Lynn drives a school bus only three hours per day and did not see her job as significantly impacting her home life. "I'm only gone from home about three hours a day, so working really doesn't affect my day as much as most," she said in her autobiography. She also did not feel that her job was professional enough to warrant her full participation in the study.

Mary, 39, is an accountant and the divorced mother of a boy (age 11) and a girl (age 9). While intellectual activities were not emphasized in her home environment, Mary is college-educated, having received a bachelor's degree in accounting. She declined to participate in the entire study because she dislikes writing. "I hate to write," she said in her autobiography. "I am totally a numbers person. I can't even get reading in."

Like Lynn, Mary does not report major balancing issues, saying that being divorced makes it easier to balance work and family because she has made arrangements with her ex-husband that allow her to have time away from parenting duties. In spite of their marital problems, her ex-husband still desires to maintain close relationships with his children and so sees them regularly. "It is nice that every other weekend, I am alone to get cleaning, laundry, and running around done," she said in her autobiography. "If I were still married, I would still have the kids and the husband to deal with when I am trying to get stuff done."

Ann, 28, is an insurance executive and a new mother to an infant boy (age 7 months). Ann said that her home environment was not overly intellectual; she, as well as her brother and sister, attended a private Lutheran school because her parents placed as much importance on religion as on quality of education. She has a bachelor's degree in business.

New to the balancing act, Ann finds the transition to balancing both roles to be quite difficult. Referring to her behavior prior to having a child, Ann wrote in her autobiography, "Today, I still feel that I need to function in the same manner at work (as I don't seem to know any other way). But now being a mother, I want to rush home at 5:00 pm to spend time with my son before he goes to bed for the night." Ann also acknowledged a dramatic shift in her priorities and offered a related prediction in her autobiography: "The struggle between work and home life, though still relatively new to me, will be one that I will undoubtedly face throughout my son's childhood." She declined to participate further in the study because of time constraints.

Because Lynn, Mary, and Ann did not participate beyond submitting their autobiographies, they have not been included in the core subgroup. They do, however, seem to represent two ends of the participation spectrum: Working mothers who feel that their working situation is so overwhelming that they say that they do not have time to participate (Ann), and those who believe that being a working mother is not an issue for them and so do not feel the need to participate (Lynn and Mary). The remaining participants fall between these two extremes.

Amy. Amy, 40, is the mother of an adopted boy (age 10) and a girl (age 7), as well as being a college fundraiser who works primarily out of her home. As a young girl, she first lived on a family farm, but when Amy was about 10 years old, she and her family moved to a smaller, rural community so that her father could enter full-time ministry as a church pastor.

Growing up in this community, Amy routinely felt left out of activities such as school dances or parties, neither of which her parents allowed her to attend. She found more friends with like interests when she attended an out-of-state Christian college, receiving a bachelor's degree in marketing. Her faith remains an important element in her life, as does her active missionary work. "I will return to Honduras for the fifth year in a row on mission work, and I hope to someday live there fulltime after our children are out on their own," Amy wrote in her autobiography. Today, she is employed by her alma mater and lives in a moderately sized, rural town close to the college.

Amy reported in her first interview that her motivation for participating in the study was primarily to help out with the research. Although she said that when she was younger, she wanted to be a writer, she had no concrete experience in personal writing prior to this study. Because of time constraints, Amy only completed half of the study writing. Although she did not complete all of the study writing, Amy did submit three writing samples and participated in both the first and the third interviews. Since she contributed rich data to the study, she has been included in the core subgroup.

Brooke. Brooke, 37, is a high school guidance counselor and a mother of two boys (ages 2 and 4); Brooke had no experience with personal writing prior to the study. She grew up in an upper-middle-class intellectual household and attended college near her hometown, receiving a bachelor's degree in psychology. She currently lives in a different state and attended a school near her current home to earn a master's degree in counselor education.

Brooke said that her balance issues involve not having enough time. "There are not enough hours in the day!" she emphasized in her first interview. "My kids and my job come first, and the other stuff gets put on the back burner. My house is dirty, and I have no social life. Even my husband and I don't get much alone time."

In spite of minor difficulties, however, Brooke viewed her current situation as being relatively balanced, especially since leaving her previous job in sales, which was not as family-friendly as her current position. "I enjoy my job and the flexibility it gives me to be there every day, consistently, with my children," she said in her autobiography. Because she only completed the first portion of the study and provided no data in the second portion, Brooke was not included in the core subgroup.

Nancy. Nancy, 39, a marketing specialist and mother of twin girls (ages 11), was born and raised in a middle-class suburb of a moderately sized manufacturing town with her extended family living nearby. She attended college in the same region where she was raised, earning a bachelor's degree in journalism. Nancy currently lives near the area in which she grew up. She also works for a Fortune 500 company in the same region and is working toward her master's degree in professional writing. Her family remains close, both in physical proximity and in their relationships. "I have been blessed

with strong family values of love, honor, respect and strength," she said in her autobiography. She added that she, in turn, wants to be a positive influence for others: "I hope that I have made a difference in a few people's lives, and I think that I have."

"My personal writing was and always has been a HUGE part of my life because it was the one way I could express myself no matter what I was feeling," Nancy continued in her autobiography. Nancy has kept a journal since the eighth grade. Although she began the study enthusiastically, she became absorbed with other obligations throughout the course of the study, including dealing with the milestone of turning 40, and she knowingly neglected herself, as well as the study writing. "I just think I have become so busy that I just haven't made time for myself, and I know I need to do that," said Nancy in her second interview. "I am kind of disoriented and I don't like it. I think I have lost a little of myself this year and that scares me."

Although Nancy stopped writing for a period of time during the study, she expressed regret for that and an intention to start participating again. "I hope to finish off strong with my writing to at least be able to submit some samples," she said during her second interview. However, despite her intentions, she did not complete the study, and I did not feel that she had provided enough material to be included in the core subgroup.

Ellen. Ellen, 30, a government employee with a son (age 2), was raised in a rural environment with two working parents and a strong work ethic. "I vividly remember my parents discussing their days at work at the dinner table," she said in her autobiography. "Listening to them discuss their day at work is how I learned what was expected of me as a responsible employee." As her parents were models for her, Ellen desires to be a positive role model for her son and future children. "I feel one of my biggest

responsibilities as a parent is to raise a child who can be a successful member of society, and a huge part of this is the ability to support him- or herself," Ellen said in her autobiography. "I will teach this to my children by leading by example."

Ellen's parents divorced when she was in high school, and she moved with her mother and siblings to a different state, where she attended college and earned a bachelor's degree in international politics. She moved again to a different state after college for her present job and currently lives there in a large, corporate suburb.

Ellen began the study intending to participate beyond writing the autobiography. Although she wrote poetry when she was a teenager, she had not engaged in personal writing for more than 10 years. She was participating in the study more out of obligation rather than personal drive, as she takes her role as a working mother in stride. "Being an employee as well as a mother is just what I do," Ellen said in her first interview. "I recognize that I am extremely fortunate in the fact that I enjoy my career and my employer is very family friendly," she added.

In spite of her lukewarm response to the purpose of the study, Ellen was included as a participant in the core subgroup because her personal life took two unexpected turns during the course of the study. While the study was being conducted, Ellen lost two unborn daughters; interestingly, in a move that was independent of the study, Ellen used writing as a method of responding to the emotional turmoil that ensued. Her writing samples and interviews have provided rich, unanticipated data that have been used as interesting points of comparison and contrast with the other participant data.

Renee. Renee, 35, is a marketing writer and the single mother of a school-age boy (age 14). Both of Renee's parents are from India, where her mother received her

medical degree. Her father holds a doctoral degree in management and economics from an American university, so Renee says that the home environment in which she and her older brother were raised was very intellectual. Because her father worked as a university professor, Renee and her family moved around a lot as she was growing up, including spending several years living in India, before they settled into a smaller farming community in the United States close to several larger metropolitan areas when she was about 10 years old. Even when her family lived in the United States, they incorporated Indian culture into their daily lives. "I often watched Indian movies with my parents, listened to Indian music, wore the Indian garb, and ate the Indian food my mom made," Renee said in her fourth interview.

Following her high school graduation, Renee was accepted into the English education program in a college near her home, but the summer before she was to begin classes, she went to India with her mother to visit relatives. Unbeknownst to her, while in India, her mother helped to arrange Renee's marriage to a family friend. While Renee's mother returned to the United States, Renee remained in India with her new husband, where she still wanted to pursue her higher education.

This situation caused problems for Renee. "I soon learned that subservience was typical among Indian women," she wrote in her autobiography. "But I wanted something more. I wanted to go to college, just like I was planning to do before. I approached my husband about my desire to get an education. 'You don't need college!' he stormed. 'You have everything you need right here.'"

"Over the next few weeks, I tried to forget about my dreams of going to school – but I couldn't," she continued. "Once again, I approached my husband. Before I could

finish my sentence, I felt a sharp slap across my face. 'I told you before, you don't need an education! Am I not good enough for you?' he shouted."

Shortly thereafter, Renee discovered that she was pregnant, and her husband's family felt that it would be best for her to return to the United States and live with her parents so that her son could be born in the United States. After her son was born, Renee attended a technical school and received a diploma in medical assisting. When her son was one year old, her parents encouraged her to return to India so that Renee's husband could meet their son; again, unbeknownst to Renee, her parents intended for her to remain in India with her husband, which she did for two years, enduring additional abuses, until her mother visited.

"That night, I wrote a long note to my mother," Renee said in her autobiography. "In my note, I described my husband's abuse in detail. Like how he punched me in the stomach when I was five months pregnant, and didn't allow me to go in the drawing room when his friends were visiting. I tucked the note under her pillow."

Renee's note moved her mother to allow Renee to move back to the United States, although for financial reasons, her son had to remain in India with her husband. At home, Renee enrolled in a community college and eventually returned to India to retrieve her son, whom her husband released to her under the condition that Renee would sponsor her husband for permanent United States citizenship.

Back at home and in school, Renee had second thoughts about bringing her husband to the United States. "The fact was, I didn't have to give my husband another chance," she said in her autobiography. "I was my own person, and I deserved the

respect and recognition I had been missing all my life. I decided to cancel his sponsorship and file for divorce."

Renee went on to earn an associate's degree in computers from the community college and eventually a bachelor's degree in business administration from a larger, local university. Most recently, she had earned a master's degree in professional writing. She currently lives with her son near her parents in the same general area where she was raised.

Renee was in her arranged and abusive marriage for seven years, divorcing about nine years ago; on her own initiative, she had used writing as a way both to gain strength to walk away from the marriage and to heal afterwards.

I met Renee after the study began and invited her to participate, realizing the unique perspectives that she could bring to the data. Because of her familiarity with using writing for personal growth through abuse, divorce, and single motherhood, as well as her experience as a professional marketing writer, I felt that Renee could contribute rich data to the study and, so I invited her to participate and included her in the core subgroup.

The remaining seven participants have completed the study in its entirety. Because of their consistent participation, all of these participants have been included in the core subgroup.

Molly. Molly, 27, is a pediatric nurse practitioner and mother of an infant girl (age 7 months). She grew up in the suburbs of a moderately sized industrial and manufacturing town and currently lives close to the suburban area in which she was raised. Her parents are both college-educated and strived to create an intellectual

environment for Molly and her younger twin brothers. "We did tons of trips to museums and libraries and such, and my parents took pride in exposing us to as much as possible," Molly said in her fourth interview. "Reading was always a big part of my life growing up and was demonstrated by my parents," she said, indicating that both of her parents were voracious readers.

As a child, Molly drew a picture of her future dream: to be a nurse, wife, and mother. "I have lived out my childhood dream, and truth is, I am very happy with my life," Molly acknowledged in her autobiography. Molly holds both a bachelor's and a master's degree in nursing from colleges near the area where she was raised and currently lives.

Molly began the study participation with a strong appreciation for writing. "I have always loved writing and kept a journal up until about five years ago," she said in her first interview. In addition, personal writing gave her the opportunity to provide a good model for her daughter. "I also think it is important for my daughter to see me spending time doing things for myself, not just work, but also hobbies," she said in her autobiography.

Pam. "Balancing family, work, and household chores is a struggle, and it overwhelms me," said Pam, 31, in her autobiography. Pam is an insurance broker with an infant son (age 8 months). She grew up in a small town about 40 miles outside of a major metropolitan area and received a bachelor's degree in mathematics from a college in the area. She currently lives in the same general region.

Pam says that her family was intellectually oriented and that her mother, who was a teacher, was actively involved in the school projects of Pam and her two younger

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brothers. Her family, including her salesman father, had breakfast and dinner together each day. "I value the closeness and support that I had growing up, and am trying to create the same environment with my family now," she said in her fourth interview.

Pam began the study aware of her balancing issues; but her participation seemed to be more motivated by obligation. As she said in her first interview, "I agreed to participate because it's an opportunity to help out. I'm guessing that it is tough to find working moms with the time to participate." Prior to this study, Pam did not engage in personal writing.

Jane. Jane, 39, is an accountant with one daughter (age 8). She grew up in a small, middle-class, factory town. Because her mother was a teacher, Jane's home environment was focused on learning. "My mom was a school teacher, so any games and such in my home were geared toward learning something," Jane said in her fourth interview. Jane attended college near the region in which she was raised and graduated with a bachelor's degree in accounting.

Jane framed her autobiography in terms of her partnership with her husband. She values him very highly, which is evident explicitly in her accolades of him and descriptions of their partnership and implicitly through phrases like "our daughter." "With the wonderful husband I have, balancing the two lives isn't as difficult as I had anticipated," Jane said in her autobiography. "We split chores up, we work together, spend time together and get our alone time too."

Like Pam, Jane initially joined the study because of obligation, but soon came to value the writing. "I should have been doing this much sooner than this study," said Jane in her second interview. "I used to keep a diary but life was too busy to get back to

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it regularly."

Sandy. Sandy, 39, the participant-researcher, is a teacher and a mother of two boys (ages 11 and 2). Like Jane, Sandy was raised in a small, middle-class factory town. Sandy's parents strived to expose her and her two brothers to travel opportunities and cultural experiences. Reading was also strongly encouraged, for instance, through frequent visits to the local library. One of Sandy's earliest memories is of her mother taking her to the traveling bookmobile.

Sandy attended college in a large manufacturing city, receiving a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in professional writing. Twelve years after earning her master's degree, Sandy returned to school for doctoral studies in the field of composition studies. She currently works as an online graduate writing instructor in addition to her graduate work.

Like Renee and Nancy, Sandy has worked as a professional marketing writer, and so she began the study believing that writing has value and purpose. Prior to the study, she engaged in personal writing sporadically.

Julie. Julie, 33, has a stepdaughter (age 9) and twin boys (ages 1), and works as an editor and at two other jobs in order to make ends meet. Her mother is a teacher, while her father's degree is in mathematics. Her parents raised her and her brother in an intellectual environment. "Because my dad's degree is in math," Julie said in her fourth interview, "he expected my brother and me to work things out on our own using analytical skills."

Julie holds a bachelor's degree in English and technical writing, as well as a master's degree in professional writing. She currently lives near her childhood home in

a large manufacturing town. She and her husband had their twins before they were married, and Julie says that, even with her three jobs, money has become tighter since her marriage. "I struggle every day with the question of whether or not I should work at all," Julie said in her autobiography. "Overall, life as a working mother for me is stressful, lonely, and exhausting."

Part of Julie's personal stress comes from the conflict between not wanting to work and wanting to be a good example for her children. "I do not want my boys to grow up in an environment where the mom stays at home, cooking and cleaning," she said in her autobiography. "I want them to know that women are independent and capable of working and being moms and wives."

Working with words, Julie valued writing and was glad that the study participation gave her an opportunity to engage in an activity that she enjoys. "I was excited at the beginning of the study because participating gave me a reason to write," said Julie in her second interview.

Grace. Grace, 36, is an insurance adjustor with one son (age 6). She was raised as an only child in the suburb of a large historical city. In her fourth interview, she described her childhood neighborhood as being "the sort of neighborhood where kids could leave the house in the morning on their bikes and stay gone all day and parents didn't worry." Her parents are not college-educated, and although she does not describe her home as being overly intellectual, reading was strongly encouraged, as was independent thinking. "My parents encouraged me to think for myself and not to be afraid to question things I didn't understand or didn't agree with," said Grace in her fourth interview.

Grace attended college near to the area in which she was raised, earning a bachelor's degree. She currently lives in the same general area.

Like Ellen, Grace used writing to help cope with her teenage years. "I would say I used writing as a way to relieve stress during that time," Grace said in her first interview. "Being a teenager is tough sometimes!" Grace lost her first child through miscarriage but conceived her son shortly after. Her experiences have only strengthened her Christian faith. "My faith in God allows me to have peace that my family will be taken care of no matter the circumstances," Grace said in her autobiography. She reaffirmed her faith in her first interview: "My faith is so important to me, and I absolutely feel that we are all called to serve others as Christ did while he was on earth. I firmly believe that by putting Christ first in my life, everything else will fall into place."

In addition, Grace embraces her life as a working mother. "I always knew I would return to work after starting a family, mostly because it would have been very difficult to live on one income, but also because I always believed I was meant to be a 'working mom.'" Grace wrote in her autobiography. And her life has reaffirmed her choices. "Life is so good right now and I really can't say I'm having any problems," Grace said in her first interview.

Grace was motivated to learn more about herself through the study of writing. "I am looking forward to making my thoughts more tangible as they are put into writing," she said in her first interview. "Maybe I will get to know myself a little better. I hope participating in personal writing will help me be more focused and organized."

Liz. Liz, 34, a teacher and mother of a boy (age 3) and a girl (age 2), grew up in an affluent suburb of large manufacturing city. Liz currently lives in the same general

area. Attending local colleges and universities, Liz earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry education and master's degrees in chemistry and educational leadership.

Although her parents were not college-educated (her dad was a mechanic while her mother later received an associate's degree in graphic arts), her parents still valued education and so deliberately moved into this affluent suburb so that Liz and her siblings could receive their education within this affluent school district. "Although it is a wealthier community, we lived literally on the other side of the tracks but still within the district lines," said Liz in her fourth interview. "Money was often a part of my parent's discussions, but we never really [experienced] any hard times as a family," she added.

Although Liz genuinely enjoys her job, she said in her first interview that her biggest challenge as a teacher is feeling that she places other children's needs ahead of the needs of her own children. Like with Ellen and Julie, working gives Liz the opportunity to be a positive model for both her son and her daughter. "I also want my son to recognize that his future wife may want to work and that he turned out okay," said Liz in her first interview, referring to her son's being effectively raised by a working mother. She added a further note on her daughter's experience, noting that she wanted to have a successful career "so that my daughter sees she can have a career and still have a happy, stable home life with her husband and children."

Liz, whose father is a first-generation immigrant from Trinidad, is a self-proclaimed "research junkie" and admits that her motivation for participating in the study is her personal desire to be part of a research project. "I am writing to make sure that I am actively participating in the study," Liz acknowledged in her second interview. "As a research person I know the value of having honest data and information to analyze in

order to draw the best conclusions." Prior to the study, Liz did not engage in personal writing.

Participant Overview Summary

This chapter has provided an introduction to the participants, including their background and prior experiences with writing. The next chapter looks specifically at the motivation and value for writing with which each person began the study. Emergent findings showed that motivation and value can help to determine the effectiveness of personal writing, so these topics are covered in detail in my discussion of motivation for writing and the value attached to writing.

CHAPTER 5

MOTIVATION AND VALUE

When I began this study, I thought that writing could play a role in helping every working mother. But as some participants dropped out of the study, while others admittedly lagged in their writing, I realized that my original assumption turned out to be too broad. I began to look at what factors were shared by those participants who seemed to be enjoying writing and reporting personal growth benefits, such as stress reduction. I found that writing generally seemed to be most effective, judging from a participant's perspective, when the participant approached the writing activity with a personal recognition that her writing could have positive effects in her life, either based on past experiences or experiences gained within the study itself.

In other words, motivation seemed to cause a participant's experiences with writing to change over the course of this inquiry, rather than remaining stagnant or unchanging. When either motivation or its component of "value" was not present to a critical degree, the participant did not seem to experience positive changes from the writing; in several cases, this led to her dropping out of the study altogether.

For example, although Amy valued writing and realized some of its benefits, these feelings did not motivate her enough to keep up with the study. Even after the study ended, she said that she would ideally like to keep writing—and even that it felt good to take time for herself—but that this self-indulgence also made her feel guilty. "It is a refreshing and almost a guilty pleasure," she said in her third interview. "I did feel guilty [for] taking time on it, some."

In terms of Clandinin and Connolly's (2000) metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, Amy's guilt prevented her experiences from shifting much within

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the narrative space. Recall that this narrative inquiry space reflects the changes through experience that a personal realizes on three dimensions: interaction (personal to social), continuity (time), and situation (place). Amy's lack of movement within this space seems to reflect how her personal growth was somewhat inhibited by her guilt, or perhaps by the underlying factors that contributed to that guilt. The value that Amy attributed to her writing seemed not to have been greater than the value attributed to other activities that demanded her time. "I honestly do not know if I will make time for it at this point in my life, but I do truly enjoy it," Amy said in her third interview.

Brooke, in contrast, had no prior experience with personal writing and thus no prior value attached to that experience and no associated motivation for writing. She also did not keep up with the study writing and so did not develop value or motivation from her current experiences. "I have to be honest, I have had no inclination (or time) to write," said Brooke in her second interview. "So I guess I have nothing in particular to report except to tell you that. I never have been much of a writer." With no value attached to writing or motivation to write, Brooke seemed to have no momentum to move through the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space; as a result, she dropped out of the study.

In contrast, though, because Renee, Julie, and Sandy make their living in writing-related jobs, they seemed to recognize the inherent value of writing. Their professional motivation for writing has also naturally segued into motivation for personal writing, reflected in their consistent study participation and intention to keep writing even after the study has ended. These participants recognized shifts in their personal experiences that can be viewed as movement throughout the metaphorical three-dimensional

narrative inquiry space. Thus, it seems as if assessment of a participant's motivation may be one way to predict whether or not writing is likely to be an effective tool for her personal growth; at the same time, a change in motivation regarding personal writing can indicate personal growth due to the personal writing.

In many cases, this "personal growth" translated into a participant's experiencing a reduction in stress level. This recognition seemed to result from the presence of two primary factors: positive *motivation* to do the personal writing and the *value* attributed to engaging in personal writing.

Initial Participant Motivation in Core Subgroup Participants

Because the 10-member core subgroup data were used to address the research questions for this inquiry, this section looks more carefully at the study-onset status quo for each participant in the core subgroup, all of whom provided consistent data sources throughout the study (Molly, Ellen, Pam, Julie, Liz, Renee, Grace, Jane, Sandy, & Amy).

At the beginning of the study, each participant expressed her motivation for study participation through her description of her recognized balance issues, current coping strategies, prior writing experiences, and, in some cases, explicitly stated reasons for participating. The following section looks more closely at these initial motivations for study participation that each individual brought into the study, which helped to determine her study onset motivation for personal writing. It seemed clear that knowing the point at which participants began their personal writing could be an effective way in which to assess their personal growth through the writing, which could also be viewed as their movement through Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.

Participant Motivational Summary

Each participant entered the study with an individualized form of motivation, which helped to shape her individual participation. As discussed in Chapter 2 in terms of self-determination theory (SDT), motivation can be either intrinsic or extrinsic (Garn et al., 2010; Waterman et al., 2003). I have applied a modified version of SDT to the inquiry by showing how participants' initial motivation falls into one of three motivational categories:

1. Intrinsic: The rooted need, reward, and value of fulfilling the need are all internal to the individual.

2. Extrinsic with internal root: The rooted need and value of fulfilling the need are internal, but the reward is external to the individual.

3. Extrinsic with external root: The rooted need, reward, and value of fulfilling the need are all external to the individual.

Although it could be argued that participants were motivated by a combination of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors, most of the participants seemed to be motivated more strongly by one force than the other, determined in part by her recognized balance issues, current coping strategies, and prior writing experiences.

Based upon the modified version of SDT as described above, Figure 4 positions each participant's motivation at study onset. The types of motivation that have been associated with growth in well-being are intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation with an internal root (Garn et al., 2010); Liz, Grace, Molly, Julie, Renee, and Sandy fall at least partially within the motivational categories that theoretically underpin potential growth. In contrast, motivation that is both rooted externally and associated with

external rewards is considered to be less effective as a basis for personal growth (Garn et al., 2010); Pam, Amy, Jane, and Ellen fall outside of the motivational categories with theoretical potential growth. Note that Molly and Sandy both appear twice on this chart, as their motivations included a complex mix of features.

External

EXTRINSIC

Sandy

Pam
Molly
Amy
Jane
Ellen

Reward

Liz
Grace
Molly
Julie
Renee
Sandy

INTRINSIC

Root

Internal   External
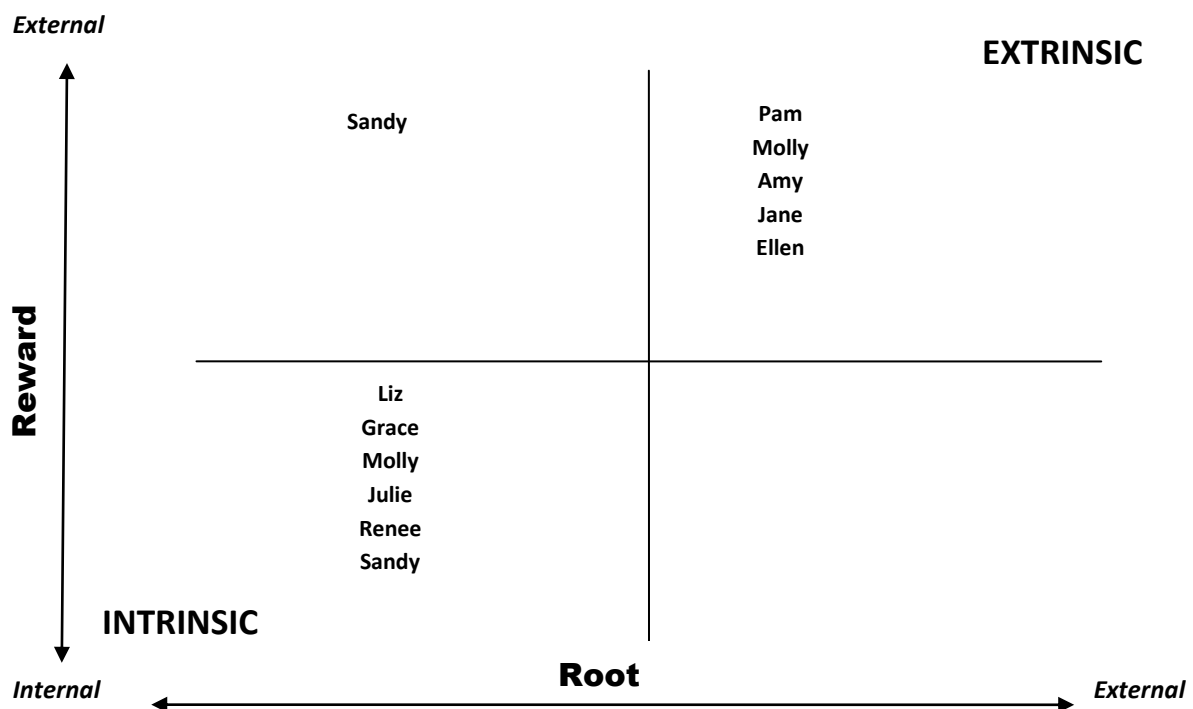
Figure 4. Participant motivation at study onset. Using a modified form of the self-determination theory (SDT) presented in Chapter 2 as a framework, motivation for each participant at the beginning of the study is positioned, based upon participant-provided data.

Each participant's type of motivation at the beginning of the study is described in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

Renee: Past writing experiences for healing and personal voice. Renee entered the study with both a master's degree in professional writing and experience as a professional marketing writer, as well as with experience in personal writing, which

included journaling, song writing, poetry, and prayer writing. As was discussed earlier, she also used writing in order to escape from her abusive marriage. Referring to the letter that she wrote to her mother, she said in her first interview, "I was aware of the power of the pen and felt that my mother might take me more seriously if I shared what he did and how I felt on paper. With that note, I finally felt that I had a voice."

After this experience, Renee continued to write for herself, which helped to build her self-confidence. "I have developed a sense of pride as I started recognizing my talent in writing," said Renee in her first interview. "This came about as I wrote scraps to myself, not in a formal journal, after my broken marriage mostly in the form of letters or poems. As I reread these scraps, I recognized that I have a love and a talent for words."

As a single working mother, though, Renee often placed writing on the back burner, although she has found her journal writing to be helpful in managing one of her primary current sources of stress, which is the emotional detachment she feels from her son as he becomes more independent. "[Writing] has allowed me to put things into perspective and clearly see when I am being selfish to my son's wants and needs," Renee said in her second interview.

Because Renee's motivation at study onset is rooted in her positive experiences with personal writing, knowing the personal rewards that writing can yield for her, her motivation can be classified as being intrinsic.

Julie: Past writing experiences generate positive expectations. Julie, who works as an editor and also holds a master's degree in professional writing, knows that writing can be a powerful tool, but she admitted that she had not kept a personal journal for more than a decade before beginning the study. She said that she had never used

writing as a way to relieve stress but was open to the possibilities. She entered the study with an awareness of a work-life balance issue, saying in her autobiography, "I struggle every day with the question of whether or not I should work at all." At the study's onset, she did not have a set of positive, helpful coping strategies in place to help with her balance issues. When the study began, Julie was handling her stress primarily by eating.

Julie wanted to engage in the study writing for the opportunities that it offers her. "I was excited at the beginning of the study because participating gave me a reason to write," she said in her second interview. Because of her personal goals and aspirations, Julie's motivation at study onset was intrinsic.

Sandy: Past writing experiences meet academic needs. Like Julie, Sandy had cited eating as a coping mechanism for the stress she recognizes that she suffers as a working mother. "I don't have a good way of managing these challenges and problems," she said in her autobiography. "Often, I have the sense of just holding my breath as long as I can, hoping that a reprieve will come. When it doesn't, I gulp and gasp for another breath. And I look for diversions, like eating." Prior to the study, Sandy had engaged sporadically in writing for stress relief, although usually only when she had reached the breaking point. She compares writing to extracting venom from a snake bite, referring to a passage from Stephen King's (2008) *Duma Key*, spoken by the main character, Edgar Freemantle:

Sometimes—often, I think—telling stories that are embarrassing or even downright crazy is easier when you're telling them to a stranger. Mostly, though, I

pushed on out of pure relief: I felt like a man expressing snake-venom from a

bite. (p. 169).

Sandy wanted to participate in the study because, like Julie, as a writer, she

knows that writing can be an effective tool professionally and hopes it can work

personally for her too. She also feels an obligation based on her commitment to

participate and her need to do so for academic reasons.

Because Sandy wanted to see how she could grow through writing in the context

of the study, her motivation is partially intrinsic. In addition, her sense of obligation and

academic need for participation also introduces an extrinsic motivator rooted in an

internal commitment; part of her motivation at study onset can be classified as extrinsic,

based on her role as researcher. Therefore, Sandy's name appears in two different

quadrants in Figure 4.

Molly: Combining personal goals with commitments. Although she does not

write professionally, Molly still entered the study with an appreciation for writing and

some experience in using writing for personal growth benefits. "I have always loved

writing and kept a journal up until about five years ago," she said in her first interview.

"Writing has always been a source of stress relief for me." Other ways that Molly has

relieved stress are by exercising, playing, crying, talking, scrapbooking, and praying.

Although her work is currently stressful, she is not dealing with any major balance

issues. "I honestly feel as if I am handling things okay right now, or I wouldn't be doing

all that I am," she said in her first interview. "But I can foresee issues with sleep, overall

health, and mental health when things aren't balanced."

Molly entered the study with personal goals for herself. "I hope this will help me to determine if working full time right now really is the right thing for me to be doing," she said in her first interview. "Right now, I am handling it okay, but I constantly question my decision." She also acknowledged that she is writing for the study requirement and that the two sources of motivation are almost intertwined for her. "I [write] because it is a requirement for the study," she said in her second interview. "However, the writing is something I do for myself to get my feelings out on paper." Therefore, Molly's motivation at study onset can be categorized as being a combination of intrinsic and, because she is adhering to her participation commitment to the researcher, extrinsic; therefore, her name appears in two different quadrants of Figure 4.

Grace: Interested in self-growth. Like Renee, Julie, Sandy, and Molly, Grace came into the study with an appreciation for writing, having valued writing in her teenage years, though she had not written much since then. She was open to realizing benefits from engaging in personal writing again, however, having said in her first interview, "I am looking forward to making my thoughts more tangible as they are put into writing. Maybe I will get to know myself a little better. I hope participating in personal writing will help me be more focused and organized."

During her first interview, Grace reported no major life balance issues. "Life is so good right now, and I really can't say I'm having any problems," she said. When she did have problems, though, she claimed that she relied on prayer and her faith in God. "Prayer is my problem-solving technique," she said in her first interview. "Whenever I am faced with a challenge or problem, I pray about it and have the peace of knowing that a solution or resolution will come."

Grace was also motivated by her personal goals of self-discovery and self-knowledge, so her motivation at study onset can be categorized as intrinsic.

Liz: Attracted by research. Liz, a self-admitted "numbers person," was intrinsically motivated to participate in the study, although her motivation was more about wanting to be a part of a research project than wanting to write. "I hear 'writing,' and, as a math/science person, I am wondering what I got myself into," she admitted in her first interview. Still, she is open to the possibility of personal growth through writing. "Through participation in the study maybe I will find benefits in personal writing and also spend some time trying to figure out how I truly am managing work and family," she said in her first interview.

Liz's writing background included a childhood diary and a monthly journal that she kept when she was pregnant with her first child, although she reported in her second interview that she was too busy when she was pregnant with her second child to do the same thing. In terms of stress management, at the study onset, Liz said that she preferred to relax by exercising, spending time with friends, and getting a "good facial," a strategy that she uses often, she reported humorously. At this point, she did not feel that she was facing any major problems or challenges.

Although not rooted in a desire for writing, Liz's motivation at study onset can still be categorized as being intrinsic because she is motivated by her desire to have the experience of being a research participant.

Unlike the participants already described, Pam, Amy, Jane, and Ellen seemed to be more motivated primarily extrinsically to participate in the study, based on perceived obligations.

Pam: Wanted to help with research. Pam was explicit in her motivations for participation. "I don't have any expectations," she said in her first interview. "I agreed to participate because it's an opportunity to help out. I'm guessing that it is tough to find working moms with the time to participate." She also reported having balance issues, however, having said in her autobiography, "Balancing family, work, and household chores is a struggle, and it overwhelms me." Pam had tried to exercise to relieve stress but could rarely find time to do so at study onset. And although she had kept a diary in high school, she has not used writing for stress relief. "I have such a sedentary job that I prefer activity to relieve stress," she said in her first interview.

Because Pam's participation is rooted in obligation and adherence to her commitment to the researcher, her motivation at study onset can be categorized as being extrinsic.

Amy: Wanted to help with research. Like Pam, Amy is explicit in her motivations for participating in the study. "It sounds like it may be hard to find time for it, but I want to help the person that asked me to do this, so I am trying to find the time," she said in her first interview. Still, Amy also acknowledged having balance issues, adding, "It is a daily struggle for sure." Like Julie and Sandy, Amy's response to stress often involved eating.

Although Amy said in her autobiography that she had wanted to be a writer when she was younger, she does not have any personal writing experience. "I have never used personal writing to relieve stress or for anything," she said in her first interview. "I have never even kept a diary." But she was optimistic about the possibilities that the study participation offered. "I would love it if I found out I was decent at writing, and if it relieved stress, wow, bonus!" she exclaimed in her first interview.

Amy acknowledged that she might find value in her personal writing, yet her primary motivation at study onset seems to have been rooted in her personal obligation to the researcher. Therefore, her initial motivation can also be classified as extrinsic.

Jane: Wanted to help with research. "I eat—anything I can get my hands on," said Jane in her first interview, commenting on the effects of her stress as a working mother. Specific stress-relieving techniques she used when she began the study included sleeping, walking away from a problem, and sitting and doing nothing to clear her mind. She said that her balance issues seem to grow sequentially with her daughter (age 8) because as she has gotten older, her daughter has become more aware of Jane's absence due to work; consequently, Jane is more conscious of having to leave her. Jane has sporadically written in a journal. "Occasionally, I have made journal entries to help clear my mind, so I can get to sleep," she said in her first interview. "I don't do any writing on a regular basis."

Jane's expectation as she began the study was to gain some stress relief, although her motivation seemed to be mostly extrinsic, in that she verbally claimed that she had agreed to participate to help out. Therefore, her motivation at study onset seemed most strongly related to her commitment to the researcher, and so it can be classified as primarily being extrinsic.

Ellen: Wanted to help with research. Like Grace and Pam, Ellen had not engaged in personal writing since her teenage years. She joined the study admittedly out of obligation, but, like Amy, she was optimistic about benefits that she could gain from writing. "I enjoy writing but I've never taken the time to really do a journal," she said in her first interview. "So maybe it would help me explore whether I'd enjoy doing that."

She perceived being a working mother as just something that she does and not as a source of stress for her. When she began the study, her methods of stress relief included talking to her mom and husband. Because her motivation is rooted in her commitment to the researcher, Ellen's motivation at the study onset can also be classified as being extrinsic.

Summary of Participant Motivation and Value

Because motivation and value have been found to be important factors in determining the potential effects and benefits of personal writing, this chapter has presented the motivations with which the core subgroup participants entered the study, as well as the value that they attached to personal writing. Knowing the points with which each core subgroup participant began the study has helped to illustrate any growth, or personal movement through the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000), that may have resulted from study participation. Motivation and value data were only provided for the core subgroup, rather than all 15 participants, because the rich, consistent data from the core subgroup allowed for pre- and post-study comparisons.

Because all 15 participants did contribute data pertaining to the stress that they experienced as working mothers, however, the next chapter first presents the problem of stress as it was generally perceived by all 15 participants. This general discussion is followed by a discussion of how personal writing impacted stress based upon data from the 10-member core subgroup.

CHAPTER 6

PERSONAL WRITING AND ITS IMPACT ON STRESS

This chapter addresses the types of stress identified by all 15 participants at the study onset. With this understanding of stress as the study participants described it, data from the core subgroup is then used to address the inquiry's overarching research question concerning balance, as well as the five secondary, exploratory questions. The first secondary research question, which concerns the effects of writing on these problems, is addressed in this chapter, and the remaining four questions are addressed sequentially in the next four chapters using data provided by the core subgroup.

Participant-defined Stress Problems

As discussed in Chapter 2, working mothers are facing a variety of issues that can detrimentally affect their overall quality of life as they struggle to balance their work and home lives. Using academic and mainstream sources, Chapter 2 situates these issues into the four broad categories of healing, problem-solving, identity, and social connections.

In terms of the grounded-theory approach, however, inquiry data have shown that the categories of issues facing working mothers are not as clear-cut as presented in Chapter 2; rather they are overlapping, and are often interdependent on one another, resulting in a network of interconnected elements. For example, participants identified numerous elements that cause them psychological stress, which include elements of self and social relationships. Also embedded within these stress-inducing situations, however, are problems that need to be addressed and decisions that need to be made; in such a pattern, social connections and problem-solving can be intricately connected, so that a given phenomenon cannot be easily categorized under one or the other label.

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Overwhelmingly, handling various forms of stress—both internal and external, and psychological and physical, as differentiated in Chapter 1—seems to be the primary balance challenge for the working mothers in this study. Therefore, the first part of this section examines the broad issue of working-mother stress. As noted above, it is difficult to fit the participants' statements into categories offered in the scholarly literature. Consequently, I have worked directly from the perspectives of this study's 15 participants in identifying the themes that emerged from their own descriptions of stress in their lives.

Once the stress issues have been identified, this section moves on to examine the effects of personal writing on these stressors within the core subgroup, again from the participants' perspectives, addressing the overarching inquiry question of balance through the first of this inquiry's secondary research questions, concerning effects of personal narrative writing on psychological and physical stress.

Most Prevalent Emotion: Guilt

Richard Lazarus (1976) says that social demands have the most impact on emotional responses to stress, including positive emotions (such as love and joy) and negative emotions (such as fear, anxiety, anger, depression, and guilt) (p. 45). The study participants reinforced the idea that social demands can lead to a plethora of negative emotions. The most prevalent of these emotions was guilt, which was itself multifaceted. For example, almost half of the participants felt guilt over leaving their children with others while they went to work. But other sources of guilt were identified: not having a sense of self-control, not having time to adequately clean, and not spending enough time with a spouse or other family members and friends.

Participants spoke of blaming themselves for a child's bad behavior, for having to ask for help, and for the choices that they make. A common complaint focused on competing demands. In her mid-study writing sample, Molly described guilt that she experienced because of her competing home and work responsibilities:

I love my job. I love that I have a place where I have a sense of self beyond wife and mother. I love learning and I love knowing that I am helping people. However, I hate coming home and wishing I had been there with my daughter all day....I hate the guilty twinge I feel when I hear she didn't nap well that day and I wonder if things would have been different if I would have been there.

"Even when I play with my son," added Pam in her autobiography, "I feel I 'should' be folding laundry or taking out the trash or answering the telephone." Like Pam, Julie has difficulty finding time to play with her children amidst her other responsibilities, but when she does, she cannot even just "play," and ambivalent feelings creep into her sense of what she is doing. "When I do play with them, at the scheduled time," Julie said in her first interview, "I am trying to teach them things like colors, numbers, Spanish, and so on, so it isn't just play."

Guilt even finds its way into situations that should otherwise be positive. For example, Pam admitted in her autobiography that she feels guilty when she achieves at work. "I feel I have done so at the detriment of my child and family," she says. "The time it took to reach that success was time away from them." Liz genuinely enjoys her job, but still suffers from work-home guilt. "My biggest challenge is overcoming the feeling that as a teacher I am putting other children's needs in front of my own children by being away from them each day," she said in her first interview. And school holidays

cause stress for Amy, who feels guilty for having to buy treats instead of baking them herself. "I NEVER have time for cupcakes, etc., anymore," she emphatically stated in her first interview. And when Molly takes some much-needed time for herself, she feels guilty that her daughter has her playtime with someone else.

This guilt can often segue into other negative emotions, including depression, sadness, resentfulness, anger, anxiety, cynicism, jealousy, loneliness, frustration, panic, grief, and disorientation. Rare is the claim that Grace made in her autobiography that she does not have guilt as a working mother: "I always had the peace of knowing that my son was happy while we were apart, and I very rarely had feelings of guilt about being away from him during the day."

Lack of Time

Another source of stress for study participants involved time, including scheduling and organizational issues. "My biggest issue is time!" emphasized Nancy in her second interview. "I just think that oftentimes, I spread myself too thin, and I know that, but I don't want to slow down." Even her choice of words, including slips of the tongue, illustrated Nancy's deep-seated issues with time. "I just need to work in time to get everything time [sic], and that is always a challenge," she said in her second interview.

Julie echoed Nancy's issues with time almost verbatim. "The biggest challenge I face as a working mother is time," Julie said in her second interview. In addition, in her first interview, Liz spoke of time management issues in terms of "trying to get kids where they need to be—sitter, school, activities, doctor appointments, etc.—and still make sure that my husband and I are meeting our work obligations." Furthermore, in her

second interview, Liz described how she kept a journal when she was pregnant with her first child. Yet when she was pregnant with her second child, she did not have time for this type of writing. "Unfortunately, when I was pregnant with [my daughter] when [my son] was just four months old, I did not have the time or energy to keep the same type of journal," she said.

Time issues also involved scheduling logistics. For example, Jane and Nancy reported that working far from home and getting home from work late detrimentally affect evening activities like swimming lessons and soccer practice. Several participants also said that modifying their schedules when their children are unexpectedly sick is a major source of stress.

Cultivating and Maintaining Relationships

Maintaining relationships is also a source of stress for most of the study participants. Pam's mother and mother-in-law watch her son while Pam is working, and she finds it difficult to communicate her childcare preferences when they want to do things their way. "I haven't found a good way to make my requests [clear] and get their respect and cooperation," she said in her first interview. Julie, too, struggled to maintain the respect of her mother-in-law, whom she feels judges her harshly because she herself stayed home with her own children. "I feel that his mother does not feel that I adequately take care of the house and the kids," she said in her first interview.

Participants also said that their relationships with their spouses are sources of stress. Because Julie's mother-in-law did not work, she believes that her husband—like his mother— wants Julie to be solely responsible for housework and childcare; in contrast, Julie's own feeling is that she would really appreciate help from him.

Furthermore, job and child responsibilities absorb time that could otherwise be spent with one's spouse. "I am absolutely unable to show [my husband] any amount of interest or attention on most days," said Julie in her first interview, "and it has definitely created a distance between us." Jane wrote about this issue as well in her mid-study writing sample, asking, "Is the connection [with my husband] still there? I should try to reconnect with him so that we are preserving our relationship/friendship." Brooke and Sandy also echoed Julie's and Jane's feelings, claiming that they and their husbands do not get much alone time together. And while Nancy's husband tries to help, she has felt that he sometimes just does not understand why she feels such stress as a working mother.

Lack of Personal Voice

With the issue of managing relationships also comes the issue of personal voice, the lack of which was also a source of stress for some participants before beginning the study. Pam had struggled with finding a voice that could communicate her desires yet not offend her child's caregivers nor upset family dynamics. Julie, on the other hand, admits not voicing her concerns at all. "I rarely voice my thoughts or feelings to my husband because he just doesn't seem to understand why I am so conflicted," she said in her first interview. "I also don't voice the feelings causing me to stress to friends or family because I don't want to sound like I don't want my children. I love them very much and would never wish that I didn't have them."

Trapped by circumstances and finances in an abusive marriage, Renee had felt that her personal voice had been squelched. "Because of the neglect and abuse [my ex-husband] imposed upon me, and because of his refusal to let me work or study or even

go out of the house, I felt like I had no voice," she explained in her second interview. Several years prior to beginning the study, though, Renee did find her voice again through personal writing, which helped her to ultimately escape from her marriage.

Work Issues

Not surprisingly, work is also a major source of stress reported by the study participants. Both Amy and Sandy work from home, which causes problems because they do not have the clear delineations between work and home that working outside of the home would provide. In fact, a recent quantitative psychological study found that work-family stress is lower when work and home are kept as separate domains and that stress increases when the "boundaries between these important domains are permeated or seep into one another" (Mitchelson, 2009, p. 363).

Many participants travel for work, which also causes stress and scheduling concerns, although some, like Ellen and Brooke, switched to jobs that require less travel after having their children, and Molly has adjusted her work schedule to allow for more time at home.

Even aside from child issues, work creates stress that the participants feel they bring home with them, to the detriment of their families. Nancy specifically withholds verbalizing her negative feelings within the workplace, and this effort creates even more stress at home. "I am currently not happy in my position, and I try to hold back at work," she said in her first interview, "so when I am home, I am usually tired and stressed." Both Jane and Molly report being overworked due to staff cuts. "We are too busy, our schedule is a mess, no one knows what the expectations are from day to day, and there are too many patients," Molly wrote in her first mid-study writing sample. Like Molly's

job, Liz's work as a teacher is also very demanding, so she is often forced to take work home that drains her time and resources.

Money Issues

Related to work are money issues that provide sources of stress for the study participants. Most of the participants work out of need. "I am the breadwinner in our home, and my job and salary are critical," said Pam in her autobiography. Like Pam, Julie needs the income that her working provides. Julie explained that she is holding three jobs in order to make ends meet and still finds managing her family's finances to be difficult, forcing her to do "creative budgeting." "I've started using coupons, for instance," Julie said in her first interview, "and I will only purchase an item if it is on my shopping list. Also, I've taken on more jobs than I would be working otherwise. It was the only way to solve the problem completely." Others, like Liz and Molly, said that their salaries are not critical, yet their families enjoy the lifestyle that their respective incomes make possible.

Drive to "Do It All"

One quality that enables working mothers to handle their varied responsibilities is also a quality that causes them a great deal of stress: the self-admitted need to "do it all." Time and time again, study participants voiced their striving for perfection. "I want to be the best mother I can be while also being the best worker I can be," said Sandy in her autobiography. Ann added in her autobiography, "I consider myself to be an overachiever and find that in addition to the pressures from work and home, I tend to place additional pressure on myself to excel at both roles."

In her first interview, Amy also acknowledged her difficulty in meeting this goal. "I think that it is hard to give 100% of yourself when you have a lot of responsibilities and you want to do a great job at all of them," she said. As unattainable as it may be, working mothers such as Pam still push for perfection. "I scramble each day to do it all and do it perfectly," said Pam in her autobiography; in fact, in her first interview, Pam acknowledged that "doing it all" included considerably more than just balancing work and family. "I am a perfectionist. I want it all," she said, "the loving family, the loving husband, the well-mannered child, the high-power job, the fun personality, the stylish clothes, the great physical shape, the clean house, and the fresh, home-cooked meals."

Hope for Something Better

Then there is that elusive source of stress, the striving and hope for something better. Molly has admitted that she constantly questions her decision to work. A part of Julie believes that a better situation might be attained if she did not work at all, so she has acknowledged not making efforts to resolve her working mother conflicts, perhaps hoping if she holds out long enough, her conflicts would be moot. Pam has discussed looking for the perfect balance. Liz longs to go in a different direction with her career but is inhibited from doing so because her husband is so focused on his career at this point. Sandy is just not sure what she wants. She wrote in her first mid-study writing sample, "So here I am. Not completely happy and content but not sure what changes to make, if any." Nancy, admittedly happy with her life but not her job, is acutely aware of her longing for "something more."

Exhaustion and Other Physical Symptoms of Stress

Participants also cited several factors of physical stress in their current work-home situations. Ellen, Nancy, Molly, Liz, Jane, Julie, Sandy, and Brooke all describe themselves as being "tired" or "exhausted." And Amy, Brooke, Sandy, and Julie attribute some of this tiredness to lack of exercise, unhealthy eating, or being overweight. Other physical symptoms of stress include headaches, insomnia, and various other medical problems.

Other Balance Issues

In addition to the overall work-life balance issues, participants identified other balance issues which cause stress in their lives. These include finding balance between:

- providing for children versus spoiling them;

- having material things versus enjoying life;

- knowing what she can do versus what others think she can do;

- teaching versus just playing without an agenda for teaching;

- making requests of others versus maintaining respect and cooperation.

These are the general, overarching problems with which the participants entered the study.

But how effective was personal writing in addressing problems and stress concerns on an individual basis? Did these shifts reflect movement through the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000)? What was the nature of those shifts? And what were the instances in which personal writing was not beneficial for participants?

In order to most effectively address these questions—and, in turn, the primary and secondary research questions—in the next section, I will present the data obtained from the study's 10 core subgroup participants (Sandy, Liz, Jane, Pam, Grace, Molly, Julie, Amy, Renee, and Ellen), beginning with the effects on stress reported by participants in this core subgroup.

Effects of Personal Writing on Stress Management

The earlier section looked at the current stress generally affecting all 15 of the study participants. This section examines how the data show the effects of personal writing on these stressors with the core subgroup, from the participants' perspectives. This discussion addresses the overarching issue of balance through the first of this inquiry's secondary research questions:

How does personal narrative writing impact stress (both psychological and physical) in participants' lives, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

As will be discussed in more detail in the section addressing writing practices, the majority of participants used the gauge of "feeling better" as their way of determining writing effectiveness. Using this gauge, participants were able to assess how their writing affected their psychological and physical stress levels.

Positive effects on psychological stress. Six out of the 10 participants in the core subgroup specifically reported that writing helped them to better manage their psychological stress levels. The responses from these participants will be presented in this section.

Mental purging and reorganization. Jane said that her writing has helped to clear her head. "On days I struggle with thoughts," she said in her second interview, "if I put them down in the journal, I am better able to sleep that night." In addition, both Pam and Molly discussed how writing lessened their psychological burdens. "There have been several situations that were worse in my mind than in reality," recalled Pam in her second interview. "Writing about them and describing them on paper helped me to see I was being irrational." Molly said in her second interview that writing helped her with stress management. "Writing helps to relieve stress," she said. "It also gives me less burden to carry around because the thoughts are out of my head, for the time being, and documented on paper." Sandy spoke of her writing as being like a friend to help lessen her burdens as well. "It's a good feeling to know that writing is there and that it can work," she said in her second interview.

Like Sandy, Renee considered her journal to be a friend, as she described in one of her final writing samples: "My journal is always there for me. It's my friend in time of need." Renee also used writing as a way of reorganizing her thoughts and dealing with stress. "Because my personal writing is so uplifting and helps me to avoid worrying about the everyday stresses of my life, I find that I am more astute and coherent," she said in her third interview. Renee specifically views writing as a therapeutic method of healing. "I see writing mostly as a healing and a self-expression process," she said in her second interview. "I've never expressed my emotions so candidly as I've done in my journal. It is definitely a great place for me to be open and honest about what I've been through and what I'm going through, and it helps me to put any feelings of bitterness and resentment aside."

Julie's personal writing also offered her a different perspective, enabling her to reprioritize her responsibilities and lessen her stress:

Basically, I was able to reconcile the difficulties of being a working mother, and it allowed me to see that there is no possible way to have enough time to do everything perfect," she said in her third interview. "I was able to reprioritize my days, and I feel that I have become a better mother and a happier person by taking the time to write.

Therapeutic effects. Along with Renee, Julie, and Ellen specifically use the word "therapeutic" to describe the effects of their personal writing. "The writing became therapeutic and was very personal to me," said Julie in her third interview, adding, "Personal writing is very therapeutic and can be incredibly relaxing." Julie also found that using writing to work through her feelings of being overwhelmed made them feel less relevant and thus more manageable.

After the stillbirth of her daughter, Ellen abandoned the study writing and instead took to email correspondence with a woman who had experienced a similar loss. "Writing to the other mother is very helpful," she said in her second interview. "We lost our babies at nearly the same time at nearly the same gestational age. We are very similar in age, and we both have an older child. We understand each other's feelings, and writing to each other is a chance to express our feelings and try to help each other cope. Not many people, thankfully, understand this. We can relate to each other when many people can't relate to us."

Negative effects on psychological stress. Ironically, while writing decreased stress for some participants, it had the opposite effect for others, causing more stress than it relieved.

Writing became another burden. Even though at mid-study, Molly found her writing to be stress-relieving, toward the end of the study, she found that it was hard to find time and energy for writing. "The second half of the study I kept thinking I should write more but never got around to it," she said in her third interview. Similarly, in spite of the benefits that she had experienced at the outset, Pam said in her third interview that writing had just become another task that she had to manage. "I enjoyed it at the beginning," she said at the end of the study. "But as things in my life got busier, it was pushed to the back burner. At that time it felt more like an obligation, one more thing on the to-do list."

Liz also had a similar experience. "Personal writing is not something I am able to comfortably find time to do right now," she said in her second interview. "So at times, instead of being a stress release, it adds to the things I am trying to accomplish during the day, and I may be missing the potential benefits."

Generating negative associations. Even though she too had some positive writing experiences, Sandy also had some negative experiences with her personal writing. Sandy is a friend of Ellen's and was personally affected by Ellen's pregnancy losses. She wrote about these feelings honestly in her journal, musings which led to reflections on her religious faith. A few days later, she was bitten by her dog (who, for unrelated reasons, had to be euthanized a few weeks later). Sandy's hand became infected from the bite, and she was almost admitted to the hospital. "My association,

however irrational, was that my writing somehow brought on the biting incident," she said in her third interview. "So, in this way, the writing added stress."

Positive effects on physical stress. Positive and negative effects on psychological stress can also positively and negatively affect physical stress, or stress related to physical factors. At the study's onset, some participants reported specific symptoms of physical stress that they were experiencing, including insomnia, fatigue, and headaches.

Jane and Renee reported positive effects on their physical stress as a result of their writing. "On days I struggle with thoughts, if I put them down in the journal, I am better able to sleep that night," Jane said in her second interview. Renee's experiences were similar. "My personal writing is very beneficial to eliminating my physical stress," she said in her third interview. "I think a large part of it is due to the writing focusing the mind away from my physical fatigue and toward something that is richer and more meaningful. If I have a headache or if I am tired, I usually find that my personal writing heals me."

Negative effects on physical stress. Inquiry results did not reveal any negative effects of writing on physical stress.

Summary of Effects of Writing on Stress Management

Overall, participants realized primarily positive effects in using personal writing to manage their psychological and physical stress. In particular, writing helped participants to vent frustrations resulting from managing their roles as working mothers, as well as to reorganize their perspectives on life issues or challenges, often yielding physical benefits such as improved sleep. However, a few of the participants reported increased

stress as a byproduct of their personal writing, resulting from the burdensome obligation

of the study writing; the participant-researcher also reported negative associations

between her writing and negative life events, including being bitten by her dog.

The next chapter, Chapter 7, describes how participant data from the core

subgroup addressed the overarching research question concerning balance through the

secondary research question, which looked at the effects of writing on problem-solving.

CHAPTER 7

WRITING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

Stress and problem-solving are not mutually exclusive but instead can be interdependent. As was discussed in Chapter 2, stress-management efforts often involve taking problem-solving measures (Lazarus, 1976, p. 47). Conversely, effective problem-solving often requires, or leads to, a reduction in stress. With this caveat in mind, this chapter uses participant data to address the overarching issue of balance through the second secondary research question:

How does personal narrative journaling impact problem-solving or coping strategies in working mothers' lives, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

Positive Effects of Writing on Problem-Solving

Most of the participants experienced positive effects of their writing in the area of problem solving and the related area of memory.

Improved Mental Functioning

Renee said that her predominant focus in journaling is self-reflection, but she also unintentionally uses it for problem-solving as well. "Once I have made progress in reflective writing, I can start to use my journal more for other things like problem-solving, although this often happens naturally, anyway," she said in her second interview. She also reported in her third interview that as her stress level decreased, her problem-solving abilities increased. "I am able to both cope and solve problems more effectively," she said.

Both Amy and Jane reported similar effects through their personal writing. "I believe I was more relaxed and able to focus," Amy said in her third interview. Jane

found that writing freed mental space, resulting in more effective mental processing. "I think I was able to better let go of the negative feelings running through my mind and keep moving forward to more positive things going on," she said in her third interview.

Improved Evaluation Abilities

Other participants recognized that they use writing to evaluate different aspects of a problem and thus better manage the problem. Jane and Sandy both said that this technique helped them to come up with solutions to problems by helping them to see the pros and cons of a particular solution on paper. In addition, both Molly and Julie specifically used the pro-con problem-solving approach to assess issues related to work and family. "I think that writing has helped me evaluate my current decision to continue working full time with a child," said Molly in her second interview. "I am currently in the midst of contemplating a job change or part-time work, and this has helped me get my feelings out of my head and onto paper."

Julie's experiences were similar. "I feel that my problem-solving capability has been greatly enhanced with the study writing," she said in her second interview. She then reported concrete problem-solving results in her third interview. "I've gotten rid of a lot of the guilt I've felt about daycare and some of the choices we (or I) have made because writing about it [sic] gives me the opportunity to evaluate the choices," she said. "By doing this, I have been able to find comfort in the fact that there are benefits to the choices that have been made, including putting the kids in daycare."

Sandy also used her journal for evaluation of a decision, in her case involving whether or not to attend a professional conference. "I did have to work out the problem of whether to attend a professional conference," she said in her third interview. She also

verified the value of writing in helping her to make her decision. "I did use the journal writing as a problem-solving technique for this problem."

In writing for problem-solving benefits, a few participants used dialectic questioning techniques, which have been known to lead to knowledge growth. For example, in her mid-study writing sample, Jane reflects on her holiday time with her daughter and family, while she also reflects on her relationship with her husband:

Vacation is almost over…sniff! Spending time with [my daughter] has been wonderful! It's been nice having [my husband] home for a few days too. We have been spending time with her, plus doing family things together….Now that she's older, I could see me possibly staying home, if I needed to. I know [my husband] has been waiting for that day, although I don't think he'd get much done but playing on the computer. I am ready to throw that thing out the window….I am missing [my husband]. Is the connection still there? I should try to reconnect with [my husband] so that we are preserving our relationship/friendship.

Like Jane, Renee used dialectic questioning in one of her final writing samples:

Professor Stanko shared a link with me to a Web site started by a mentor to young girls. She sells greeting cards through her site. This is something I would absolutely love to pursue. I've always wanted to work for Hallmark, designing their greeting cards!! This would be a dream come true. Why not take initiative on my own?

Finally, Sandy reflected this dialectic technique in one of her mid-study writing samples:

I had a dream last night that I would enjoy traveling with women and giving journaling lessons, Journaling Tours. I wonder if that is something that could be

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done virtually? [My husband] also had the idea of my starting an online school. That's something I've wanted to do for a long time. How to do that?

Negative Effects of Writing on Problem-Solving

Writing did not help all of the participants with problem-solving, however. Some participants felt that writing was not applicable to all situations that they faced. Pam recognized that writing can theoretically help a working mother to deal with a problem, but she indicated that it could not work in every situation for her. "I strongly agree that writing about an event or problem is a huge help in dealing with it appropriately," she said in her second interview. "The problem is, some things have to be addressed immediately." Pam seems to have been addressing the potential tension between writing and reflection, which takes time, and the immediacy of some urgent real-life challenges.

On a related note, Liz raised the issue of a possible disconnect between the well-organized, written viewpoint and the more chaotic life situation in which solutions need to be implemented immediately. In addition, rather than being impractical, realistic guides to finding solutions, Liz found that her pro-con lists were just, well, lists. "I feel like I am just writing a running list of what I do or need to do as a mom, and it often just reminds me of how crazy the days and nights can be," she said in her second interview.

Positive Effects of Writing on Memory

Some of the participants reported that their writing also had positive effects on their memory. Mid-study, Nancy struggled with the milestone of turning 40 and, in this context, said humorously in her second interview, "Writing helps me with memory, and I think I need all of the help I can get." Julie felt that having children detrimentally affected

her memory, and that writing had helped to rebuild it. "I was having a hard time after I got pregnant remembering anything, and that just got worse after I had the kids," she said in her third interview. "Since I've been participating in the study, I feel that my memory is better for everyday things and remembering stories or events that happened a long time ago."

Triggering Deeper Reflections

In addition, writing has helped some participants in that it triggered deeper memories. "When I write about a particular subject, I recall related past experiences and readings vividly," said Renee in her third interview. "I think the process of extracting this latent memory also helps me to remember other things more clearly as well, even when I am not engaged in the writing process." Molly has had a similar experience. "I am blessed with a good memory, but writing things helped me to recall even more after the fact about how I really felt at a certain moment," she said in her third interview.

Providing Opportunities for Future Reflection

Amy, Molly, Julie, and Liz all said that writing helps their memory in that they enjoy going back to reread passages that they have written, especially those passages about their children. For Liz, this opportunity for recollection is the most valuable aspect of writing as a working mother. "I enjoy the re-reading of events to help me remember," said Liz in her second interview. Liz also articulated this benefit in her final writing sample:

> I can't wait to read this writing again in the future just to keep me grounded. This whole working mom/ wife/ friend/ daughter etc. thing is hard, but it makes for a very exciting journey, and it is worth keeping up the rat race. Again for me it is

not about the actual journaling but more about where it takes you when you go

back and read your words again.

Liz's sentiment was echoed by Molly in both her second and third interviews. "I like

going back and reading my reflections later on," Molly said in her third interview.

Summary of Effects of Writing on Problem-Solving

Participant data support that writing can be an effective means of problem-

solving for working mothers. Writing helped participants to see elements of a problem in

black and white, enabling them to more effectively evaluate options. Writing also

improved memory functioning, as well as provided a tool for recollection, both of recent

and more distant past events.

The next chapter, Chapter 8, presents how the participant data from the core

subgroup addressed the overarching research question concerning balance through the

third of the secondary research questions, which covered the other effects—anticipated

and unanticipated—of participants' personal narrative writing.

CHAPTER 8

OTHER EFFECTS OF PERSONAL WRITING

Since issues involving stress management and problem-solving can often

naturally encompass other issues, the third research question for this study attempts to

address the overarching research problem of balance by isolating those effects that

personal writing specifically had on areas outside of stress and problem solving, thereby

addressing the fourth of the secondary research questions:

What other personal effects do participants experience through their personal

writing, including effects on personal relationships and concepts of self and

identity, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about

personal writing?

These effects can involve perceived effects on a participant's various personal

relationships, exercise, and eating, as well as her concepts of self, identity, and

personal voice.

Effects on Personal Relationships

The crux of narrative inquiry is experience, and an integral part of experience

involves those social relationships that a person has with other people. So, it is a natural

extension to see how a person's personal narrative writing experiences can affect

personal relationships. Results from this inquiry show both perceived positive and

negative effects of personal writing on social relationships, as well as no effects, in

some cases.

Renee, Jane, and Julie all reported that being able to work through their feelings

on paper has made them better mothers and better employees. "Documenting daily

events and my feelings and reactions toward those events has already helped me to

become a better parent and, on the work front, a better employee," Renee said in her second interview; this is a viewpoint she reiterated in her third interview. "Because of my personal writing, I have been able to interact with my family members and coworkers more calmly," she said. "I no longer take my troubles out on others and do not allow my stress to impact my relationships with others."

Jane found that venting through writing improves the quality of the time that she spends with her daughter. "My relationship with my daughter has indirectly changed because I can put my feelings down on paper and not let them interfere with spending time with her," Jane said in her second interview.

Julie said that she is a better mother because of the personal benefits she realized through writing. "I really feel that I am a better mother to my children," she said in her second interview. Julie's appreciation for her children has also increased. "I know that I have been able to appreciate my boys a lot more since I started the writing," she said in her third interview.

Writing also made both Julie and Amy feel better about themselves, which indirectly impacts their families. "I am definitely less stressed, and the personal writing has allowed me to feel like I do take some time for myself," said Julie in her second interview. Amy agreed. "I believe I was calmer and happier [after I wrote], so that is always better for my kids and those I love," she said in her third interview.

Liz also reported positive effects from her personal writing, on both her family and on other aspects of her life. "Besides writing, I have made changes in my life, such as working out and helping out more at church and that has really helped me to realize

taking time to do things that make mom feel better is better for the family," she said in her second interview.

Sandy is the only participant who reported a negative impact of her writing on her personal relationships. In her third interview, she said, "Having to take time for my writing has negatively impacted the time that I spend with my family." In her first mid-study writing sample, she also cited an incident on an airplane when her son was throwing a tantrum, and Sandy temporarily ignored him as she documented the event in her journal. Writing often necessitated such a choice for her, often leaving her feeling guilty when she chose the writing option over immediate active response to some situation.

Pam said that her personal relationships were not affected in any way by her personal writing.

Effects on Perceptions of Identity and Personal Voice

Almost all of the participants reported positive effects on their concepts of self, identity, and voice due to their personal writing, although these effects are based on individual perceptions of self, identity, and voice, which may vary from person to person.

Renee said that she did not realize the importance of personal writing for shaping her self-understanding until it became a routine for her. But having come to that realization, she was enthusiastic in her praise of the practice. "I place a great deal of value on my personal writing," she said in her second interview. "It is a reflection of me as a person and an iteration of my innermost self. I no longer view it as a luxury but instead as something that is helping me to heal, to grow, and to become a better person." Renee said that her writing has given her a greater sense of self-worth, as well

as giving her back the personal voice that had been squelched by her negligent and abusive husband. "Generally, I have gained a lot more confidence over the past 10 years, ever since my divorce," she emphasized in her third interview. "I have discovered my own identity and have developed a more peaceful state of mind. My writing has definitely played a role in this." It seems that her engagement in the present study awakened in her a new level of realization that writing could be supportive of her development on a continuing basis, reaching back to her use of writing during her marriage and divorce, but also affirming her voice in new ways in the present. In one of her final writing samples, Renee provides an example of asking this refined inner voice for advice:

Dear Ms. [Renee],

I wanted to write to you for some advice, since I know you are great at giving it. My ex-father-in-law is visiting in September. I have mixed feelings about this, since he is [my son's] grandfather and the last time he saw [my son] was four years ago. However, I have some major issues with him. He is a dreadful abuser. He must suffer the same psychological issues that his sons suffer – especially [my ex-husband]. They are all brainwashed into thinking that they are superior and practically owners of their wives. I can't believe the utter emotional and physical abuse that goes on in that household. It's appalling. I feel bad for the children, too, since they had to grow up in that atmosphere. How it must feel to watch and hear your own mother, helpless in the hands of your father! Something must be done to stop people like this. Domestic abuse shelters need to be MUCH more prevalent in India – especially in small towns like Rewa. I

would love to establish a couple myself. Of course, the government must support this cause as well. I am glad India is becoming more westernized and appreciative of women. I hope this movement continues and the backwards, close-minded thinking slowly dissolves.

Any advice you could offer me would be appreciated.

Regards,

[Renee]

Like Renee, Julie has found that writing is integral to her identity, helping her to redefine herself in ways that are more realistic and thus less stressful for her. In particular, as she explained in her second interview, writing has opened possibilities for her that are outside of both the mother and employee roles, and that give her a new perspective:

> I am beginning to feel like I have my own identity again. At first, I was worried that I would have to take time away from the dishes, the laundry, work, and so on in order to find the time to write. I have enjoyed writing so much, though, that I've been able to put chores aside and take the time to sit and relax and write. It's been incredibly therapeutic and has been great for helping me realize that being a mother is part of my life but isn't the only thing that I am. It has made me feel more like an individual person again, instead of defining myself completely by the roles I have taken on in my life as a mother, wife, and employee.

As it expands her concept of identity, Julie said that her personal writing has given her more of a personal voice. In her first interview, Julie explained her lack of voice regarding being a working mother. "I rarely voice my thoughts or feelings to my

husband because he just doesn't seem to understand why I am conflicted," she said. "I also don't voice the feelings causing me to stress to friends or family because I don't want to sound like I don't want my children." She said that writing has helped her to find a voice again. "Writing has given me the opportunity to put myself first and to talk about the things that are most important to me, instead of the things that are most important to my husband, kids, or boss," she said in her second interview.

Along with a stronger voice, Julie experienced empowerment and agency through her writing, taking back power that other people had taken from her:

My husband's parents stopped by today, and his mom of course looked around the living room again like I'm a slob and can't keep my house clean. Of course I can't. I have twin toddlers that are into everything and a husband that isn't interested in housework. She didn't have to work on top of everything else, and she definitely didn't have twins! I think this weekend we'll send the boys over to his parents' house for the night so they can get a better understanding of how hard it is.

Sandy also experienced changes in her concept of voice and identity through her writing. She cited her personal growth as being largely spiritual, connecting with what Games (2011) has referred to as a woman's "Inner Goddess." "I gained a real connection with God through this study," she said in her third interview. "It's like the voice of God is integrated into my own voice. I feel like He is right inside of me, feeding me wisdom. I think I resisted that image for a long time. But I'm ok with that now. Maybe that gives me more license to listen to it?" She said that her concept of self has grown richer because she also acknowledged that her feelings have value.

While some participants talked about how writing has enhanced their voice as the entity that strengthens them and gives them power, Grace spoke of a different voice, that of her "inner critic," in response to one of the writing prompts. In her case, writing helped to subdue this negative "voice": "One prompt I remember using was writing about my negative inner voice, which really helped me to recognize what triggers my negative feelings about myself and to work on stopping those triggers in their tracks," she said in her third interview.

Some participants reported growth in either voice or identity, although not both; of course, these data are dependent upon how the individual defines "voice," "self," or "identity," respectively. Molly felt that her writing does give her a voice but it has not altered her concept of identity. "My identity is the same as before," she said in her third interview. "I still identify myself most as a mother, wife, and nurse practitioner." In contrast, both Jane and Amy felt that their concept of self expanded, while their concept of voice has not. "Since I am writing in a private journal setting, I don't believe my personal voice has changed, and I am ok with that," said Jane in her second interview. However, in her third interview, she addressed her self-concept in these terms: "I think I have a better sense of myself and feel more confident in my everyday self since I am working through my feelings sooner."

Although Amy also did not see a change in her voice, her writing showed her that she does not focus enough on herself, although this realization came at the price of guilt. "I did realize that I do not spend enough of my time on me," she emphasized in her third interview. "As a mom, I come last and the writing was me-focused, so that was a nice change, but I did feel guilty [for] taking time on it, some." In her case, the very act of

focusing on herself can be seen as an important first step toward increased self-awareness; however, this change may proceed slowly for her, as it brought with it feelings of guilt that she would need to resolve.

Neither Pam nor Liz claimed that either their voices or their concepts of identity were altered through their personal writing. However, Liz did say that writing helped her to further define and understand her identity, at least in terms of the diverse roles that she plays. "I think more recently I have gotten a handle [on] the different hats that I wear in a day and am getting better at identifying with each," she said in her third interview.

Effects on Exercise and Eating Control

Participants did report other, unanticipated, effects from their personal writing. At study onset, Jane, Julie, Sandy, and Amy all reported using food as a negative way of coping with stress. "I am more overweight than I have ever been, and I know that it is my fault," Amy said in her first interview. But then midway through the study, Amy started exercising regularly. When asked whether she thought that her writing had impacted her exercise regimen, she emphasized, "I do know for a fact that writing about my life and even the things I want to still do made me realize I need to do it NOW."

Julie addressed her emotional eating within her journal and found that this reflection resulted in positive changes for her. "I've recently started writing about my weight and why being overweight has caused some of the strong emotional reactions I've had," she said in her second interview. "I've been writing about this topic whenever I feel like cheating on my diet and writing about why I want to eat. I've actually been able to lose five pounds, and I do think writing about the emotional side of eating has helped me do this."

Like Amy and Julie, Liz's writing also indirectly helped her to make positive life changes. "Besides writing, I have made changes in my life such as working out and helping out more at church, and that has really helped me to realize taking time to do things that makes mom feel better is better for the family," she said in her second interview.

Although Jane and Sandy originally acknowledged having a problem with overeating, neither reported that writing had affected their eating positively or negatively.

Summary of Other Effects from Personal Writing

In addition to healing and problem-solving effects, participants realized other, sometimes unanticipated, effects from their writing. Some participants noticed that their personal writing affected their social relationships in both positive and negative ways, while others found that the writing modified their self-defined perceptions of self and identity. One surprising finding was the ways in which personal writing functioned for some as a means of stimulating exercise and control over excess eating.

The next chapter, Chapter 9, outlines those writing practices that participants found to be effective and non-effective in achieving the benefits that have been previously discussed, addressing the overarching research of balance through addressing the fourth of the secondary research questions.

CHAPTER 9

EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE WRITING PRACTICES

In this chapter, I look more closely at the data on the participants' writing practices, with a view to addressing the overarching research problem of balance through this inquiry's fourth secondary research question:

What types of writing practices do the participants find to be most effective, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

Overall, the writing practices were relatively consistent among participants, including the ways in which they evaluated the personal effectiveness of their writing, their physical writing spaces (types of journal(s) used and locations of writing), choices involving writing topics, format, and timing. Ellen represented a special case in data collection in that her unique circumstances intensified her responses and affected her writing practices, as will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Personal Writing

Using their feelings as a gauge was the predominant way in which participants determined whether or not writing was personally effective for them. If a participant felt better after writing, then the writing was deemed to be successful. In her third interview, Jane summarized this general opinion on the part of the participants: "[Only] if I felt better or if it felt as if a weight was lifted did I think I gained value through the writing." Pam provided a similar response in her third interview when asked how she assessed the value of her writing: "Just the way I felt during and after the writing."

Renee took her assessment of writing value to a deeper level than just pure feelings, attributing value based on articulated, perceived benefits; however, these in

turn seemed to be based on the emotions generated in her when she considered or reacted to the product of her writing. "The writing which I consider valuable either heals me emotionally, such as poetry, or gives me a sense of pride and recognition, such as customer newsletters," she said in her third interview. "Writing which accomplishes neither is not beneficial to me."

Julie articulated a similar benefits-oriented approach to her writing, which again referred back to perceived improvement in her emotional state. "On the days that I would be having a bad day or was extremely stressed or incredibly tired, I found that the journal entries helped me to calm down and relax, and work through some of the emotions I felt," she said in her third interview. "Because writing the journal entries helped me to relax more than the other writing, I chose to engage in this type of writing more so than the others."

Choices Involving Writing Practices

Overwhelmingly, the participants in this inquiry preferred to control all of their writing, including the guidelines to follow while engaging in the writing (i.e., preferring guidelines of their own conception over both the required instructions and optional writing prompts that were provided), and their preferred physical writing spaces (both the physical location of their writing and their personal location as they engaged in the writing), as well as the choices of writing topics.

Choice of Topics

Personal relevancy seemed to figure strongly in the writing approaches used by participants. In particular, being able to choose her own writing topics seemed to go hand-in-glove with whether a participant deemed the writing to be effective. Rather than

involving the writing prompts provided at the beginning of the study (see Appendix C), the predominant writing type in the inquiry was self-reflective journaling, in which each participant wrote about topics that were important to her at the time. "I have been writing about my own topics, mostly about the things that are going on in my life and my family right now," said Julie in her second interview. "I chose to write about these topics rather than the prompts because the writings have been an excellent reliever of stress and have also allowed for me to work through my own thoughts and gain new perspectives on my life." Sandy's experiences were similar. "I wrote about topics that were important to me as they came up in my life," said Sandy in her third interview. "I picked my own topics and didn't use the guidelines or prompts."

Like Julie and Sandy, the other participants did not feel that the writing prompts provided were useful. Molly, Pam, and Grace were the only participants who even spoke of trying the writing prompts, and none found them to be nearly as effective as being able to choose their own topics. "I kept the writing prompts around for ideas but most often just wrote what was on my mind," said Molly in her third interview. Pam tried the writing prompts but also preferred her own topics. "I used the writing prompts when I first started the study, but now I usually use my own topics," she said in her second interview. Grace acknowledged using the prompts but pointed out that she relied more on her own ideas. "I just kept a journal and wrote about whatever came to mind that particular day," she said in her third interview. "I found this to be very beneficial and found that I just really enjoyed putting my thoughts on paper."

Other than the journal writing, Julie tried some creative writing, and Sandy wrote on blogs and discussion boards. Neither found these approaches as effective as the self-reflective journaling, however.

As will be discussed in more detail later in the special-case section, Ellen was another participant who wanted to choose her writing topics, but her choice of topics were determined by her life events and fell outside the parameters of this inquiry. She did not even consciously associate her personal writing with the research questions in this inquiry, since her primary motivating factor for writing was not study participation as it had been at the beginning of this inquiry. The connections between her writing, which was completed during the study timeframe, and the research questions were made as I triangulated data within the data consolidation and analyses.

Choice of Writing Guidelines

Personal choice also extended to personal choice concerning writing practices: All of the participants admittedly did not adhere to the required writing guidelines as provided at the beginning of the study. Instead, most wrote when they felt they had something to write about or when they had time. "I have not really followed the guidelines of writing twice a week for 20 to 30 minutes," said Molly in her second interview. "Instead, I write when I have time to and when certain thoughts or ideas strike me." Sandy's experiences were similar. "I write when I am inclined to do so, when I feel I have something to record," she said in her second interview.

Jane chose to write only when she had some problem or issue to work through. "It was very hard to keep with the writing on a consistent basis throughout the study due to the lack of time to do so, especially when things were going well," she said in her

third interview. "If things were going well, I just didn't write." Julie tried to write according to her self-established daily guidelines, but she still ran into time constraints. "I try to write every day, but I have missed a few days," she said in her second interview. "The biggest contributing factor to not being able to write has been additional work responsibilities."

Choice of Physical Writing Spaces

Because participants predominantly wanted to keep their writings private, most chose to write in a personal journal, either hardcopy or electronic.

Hardcopy versus electronic journals. Jane, Julie, Grace, and Renee chose to handwrite in hardcopy journals. "I am only writing in a personal journal as this is the most private and comfortable for me," Jane said in her second interview. "Some subjects I am writing about and struggling with are VERY private, and this is the best venue for my outlet," she emphasized. Julie also wrote in a hardcopy journal because of the personal nature of her writing. "Because I felt that the writing was personal, I chose to use a notebook rather than using a computer or other type of electronic journal to write in," she said in her third interview. "Using the notebook made me feel more like the writing was a journal." Grace also used a handwritten journal because it was portable. "I kept a small spiral notebook in my purse that I used for the writing," she said in her third interview.

In contrast, Pam, Molly, Liz, Amy, and Ellen preferred keeping a typewritten record of their writing. "I write using the computer, journal style," said Pam in her third interview. Likewise, Molly said in her second interview, "I type on the computer because it is faster and more convenient to me." Convenience influenced Liz's choice of an

electronic journal as well. "I write at my computer after the kids go to bed," she said in her second interview. "Typing is easier, and at night is the only quiet time I have all day." Sandy used both handwritten and typewritten journals, making entries in either depending on convenience and proximity.

Private versus public writing venues. None of the participants used the public discussion boards provided for the study participants, although Sandy did write in some public venues outside of the study, including blogs and classroom discussion boards. In addition, Amy acknowledged that she used the social networking site Facebook, which she said has helped to stick to her exercise commitments. "I also think posting on FB is helping me stay accountable, so that writing is helping too," she said in her third interview.

Writing location of home versus work. A few of the participants say that they benefitted from engaging in personal writing while at work. Both Pam and Grace chose to write at work during lunchtime, although Grace also wrote sometimes at home and in other venues. "I mostly wrote while at work, during lunchtime, but I also wrote at home a couple of times, and once while I was waiting in a car line to pick up my son from school," she said in her third interview. Pam preferred personal writing at work as well because it enabled her to work through home issues in a non-home environment. "Personal writing at work gives me a chance to work through the 'mother stuff' at work, where I have some quiet time to think it through," she said in her second interview.

Most of the participants, however, chose their home as the space in which to write, predominantly because the writing in which the participants were engaging was private. As she described above, Liz wrote on her computer in the evening after her

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children were in bed. In contrast, Julie wrote in the morning before her children were awake. "I write in a composition journal early in the morning in my living room while I am drinking my morning cup of coffee, before my husband or my children are awake," she said in her second interview. "This is the best time and place for me to write because the house is quiet and I am able to relax without being exhausted and think the most clearly out of the entire day." When she was able, Renee enjoyed writing in a natural setting, such as the woods or the seashore. "I am greatly touched by the beauty Mother Earth has to offer," she said in her third interview, "and writing about this beauty enables me to connect with the world around me."

Ellen: Special Case

The one exception to the consistency within the study is Ellen, who reflects a special case within this inquiry because her data are different from the normal results. Taking into account the multiple realities inherent in qualitative research, a special case analysis can be useful in introducing alternative interpretations of the data results in a case such as this one.

Ellen began the study like the other participants, saying in her autobiography that "being a professional woman and a mother is a challenge," but accepting her role as a working mother as just something that she did. She shared her expectations for the study in her first interview. "I think [the study writing] will help me to take the time," she said. "I enjoy writing but I've never taken the time to really do a journal. So maybe it would help me explore whether I'd enjoy doing that. But because I will be doing this study, I will definitely make the time, and I can see if I enjoy it."

Her intention to participate in the study was completely trumped, however, one month after the study began, when her unborn daughter died unexpectedly at almost 25 weeks gestation. At this point, Ellen opted to stop her study participation. "I haven't been doing any writing related to being a working mom," she said in her second interview. "Being a working mom is just not something that I was too stressed about to begin with and even [am] less now."

To help cope with her loss, though, Ellen began email correspondence with another woman who had had similar experiences.

A few months later, Ellen painfully chose to electively terminate another pregnancy, also a daughter, due to the baby's having severe genetic abnormalities. As after her first pregnancy loss, Ellen again turned to writing outside the parameters of the study, becoming involved with an online support group and writing a letter to government officials petitioning for changes to a law that had adversely affected her. Her final writing sample is this letter that she wrote to politicians, ending with this collective appeal:

> I write to you for the sake of all other federal employees who may find themselves in this position. There was nothing I did or did not do that caused my baby's defects. They were caused by a random fluke, as she was developing something just went wrong. Any female federal employee of child bearing age could find themselves in the exact same position I was in.

Unlike the other participants, Ellen's motivations for writing went beyond a quest for self-discovery or an obligation to participate in the study. She wrote specifically for therapeutic healing benefits—driven, as Moran (2004) was in writing about her sister's

murder, by an innate sense that writing could bring healing—as well as to accomplish an external change in the practical world. Although the intensity with which she approached her writing was heightened by her losses, Ellen's gauge of writing effectiveness, like that of the other participants, was to feel better. Like the other participants, she also preferred to choose her own writing topics and guidelines. Unlike the other participants, however, Ellen wrote specifically to effect public changes and so chose to make her writing public rather than keep it private.

At one point, I suggested that Ellen engage in personal writing for healing benefits, and even provided Ellen with a resource guide, but Ellen said that she was unwilling to invest her time or hope of healing into something that may not yield those desired results. Her mistrust of writing as a healing method may reflect the fact that writing has not been prompted in the mainstream in the same way that a medication with a similar healing effect would have (Spiegel, 1999, p. 1329). Ellen's writing was intended to make personal connections with others in similar situations, as well as to effect public changes, not as an introspective use of writing for healing. Her writing efforts did, however, yield unanticipated personal healing benefits.

It can be said that Ellen's social practices are similar to those of the other participants, except that her practices became infused with a greater intensity due to her life circumstances, as well as with a new goal in her focus on public policy. These data illustrate in part the relationship between experience and motivation and the role that these elements can take in personal writing.

Summary of Participant Writing Practices

While the individual situations of the participants varied and reflected a variety of prior experiences, the social practices implemented within the study, which reflected strong preferences, were relatively consistent among participants. These can be represented in the abbreviated form which appears in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Writing Practices

Writing practice	General participant practices	Ellen's special-case practices[a]
Writing gauge	Feeling better and/or perceivable benefits	Feeling better; effecting change
Writing venue	Private journal, electronic or handwritten	Emails, public discussion boards, public letters; no personal writing
Writing place	Home primarily, sometimes work	Home, linked to outside via Internet
Writing practices	Self-reflective journaling	Personal sharing/testimony
Writing topics	Self-determined, non-prompted	Self-determined, focused on pregnancy losses

[a]Reflecting Ellen's increased motivational intensity.

As this table shows, participants preferred to write in self-reflective, private journaling for which they chose their own, open-ended topics, in additional to writing according to self-defined guidelines. All of the 10 participants in the core subgroup had similar types of practices and motivations in their writing. Overall, however, Ellen's practices were infused with more intensity due to the strong motivations from her multiple pregnancy losses during the course of the study. For example, participants preferred to choose their own writing topics. Ellen chose her own topics as well, but instead of choosing a variety of self-determined topics, she focused her writing efforts on only one topic, that of her pregnancy losses.

The next chapter, Chapter 10, addresses the overarching research question of balance through showing how the data addresses the potential effects of writing for

working mothers in general, thereby responding to the fifth of the secondary research

questions.

CHAPTER 10

EFFECTS OF WRITING FOR OTHER WORKING MOTHERS

In addition to questions concerning how writing has impacted them personally, participants were asked to provide suggestions as to how personal writing could benefit other working mothers. Their responses have been used to address the fifth research question:

What potential positive effects and drawbacks could personal writing have for other working mothers, judging from participants' perspectives about personal writing?

Most of participants' responses were based upon their individual experiences, which they theoretically transferred onto other working mothers.

Writing Can Work for Some, But Not All, Working Mothers

Both Sandy and Liz felt that writing can benefit some, although not all, working mothers. "I believe that writing can help working mothers, but the mother has to be intrinsically motivated to write and must see value in writing," Sandy said in her third interview, echoing a predominant pattern that emerged in the data for this study. "She also needs to see a direct correlation between her writing and her life improvement." Liz's feelings were similar to Sandy's, if less explicitly stated: "I know writing can be a very powerful tool in dealing with the ups and downs of life, but I think it really depends on the person," she said in her second interview.

Molly and Amy also agreed that certain factors need to be present in order for writing to be effective for working mothers. Molly directly extended her thoughts on her own experiences to speculating about the potential effects for others. "There have been several situations that were worse in my mind that in reality," she said in her second

interview. "Writing about them and describing them on paper helped me to see I was being irrational. [In this way,] I think writing could be helpful [for other working mothers]." She also emphasized that "the challenge is finding the time to do it," suggesting that others may share her experiences with the challenges of writing, as well as its benefits.

Like Molly, Amy said that finding time could be a drawback for working mothers. "I believe that finding time to journal daily would be a huge stress reliever and [lead to a] sense of personal enjoyment, but finding time would need to be forced at first, I think," Amy said in her third interview. Perhaps rooted in her dedication to missionary work, Amy believes that a commitment to writing might be more effective if it were connected with other people in need of help.

Thus, even with some restrictions and qualifiers, participants defined several ways in which personal writing has benefitted them and so can potentially benefit other working mothers. Participants also provided ways in which they believe that working mothers could be motivated to engage in personal writing. These recommendations fall generally into categories that seem to conceive of writing metaphorically as either a space provided in a person's life, or an agent for change and development. The following sections cover each of these ideas in turn.

Writing Journal as a Metaphorical Personal Space

Some of the participants recognized the real physical space provided by a personal journal and spoke of benefits that working mothers could realize by using this defined space.

Specifically, a journal can provide a place to:

- vent;

- express gratitude;

- regain a sense of self.

Each of these approaches will be discussed in further detail in the sections that follow.

Journal as a Place to Vent

Having an unconditional sounding board is one way in which participants believe that personal writing can help working mothers. "I can see it as an outlet when moms are frustrated," Grace said in her second interview. Jane spoke a great deal in her personal responses about how writing helped her to vent her feelings and frustrations and, not surprisingly, also asserted that this is a benefit that other working mothers could experience through writing. "Writing will give a venue to vent, so you can be present in the moments you really don't want to miss," Jane said in her third interview. "Putting thoughts down on paper to get them out of the front of your mind so you can concentrate on family would strongly motivate a working mother to engage in personal writing," she added.

Molly's recommendations were similar. "I believe it can help one reflect on their feelings and get any stressors out of their mind and onto paper," she said in her third interview; this comment was reminiscent of her second interview description of writing as being "like telling your thoughts to your best friend or husband but not getting any comments back."

Although not a member of the core subgroup, Nancy had strong feelings about how venting through writing can be a valuable release for other working mothers. "I

think writing can have a big role in helping a working mother," she said in her second interview. "It is a way to vent about work and personal issues. There are so many times when I was challenged at work, and my husband can only hear my stories and complaints so many times, so writing was a good way of escaping/releasing that anger or anxiety."

Journal as a Place to Express Gratitude

Brother David Steindl-Rast (2010) has described "gratitude" as being "that inner movement of radiation in which you are really basically concerned with joy, with gratitude for life and gratitude also for the opportunity to do something if it is given to you" (p. 57). Based upon Steindl-Rast's teachings, Adams (2000) has developed a therapeutic writing exercise in which a person is to list "100 gratitudes," the intentions being to illustrate the positive pieces of one's life (p. 136).

Like Adams (2000), Liz suggested that using the journal as a dedicated place to express gratitude could be a way in which writing could be more beneficial for both her and other working mothers. Working mothers could "use it more as gratitude writing, to be sure we are thankful for all the great parts of being a mom," she explained in her second interview.

Renee has used her journal as a place for expressing gratitude for her son, evidenced through the pain she felt in being separated from him, as well as her ability to pull out of her abusive marriage. "Once I came to the U.S., I wrote to show both my gratitude that I escaped my abuser," she said in her fourth interview. "But I also expressed my grief that I was not able to bring my son back [from India] with me. I missed him dearly."

Amy used her final writing sample, which she titled "My Blessings," to express this kind of gratitude:

I know that make my yearly trips to Honduras to work in that mission field has shown me how truly blessed we are to just be Americans. It was just by the grace of God that I was born on U.S. soil and by that alone, I am blessed….How can some of us be blessed so greatly and others suffer so very much?...Thank you Lord for letting me be reminded of how blessed I am and please help me to stay focused on what we have and NOT what I want us to have.

Journal as a Place to Regain a Sense of Self

Several of the participants described how working mothers do not take enough time for themselves, even losing their sense of self amidst all of their other responsibilities. Personal writing can be a way to recapture that lost self in different ways. For example, writing forces a woman to spend some time on herself. "I think personal writing is an excellent way for any mother to gain a sense of self back," said Julie in her second interview. "It's easy to lose yourself completely in your children, and that can create a variety of emotions, including sadness and nostalgia." However, Julie acknowledged her children as central presences in her writing: "Although I sometimes think and write about how my life was before I had the twins, I find that I am happiest when I write about the kids."

"The writing will enable working mothers to get in touch with themselves and find inner peace like I did," added Renee in her third interview. "Ultimately, it will enable them to approach their lives and interact with people in a calmer, more confident, and more positive manner."

Journal as a Place for Reflection

The sense of self that both Julie and Renee describe involves writing about their current situations and reflecting upon them to gain new perspectives. Both Grace and Pam also mentioned using writing for reflection and growth. "I think for some moms, a journal can be a great avenue to express personal thoughts and feelings and work through issues," Grace said in her third interview. Pam's recommendations were similar. "I think a working mother could turn to writing if she needs a place to think," she said in her third interview. "I think it could work well, say, on the bus on the way home from work each day." Using writing in this way can be an effective way to address problems, as data from this inquiry have shown that writing for problem-solving has been an effective technique for working mothers.

<div align="center">

Writing Journal as an Agent

</div>

In addition to being a physical space, some of the participants also spoke of their writing journals as being entities, agents, or catalysts for change. "For those who give writing a chance, it can be a very, very powerful force for positive change," said Sandy in her third interview.

Participants said that writing can be a positive agent to:

- relieve stress;
- establish a life balance.

Each of these approaches will be discussed in further detail in the sections that follow.

Journaling to Relieve Stress

At the study onset, participants identified sources of stress as being one of the primary problems that they face as working mothers. Many of the participants found that writing was a way to reduce stress in their lives and potentially in the lives of other working mothers. "Writing has helped relieve a significant amount of my stress and has helped me relax, which are two things that I think every mother needs," Julie said in her second interview.

Amy agreed that writing can help to relieve stress for other working mothers, although, again, she qualified that benefit with the drawback of time. Her comment on this, cited above, is repeated here. "I believe that finding time to journal daily would be a huge stress reliever and sense of personal enjoyment, but finding time would need to be forced at first, I think," she said in her third interview.

Having a need to relieve stress in their lives can be a factor motivating working mothers to turn to writing, according to both Molly and Grace. "Having a low or high point in the roller coaster of a working mom would motivate her to put her thoughts into writing," said Grace in her third interview.

Journaling to Establish a Life Balance

Juggling all of her roles, responsibilities, and identities can be a challenge for a working mother, but some study participants say that writing can be a way in which working mothers can achieve more of a balance in their lives. "Yes, I do believe it can have a role in helping with work/life balance," said Pam in her third interview. Renee elaborated: "Without a doubt, I believe that writing can help other working mothers achieve a balance in their lives," she said in her third interview. "I think if they commit to

setting aside 10-15 minutes, even 2-3 times a week, to write for themselves, they will start to recognize more positive aspects of their lives and appreciate themselves more as both mothers and individuals." Jane also said that writing can help other working mothers with balance issues, as it has helped her. "Now that I have engaged in writing as a working mother, I believe writing can have a role in helping anyone with their life/balance issues," she said in her second interview.

Knowing that writing can potentially also help her family might also motivate a working mother to try personal writing. "I think the biggest factor is that personal writing can help working mothers emotionally, which is beneficial to their children," said Julie in her third interview. Jane's recommendations are similar. "Putting thoughts down on paper to get them out of the front of your mind so you can concentrate on family would strongly motivate a working mother to engage in personal writing," Jane said in her third interview.

Hearing how writing has benefitted other working mothers may also motivate a woman to try her own personal writing. "I think it would benefit working mothers to read testimonies of other working mothers who have engaged in personal writing – especially those who are in the same age bracket or who share a similar socioeconomic background," said Renee in her third interview.

"Another motivator is a personal writing group," Renee continued, noting a specific source of possible encouragement, which will be developed further in a later section. "Joining such a group is a big incentive, as these mothers would not feel like they are alone when engaging in the personal writing process. The group could discuss the general subject matter of their writing and the benefits that they reap." Sandy

asserted that these kinds of testimonies would need to be linked to personal experiences to be most effective. "A working mother could be motivated to write if she can see a direct correlation between her writing and her life improvement," she said in her third interview. A writer's group would both enable the working mother to see her own life improvements via personal writing, as well as hear about the life improvements of other working mothers.

Amy believes that it is tough for a working mother to make time for writing, so she said that connecting her writing with helping others might be a writing motivator that would yield personal balance benefits. She implicitly related her personal experiences to the hypothetical experiences of others, as she moved from the singular first person "I" to the plural first person "we" when she provided her recommendation. "It would need to be tied to helping others somehow to start, *I* think, as *we* don't find time for ourselves much," Amy said in her third interview (emphasis added).

Summary of Participant Recommendations for Other Working Mothers

With their wide array of experiences through personal writing, participants have applied their own experiences and insights to derive a list of benefits that they believe other working mothers could realize through writing, plus motivational factors that they feel could prompt working mothers to engage in the writing in the first place. Participants have projected their personal experiences with writing onto other working mothers, including both drawbacks and benefits of personal writing.

The next chapter, Chapter 11, presents patterns and themes that emerged through the data, as well as relevant findings and interpretations that can be drawn from

these patterns. First, however, the inquiry's problem, research questions, and

underlying methodology are briefly reviewed.

CHAPTER 11

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This inquiry's data yielded interesting and sometimes unexpected results

emerging from participants' varied experiences in engaging in personal writing.

Participants experienced benefits in healing, including stress relief, and problem-

solving, as well as effects on their social relationships, concepts of self and identity, and

other areas. In some case, these effects were negative. This section identifies themes

that emerged from the data, as well as presents recommendations that emerged from

these themes. First however, the inquiry's problem, research questions, and

methodology are briefly reviewed.

Statement of the Problem

Based within composition studies, this inquiry's guiding problem was as follows:

How does personal narrative writing impact the various balance issues with a

group of working mothers, judging from their personal experiences with and

testimonies about personal narrative writing over a five-month study period?

Research Questions

This was the overarching research question for this inquiry:

How does personal narrative writing impact the various balance issues with the

working mothers who participated in this inquiry, judging from their personal

experiences with and testimonies about personal narrative writing over a five-

month study period?

Specifically, this inquiry addressed these underlying, secondary research questions:

1. How does personal narrative writing impact stress (both psychological and physical) in participants' lives, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

2. How does personal narrative journaling impact problem-solving or coping strategies in participants' lives, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

3. What other personal effects do participants experience through their personal writing, including effects on personal relationships and concepts of self and identity, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

4. What types of writing practices do the participants find to be most effective, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?

5. What potential positive effects and drawbacks could personal writing have for other working mothers, judging from participants' perspectives about personal writing?

Review of Methodology

The study included three main parts, including preliminary pre-study work, the study itself, and post-study follow-up. During the pre-study period, which ran for one month, I interviewed each participant and asked her to write a 500-word autobiographical piece, as well as presented her with a list of writing prompts.

During the study, which ran for five months, I asked each participant to write at least two times per week, at least 20-30 minutes per session, or longer if she felt compelled to. I also conducted an in-progress interview of each participant.

During the post study, which ran for one month, I interviewed each participant two more times, right once after the study ended and once approximately two weeks later to gain additional demographic data which enriched the inquiry data that were collected. During these final interviews, I also invited each participant to share some of her personal writing as data sources.

Findings and Interpretation Themes

Based upon the data presented in previous chapters, several major findings emerged, some supported by previous research and others raising the need for more research. Through this inquiry, five major findings themes emerged that address the five secondary research questions, respectively, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Secondary Research Questions and Corresponding Inquiry Findings Themes

Secondary research question	Related findings theme
How does personal narrative writing impact stress (both psychological and physical) in participants' lives, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?	Working mothers are stressed, but personal writing has the potential to relieve stress.
How does personal narrative journaling impact problem-solving or coping strategies in participants' lives, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?	Personal writing has the potential to impact problem-solving and memory.
What other personal effects do participants experience through their personal writing, including effects on personal relationships and concepts of self and identity, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?	Personal writing has the potential to impact self-defined concepts of identity and voice, among other effects.
What types of writing practices do the participants find to be most effective, judging from their personal experiences with and testimonies about personal writing?	Working mothers want to control their writing practices.
What potential positive effects and drawbacks could personal writing have for other working mothers, judging from participants' perspectives about personal writing?	Relationships may exist among motivation, value, and stress relief for working mothers, but personal writing as a coping method may not work for everyone.

Each of these major findings themes as presented in Table 4 will be explored in more detail in the sections that follow.

Theme 1: Stress, Working Mothers, and the Potential Impact of Writing

As was discussed in Chapter 2, a primary source of stress for working mothers is the negative emotion of guilt, which has been said to exist as "epidemic levels among working mothers" (Greenberg & Avigdor, 2009, p. 55). "Nearly all mothers have experienced some form of guilt—whether it's a feeling that they haven't done enough for their children or a sense of guilt over choosing to do something for themselves without

their kids," added working mother/writer Tina Games (n.d., para. 5). Data from this inquiry corroborated these viewpoints: Working mothers are stressed, the same challenge also reported in the 2009 *Working Mother* magazine reader survey (Eckel, 2009, p. 50), as also cited in Chapter 2.

Specifically, the stress identified through this inquiry fell into several categories also reflected in related popular literature, including a lack of time (Crittenden, 1999; Bachmann, 2008; Riss, 2008), guilt and exhaustion (Crittenden, 1999), job and workplace issues (Crittenden, 2001; de Vise, 2010; E. Evans, 2009; Friedan, 1981; Holcomb, 1998; O'Reilly, 2008), and judgments by others (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2009; Weston, 2008).

As indicated in Chapter 4, however, areas of stress often overlapped with other areas of concern for the participant working mothers, including problem-solving, social relationships, and self and identity issues. In this vein, the stress-related issues indicated by the participants included maintaining relationships, especially with one's spouse and children, money issues, the drive to "do it all," the hope for something better in terms of personal fulfillment and work/life balance, and issues concerning identity and personal voice.

Personal writing can relieve stress. The related interdisciplinary literature presented in Chapter 2 indicated that writing can help to alleviate both psychological and physical stress. The findings from this inquiry corroborated this previous research and literature. More than half of the core subgroup indicated that personal writing helped them to relieve psychological stress in three primary ways:

1. Catharsis.

2. Formation of new perspectives.

3. Increased sense of empowerment.

In addition, this inquiry revealed that the relief of psychological stress resulted in

physical health benefits, including these:

1. Improved sleep.

2. Fatigue and headache relief.

3. Eating control and weight management.

Each of these psychological and physical benefits of writing will be developed further in

the sections that follow, using both related literature and data from this inquiry.

Relief of psychological stress. In Beatty's (2003) study of recovering

alcoholics, eight out of her 10 participants used writing for catharsis, or "getting it out,

dumping" (p. 123). Similarly, several of this inquiry's participants used writing to get their

feelings, thoughts, and perspectives out of their minds and onto screen or paper.

Several participants also reported that writing enabled them to develop new,

healthier perspectives about their current situations, which made these situations more

manageable. These adaptations of new perspectives through writing reflect the

development of new memory schemas (Flower and Hayes, 1981/2003), as well as the

objectifying of an experience (Moran, 2004). In fact, some participants incorporated self-

directed, dialectic questioning into their writing, reflecting the shift between subjective

and objective perspectives, or Macrorie's (1985) "I" and "The Others" perspectives, the

incorporation of both questioner and questionee into one writing entry.

A byproduct of these new perspectives for some participants was the gaining of power and control over their situations, which then made them agents for their own change and healing (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000; Freire, 1974). This newfound power enabled participants to make more effective decisions regarding their work-home situations (a benefit which also ties in with the ways in which writing relates to problem-solving) and led them to respect themselves more as individuals (a point which also ties in with the ways in which writing relates to self and identity).

Relief of physical stress through the relief of psychological stress. The psychological benefits of writing were also related to physical benefits within this inquiry. The cathartic nature of writing helped one participant to enjoy improved sleep, a benefit of writing that Mosher and Danoff-Burg (2006) also found in their study of college students. The development of new perspectives enabled some participants to alleviate symptoms of their physical stress as well; for example, refocusing their attention through writing enabled some participants to avoid focusing on physical maladies, such as fatigue and headaches. Plus, empowerment through writing enabled other participants to control their eating and lose weight, recalling the weight management techniques taught by Julia Cameron (2007).

What is especially interesting in these results is the relationship between the psychological and physical effects of writing. Emig (1977/2003) has taught that writing is a whole-brain activity, involving synchronicity between the more logical left brain and the more emotional right brain. Moreover, Pennebaker (1991) has found that when a person psychologically "lets go" through writing or talking, the person experiences physical signs such as relaxed facial muscles, decrease perspiration, and lowering of heart rate

and blood pressure, as well as increased symmetry in left-brain/right-brain brainwave activity (p. 162).

Simultaneously, as the brain increases in efficiency, there are also notable physiological effects, reinforcing the effectiveness of Perl's (1980/1994, 2001, 2004) concept of felt sense, where one can use the body's responses to gauge the effectiveness of one's writing. This inquiry's findings have demonstrated these relationships between the psychological and physical effects of writing.

Theme 2: Writing Can Impact Problem-Solving and Memory

As indicated in Chapter 4, areas of stress often overlapped with other areas of concern for the inquiry participants. Likewise, in some cases, writing for stress relief yielded benefits beyond stress relief, including benefits involving problem-solving, and even improved memory.

For example, some participants reported that writing enabled them to form new perspectives, which resulted in perceived psychological and physical benefits. The development of these new perspectives through writing reflect the simultaneous development of new memory schemas (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003), potentially improving mental functioning and increasing memory potential.

More efficient mental functioning has also been associated with increased problem-solving abilities (Klein, 2002; Lutgendorf & Ullrich, 2002; Moskowitz, 2008). One participant reported that while cathartic writing decreased her stress levels, it also helped to streamline her mental functioning, enabling her to realize more effective problem-solving. Other participants said that the power and agency that personal writing

yielded for them also enabled them to make more effective decisions regarding their work-home situations.

In this inquiry, writing has helped some participants to trigger deeper memories, an adaptation of Emig's (1977/2003) "writing to learn" philosophy, in which the process of writing releases items of memory that can be integrated into narrative experiences, similar to what Nemat (2008) experienced in her recollections of her imprisonment in Tehran.

Motivation can also impact problem-solving and memory, as some researchers believe that memory is motivated through a goal hierarchy that is part of working memory. Researcher Martin Conway (2005) describes this relationship among writing, memory, and narrative developments of self as the Self-Memory System (SMS); the SMS consists of the working self (a collection of goals and self-images) and the autobiographical memory knowledge base (Conway, 2005, p. 594). "When these components interlock in acts of remembering," said Conway, "specific autobiographical memories can be formed" (p. 594). Although they were not asked to do so, several participants reported enjoying rereading their writing and reflections, especially regarding experiences with their children that they had recorded. This use of writing ties in with Cheeseman's (2006) study about how baby books are used by mothers as a way of memory recreation and identity formation.

Not all participants realized problem-solving or memory benefits through writing, however, primarily because of time constraints. One participant addressed the potential stresses that arose between the time gap necessary between writing and reflection and the immediacy of some urgent real-life challenges. On a related note, another

participant raised the partially time-related issue of a possible disconnect between the

well-organized, written viewpoint and the more chaotic life situation in which solutions

need to be implemented immediately.

These findings reinforce the idea that personal writing does not yield the same

benefits for each person, nor can it be said to be a relevant coping tool in all types of

situations. Some, however, can realize problem-solving benefits through personal

writing.

Theme 3: Writing Can Impact Identity and Voice

Previous research has shown that personal writing can impact concepts of

identity and voice, and similar results were revealed through this inquiry. Almost all of

the participants reported positive effects on their concepts of identity and voice due to

their personal writing. These data, however, were based on self-defined concepts of

identity and voice. Generally, judging from the context of their usage, these were the

ways in which participants defined the concepts of identity and voice:

> *Identity:* This concept embodied the various roles that the person assumed, as
>
> well as the essence of the person, those integral qualities such as self-
>
> confidence, compassion, and patience that comprised her (what some may also
>
> refer to as concepts of "self").
>
> *Voice:* The articulation of the self, both verbally (to others) and nonverbally (to
>
> self).

Some participants in this inquiry experienced an enriched sense of identity

through their personal writing. In Belenky et al.'s (1997) terms, one participant (Julie)

was able to move from defining herself solely by her roles (a state of received

knowledge) to an expanded identity that included but was not solely defined by her role as a mother (a state of constructed knowledge).

In addition, some participants found that the writing helped to strengthen and articulate their positive personal voices. One participant (Grace) even found that her writing helped to squelch her negative inner critical voice, while another participant (Renee) composed a written letter to her inner self and yet another (Sandy) spoke about listening more closely to her inner wisdom through her study participation. These are the only participants who directly acknowledged having the multiple voices described by some scholars (Gilligan, 1993; Schiwy, 1996).

These enhanced concepts of identity and voice empowered some participants to make other, seemingly unrelated, changes in their lives. As was previously mentioned, writing helped some participants (Julie & Amy) with their eating and weight management. For another participant (Liz), writing prompted her to make other life changes, including working out and volunteering at church.

Theme 4: Working Mothers Want to Control Their Writing Practices

Before the study began, participants were given instructions to write about whatever subjects they chose, and they were provided with a list of 10 writing prompts to use at their discretion. See Appendices B and C for lists of the prompts. A few participants used the prompts sparingly, but participants overwhelmingly preferred to choose their own writing subjects, writing about the topics that were most important to them at the particular time of the writing.

While participants chose their own writing topics—allowed within the flexible parameters of the study—they also did not follow the specific writing duration guidelines

provided, which specified that they should write at least two times per week, at least 10-15 minutes per session. Instead, participants wrote at times and for durations that were most convenient for them, which varied from quick jottings to up to 30 minutes in some instances. This disregard for instructions reflects a limitation of this inquiry, as discussed in Chapter 1. This self-determined writing practice, however, is considered to be effective in yielding personal growth benefits through writing: "My own experience is that journal writing works best when used on an as-needed basis," said Pennebaker (2004). "If your life is going well, you are happy, and you are not obsessing about anything in the past, why overanalyze yourself?" (p. 19).

Table 5 presents the participation duration for each participant in the core subgroup over the five-month study period along with the approximate amount of time that each participant spent writing during the individual's participation period. These self-determined writing durations can also both determine and reflect the participants' changing motivation for writing, presented both in this table and explained in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

Table 5

Subgroup Participation Durations, Writing Periods, and Motivational Changes

Participant	Duration[a]	Writings[b]	Time[c]	Total[d]	Modification reasons[e]	Motivational changes
Renee	3	1	30	12	*I find that I write personally mostly when I am in a good mood. When I am under stress and preoccupied with my work, I push my personal writing aside (which I know I should not be doing, since I have experienced the therapeutic properties of writing).* (3rd interview)	Renee began the study with past, positive writing experiences. Her appreciation for writing grew throughout the study, showing her more ways that her writing can help with managing her present feelings about her son's growing up.
Julie	5	4-5	10-20	100	*There were some periods when I was not able to write every day. A few times over the holidays I did not engage in writing, and there were additional times when my children were ill that I did not have the time to write in the journal.* (3rd interview)	Julie began the study with past, positive writing experiences. Through participation, and an intention toward daily journal writing, she also learned how writing could help with social relationships, problem-solving and weight management
Sandy	5	1	10	20	*I wrote about topics that were important to me as they came up in my life. No definable periods [of stopping writing]. I just wrote sporadically.* (3rd interview)	Sandy began the study with both past, positive personal writing experiences and social obligations for the writing. Through participation, she grew to appreciate more the value of personal writing.
Jane	5	1	15	20	*My writing pattern seemed to follow with more writing on days that were stressful either from pressures at work or home, so if I was having a good week, I didn't write.*	Jane began the study with a present, social obligation (to the researcher), but through participation, she grew to personally value writing.
Grace	5	1-2	10-20	30	*The reason I didn't write was definitely due to time constraints or other things going on that required my attention, and not because of a lack of interest.* (4th interview)	Grace began the study with optimism about the benefits of writing. These anticipated benefits were realized for both the present and the future.
Molly	5	1 EOW	10	10	*The second half of the study, I kept thinking I should write more but never got around to it.* (3rd interview)	Molly began the study with a combination of wanting to write and having a present, social obligation (to the researcher). She concluded that writing would not be an effective coping tool for her.

Participant	Durationª	Writingsᵇ	Timeᶜ	Totalᵈ	Modification reasonsᵉ	Motivational changes
Pam	5	2; @ end, 1 EOW	20	32	*I just didn't have time. My son started crawling/walking!* (3ʳᵈ interview)	Pam began the study with an obligation (to the researcher). Through participation, she concluded that writing was not an effective coping technique for her in the future.
Amy	2	1	10-15	8	*I wrote my biography and I found that enjoyable. I just did not find time to do other writing. I really found it relaxing what I did get to do but I never found time to do enough of it.*	Amy also began the study with an obligation (to the researcher). Through participation, she concluded that writing was not an effective coping tool for her.
Liz	5	1 EOW	15-30	10	*I found it very difficult to keep up with writings of any type. For some writing can be a venue to help work through problems and I know some keep a journal of what they are grateful for, but at the end of the night it was always a choice between writing lesson plans or writings.*	Liz began the study with a personal interest in being a research participant. Through participation, her personal interest in writing developed in a limited sense (i.e., for memory recollection).
Ellen	2	1 EOW	10	4	*[Daily] writing to [the other mother who also lost an unborn child] also gives me a time each day to think about my daughter and grieve....I haven't been doing any writing related to being a working mom.* (2ⁿᵈ interview)	Ellen began the study with an obligation (to the researcher). Through participation, she found writing to be helpful for her for specific purposes (i.e., therapeutic and public service purposes).
	3 (period after 1ˢᵗ pregnancy loss)	5 (for the 3 months after ending official study participation	10	60		

ªParticipation duration of 5-month study (taken from Table 2). ᵇ Average number writings/ week (EOW = every other week). ᶜAverage time/session (in minutes). ᵈTotal writing samples (without autobiography). ᵉParticipant-provided reasons for self-modifying writing practices (with source of comment).

In general, the participants who wrote less throughout the study were the ones who did not value their writing participation as much. For many of these participants, writing became just another burden, something else that they had to do in an already busy schedule. A personal lack of time and competing life demands were the primary reasons for the limited participation in most instances, as well as for the variance among writing participation.

Surprisingly, participants did not prefer the traditional freewriting technique that previous research has shown to be helpful in revealing a person's voice, where a person just writes anything that comes to mind unceasingly for a given period of time without much thought (Elbow, 1998b). Instead, participants seemed to put a lot of thought into their journaling topics, choosing to engage in self-reflective journaling in which they wrote about the events of their lives and their reflections concerning those events. Participants also chose whether to write in a hardcopy journal or an electronic journal, depending upon their goals and what was most convenient.

With the many challenges that working mothers manage, and the objective of many of the participants to "do it all," it is not surprising that these working mother participants also took charge of their writing practices, again increasing their sense of empowerment.

Disadvantages of enabling student choices. Running a completely student-centered classroom might not always be in the best interest of the students, however. In this inquiry, participants were in charge of choosing not only their writing topics but also their writing venues, and, as discussed previously, most preferred private writing in either hardcopy or electronic journals. However, the inquiry data also raises the possibility that a participant's choice of writing venue may have detrimentally affected the effectiveness of the participant's personal writing.

As was already discussed, not making adherence to the required writing duration an inflexible criterion for data collection resulted in a wide variety of writing durations for core subgroup participants, as presented in Table 5. In addition to this factor, some of the participants might have had more positive writing results if there had been more

structure required in their writing. Relevant to this point, Adams (1998) has suggested

that writing approaches dependent upon different degrees of structure may be useful

depending upon the situation and the person's approach to the writing process. She has

situated these approaches in terms of levels of structure on a "journal ladder"; she

speculates that writing can increase stress levels if it is unstructured (p. 1), as a blank

page can be intimidating to a writer. In addition, as cited in DeSalvo (1999), Pennebaker

has hypothesized that explicit instructions pertaining to writing structure might create a

feeling of safety that can be healing (p. 73).

   Hardcopy versus electronic writing. For example, letting students choose whether

to write in a hardcopy or electronic format might also affect the personal effectiveness of

their writing. In this inquiry, there was an interesting correlation between a participant's

motivation for personal writing at the study's conclusion and the writing format in which

she engaged during the study period. With the exception of Pam, the participants who

chose to write in hardcopy journals were positively motivated to continue writing after

the study's conclusion. Participants who chose to write in electronic journals did not feel

that they would continue writing after the study or only thought that they would write in

limited situations. Table 6 presents a summary of the writing format chosen by

participants and the level of their motivation at the end of the study.

Table 6

Comparison of Chosen Writing Format With Motivation for Personal Writing

Participant	Writing format	Motivation for writing[a]
Renee	Hardcopy & electronic	Intrinsic (positive)
Julie	Hardcopy	Intrinsic (positive)
Sandy	Hardcopy & electronic	Intrinsic (positive)
Grace	Hardcopy	Intrinsic (positive)
Jane	Hardcopy	Intrinsic (positive)
Pam	Hardcopy	Intrinsic (negative)
Molly	Electronic	Intrinsic (negative)
Liz	Electronic	Intrinsic (limited)
Amy	Electronic	Intrinsic (negative)
Ellen	Electronic	Intrinsic (limited)

[a]Participant motivation for personal writing at study conclusion.

When a person chooses a particular writing format or venue, she, in essence enters a predefined writing space. "Each writing space is a material and visual field, whose properties are determined by a writing technology and the uses to which that technology is put by a culture of readers and writers," said Jay David Bolter (2001). "A writing space is generated by the interaction of material properties and cultural choices and practices. Moreover, each space depends for its meaning on previous spaces or on contemporary spaces against which it competes" (p. 12).

So, when a person engages in handwriting, she engages in part in what Hesse (1999) calls "essayistic literacy," which is "characterized by texts of a certain length, complexity, and expected integrity (p. 34). In contrast, engaging in electronic communication incorporates common characteristics which Hesse describes as "terse, mostly single-draft, often composed in immediate response and not repose" (p. 34). Because electronic communication is commonly used in formal communication, it also brings into its writing space grammatical rules and editing capabilities, critical functions

that can be hard to turn off in even an informal writing situation. It is possible that the electronic journaling engaged in by participants imbued their writing space with criticism that may have negatively impacted their future motivation for writing. More research in this area needs to be conducted to see if a teacher's requiring a certain type of writing venue (i.e., hardcopy or electronic) may have a positive or negative impact on student learning.

Theme 5: Relationships Among Motivation, Value, and Stress in Writing

As was discussed in Chapter 4, motivation and value seem to be two primary factors determining whether or not a working mother would find personal writing to be an effective tool for coping with her myriad challenges, including stress relief, which, as defined in Chapter 1, can occur when there is an imbalance between demands and coping abilities. Furthermore, using self-determination theory (SDT) as a lens through which to view the element of motivation, the component of value, or what makes something important to a person, is key in determining the level of motivation.

In recommending how personal writing might be effective for other working mothers, inquiry participants extrapolated suggestions from their own experiences with personal writing, experiences which were affected in large part by the connections between motivation, value, and stress relief which emerged through the inquiry data.

Ellen's motivation, writing value, and stress levels. Ellen's special-case data are particularly useful in illustrating how motivation and value can function together in working-mother writing.

Prior to her pregnancy losses, Ellen said that her stress levels were relatively low. She reported not running into major difficulties managing her working-mother

challenges. Her demands and coping abilities were relatively balanced, resulting in a low level of motivation for needing to address them, also resulting in a low level of stress.

The situation changed after Ellen's first pregnancy loss, however. At this point, her demands exceeded her coping abilities, evidenced in Ellen's admission in her second interview that, although she was trying, she was not handling her losses very well in her estimation. Ellen had an admitted disparity between her demands and coping abilities. She also had motivation to try to heal from the situation, evidenced through her self-generated attempts at writing that she felt would lead to healing.

With this increased motivation for personal writing, Ellen continued to engage in writing that was personally meaningful for her, reporting in her third interview that this writing was helpful. Therefore, in a situation where demands exceed coping abilities, Ellen's case illustrates the claim that a motivational strategy infused with personal value may need to be present in order to decrease the level of stress.

Other participants' motivation and value associated with writing. At study onset, five of the core participants had at least partially intrinsic motivation to engage in personal writing for potential personal growth benefits. This motivation regarding writing remained intrinsic for all of these participants at the study's conclusion, although some were positively motivated to continue engaging in writing, while others were negatively motivated to not engage in future writing. Whether motivation was positively or negatively intrinsic for writing seemed to be determined by the value that the participant attributed to her writing, compared to the value she attributed to other demands on her time. When writing was viewed as being a burden or luxury, it was not associated with a

high degree of value, and so the participant was not motivated to write. In addition, at study onset, six participants had at least partial extrinsic motivation, with only one of these participants (Sandy) having the type of internalized extrinsic motivation associated with positive well-being.

At the study's conclusion, all of the participants had moved to various forms of intrinsic motivation for personal writing, based upon the value that each attributed to personal writing:

1. Intrinsic (positive): Being motivated to engage in personal writing for personal growth purposes.

2. Intrinsic (negative): Being motivated to *not* engage in personal writing for personal growth purposes.

3. Intrinsic (limited): Being motivated to engage in personal writing for personal growth purposes on a limited basis or for specific, self-determined purposes.

Table 7 summarizes the motivation of each participant in the core subgroup at the beginning and at the end of the inquiry.

Table 7

Participant Motivational Changes Throughout Inquiry

Participant	Beginning motivation[a]	Ending motivation[b]	Motivational change?	Assessment of motivational change		
				Writing value ↑[c]	Other value ↑[d]	Limited value[e]
Renee	Intrinsic	Intrinsic (positive)	Yes	x		
Julie	Intrinsic	Intrinsic (positive)	Yes	x		
Sandy	Intrinsic/Extrinsic	Intrinsic (positive)	Yes	x		
Jane	Extrinsic	Intrinsic (positive)	Yes	x		
Grace	Intrinsic	Intrinsic (positive)	Yes	x		
Molly	Intrinsic/Extrinsic	Intrinsic (negative)	Yes		x	
Pam	Extrinsic	Intrinsic (negative)	Yes		x	
Amy	Extrinsic	Intrinsic (negative)	Yes		x	
Liz	Intrinsic	Intrinsic (limited)	Yes			x (memory recollection)
Ellen	Extrinsic	Intrinsic (limited)	Yes			x (specific purposes)

[a]Participant motivation for personal writing at study onset. [b]Participant motivation for personal writing at study conclusion. [c] Increased value attributed to writing. [d] Increased value attributed to activities other than writing. [e] Limited application for personal writing (limited value).

Because motivation at both the beginning and the end of the study is dependent upon the value that each participant attributed to personal writing, this inquiry showed how perceived value is integral to motivation for personal writing. This perceived value and motivation were also reflected in the amount of writing which each participant did throughout the five-month study period, as presented previously in Table 5. Changes in motivation can be said to reflect movement through Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, illustrating how the participant's narrative experiences resulted in personal growth.

Although this inquiry found positive associations between motivation and writing effectiveness, the data do not indicate that a person has to consider herself to be a "good" writer in order to experience the benefits of writing. Rather, the person has to

have a positive personal association with the writing, meaning that it is not necessarily the writing itself that is important in producing positive benefits but rather the person's perception of the value of the personal writing and the related writing process. The Linked Value Balance Model proposed in the final chapter shows how writing can be imbued with value even for those people who may not like writing or may consider themselves to be "bad" writers.

Personal writing increasing stress. In his quantitative studies, Pennebaker (2004) has found that writing about traumatic situations can increase a person's stress in the short-term due to the reliving of the experiences through writing, although these negative effects were found to decrease in the long-term. However, a perspective raised by this inquiry that was not found in previous research is that, for some participants, the act of writing, as opposed to the writing topic itself, actually increased rather than decreased stress. For a few of the participants, writing became a burden rather than a desired activity, only adding to their lists of obligations. For these participants, personal writing was seen as a personal luxury rather than a necessity, and, as popular literature reinforces over and over, most working mothers do not take much time for personal luxuries (Bachmann, 2008; Crittenden, 1999; O'Brien, 2009; Riss, 2008). One participant (Amy) even suggested that personal writing would need to be tied in with helping other people because a working mother does not take much time for herself.

For the researcher-participant (Sandy), personal writing also increased stress because she associated it with negative events in her life at the time. Her experience reflects a type of learning known as classical conditioning, which establishes relationships between two previously unassociated concepts and can become a part of

the person's inner intuition. In discussing this type of reaction, Robin Hogarth (2001) has said that "a key element of learning is noting connections or co-variations—that is, what happens when something else happens….Clearly, the mechanism of learning must contain something that cements mental connections" (p. 182). This type of associative learning is also the psychological basis for the development of superstitions. Associative learning may be positively adapted to increase the positive personal effects of writing, as well as to provide structure for writing that may decrease some associated stresses, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

For working mothers in general, then, writing as a coping tool can work more effectively for some mothers than others, even increasing stress in some cases. The perceived value that a participant has for writing can help to determine her motivation for writing addition, and these factors can combine to determine the level of stress relief that she can experience through personal writing.

Chapter Summary

While this chapter has outlined the five major themes that emerged from the inquiry data, the next chapter, Chapter 12, covers the recommendations and research suggestions that I have extrapolated from these emergent themes. The chapter ends with my researcher comments about the inquiry, including the presentation of a Linked Value Balance Model that can have both working-mother and classroom applications.

CHAPTER 12

RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS, RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS, AND

RESEARCHER COMMENTS

Recommendations Emerging from Inquiry Data

This section presents a set of recommendations that have been drawn from the

data analyses and findings, indicating ways in which the various findings or themes can

be most effectively applied to the population of working mothers, but also leading to

some implications for the classroom. This chapter also presents suggestions for further

research. These recommendations all involve reestablishing balance among various

elements, thereby improving conditions for personal motivation and related value and

thus the potential effectiveness of writing.

The recommendations to be discussed are:

1. Balance the personal and social in composition research.

2. Balance personal and social issues in composition instruction.

3. Balance mind and body in composition instruction.

4. Scaffold writing onto other elements of personal value in writing instruction.

5. Promote social networks for working mothers.

Recommendation 1: Balance the Personal and Social in

Composition Research

Other than being connected with specific issues, such as raising a special-needs

child (Greenstone, 2006), alcoholism (Beatty, 2003), reentry college women (Trupe,

1997), or the death of a parent (Milner, 2005), academic literature concerning working

mother issues within composition studies is limited. In particular, this literature does not

explore connections between personal writing and working mother balance issues. Popular literature currently contains the richest discussion of ways in which working mother challenges and balance issues can be effectively addressed; but because these sources are often based on personal opinion rather than research or peer review, the nature of these sources raises issues of authenticity and validity.

More controlled, qualitative research is needed concerning working mothers, particularly concerning the specific ways in which writing can be most effectively used as a tool to help working mothers to manage their many balance issues. Part of this research may include a revisiting of the role of cognition in composition studies, such as Flower's (2011) current social-cognitive approach to writing instruction concerning "how writers construct negotiated meaning in the midst of conflicting internal and social voices" (Major Research Interests section, para. 1). The issue for composition in this recommendation is to reestablish a balance between the internal/personal and the social, a recommendation supported by composition researcher Richard Haswell (2009):

> [It's] good to remember that the 'rhetorical turn' doesn't have to abandon the 'textual,' that the 'turn of the cultural' doesn't have to demonize 'individuality,' that the turn to the 'social' doesn't have to exclude the 'cognitive.' (para. 2)

Rather than letting the pendulum swing too far one way or the other, efforts need to be made to keep a balance between influences, in this case, incorporating more elements of the personal into composition studies. By focusing more on the individual, the composition discipline is acknowledging the importance of the individual; when the individual knows that her perspectives are valued, her motivation for contributing her

perspectives through writing potentially increase. Like the findings from this inquiry, the results of related studies can also be applied to the classroom to illustrate ways in which establishing and maintaining balance can enhance learning.

Recommendation 2: Balance Personal and Social Issues in

Composition Instruction

Not only composition researchers but also composition instructors can benefit from recommendations relating to balancing personal and social issues. In this inquiry, participants overwhelmingly wanted to engage in self-reflective journaling, expressing what was most important to them at the time of their writing. Writing about a topic of personal value contributed to the motivation that the participant had for the writing, supported by the self-determination theory (SDT) that was presented in Chapter 2 and that formed the theoretical basis for looking at motivation in this inquiry. As was discussed in the first recommendation, focusing on the individual conveys that her perspectives are important, potentially increasing her motivation. Simultaneously, her motivation can be positively impacted as she writes about topics that have personal value for her.

These recommendations are consistent with some lines of thinking within composition studies. "We know that students develop best as writers when they can write about something they care about and want to know more about," said Maxine Hairston (1992/2003), in referring to effective freshman English courses. "Only then will they be motivated to invest real effort in their work" (p. 708). The learning theories of both Dewey (1938) and Bruner (1960) also stress that effective learning should be rooted in elements of personal value for the individual. "Ideally, interest in the material to

be learned is the best stimulus to learning, rather than such external goals as grades or later competitive advantage," said Bruner (p. 14).

The implications of a self-determined topical preference when it comes to writing can also have a significant impact in the socially constructed composition classroom. This narrative preference of students can sometimes run counter to an instructor's desire to teach "literary writing." "Private journal and diary writing…differs dramatically from literary writing," said composition instructor Kuhl (2005, p. 4), adding, "[Popular writing] books blur the differences and distinctions between personal or private writing and writing which is intended for an audience" (p. 7). In cases where personal expression is thwarted or discouraged, however, the social element receives the primary focus, disrupting the classroom balance of personal to social.

In an effort to pique student interest in writing, however, perhaps more value does need to be attributed to these personal writing topics that students deem to be important, more widely using techniques such as those of composition instructor Jane Danielewicz (2008), who uses what she admits is a "counterintuitive, even contradictory" approach to writing instruction: encouraging students to embrace personal writing topics with the intent that "writing in personal genres, like autobiography, leads writers to public voices" (p. 420). Other composition instructors (Hairston, 1992/2003; Paley, 2001) found that students who were permitted to write about their lives made significant contributions to public discourse and the culture of the academy.

The composition discipline should perhaps adapt so that approaching writing through the personal is not thought of as being "counterintuitive" but rather as the

natural, intuitive process that it seems to be. Bishop (1993) seems to agree, having said, "I've often wished that I had been given more encouragement for investigating the personal, therapeutic, and affective aspects of our field" (para. 1). In potentially readjusting her teaching philosophy, the teacher needs to recognize what Fulkerson (2005) refers to as a "genuine controversy" within the field of composition concerning the goals of college level writing instruction; in this vein, Fulkerson poises these questions:

> Are we teaching students to write in order that they should become successful insiders? Or are we teaching them to write so that they are more articulate critical outsiders? (Or even so that they 'know themselves'?) (p.679)

> By deliberately enabling personal expression within the classroom, however, the composition instructor would walk the fine line between the traditional roles of scholar and practitioner, "scholar/practitioner" being the term which Mary Kay Tirrell (1990) coined to describe composition scholar James Britton, who she feels "walks the line between two traditional roles which until recently have been viewed as quite separate" (p. 167).

A composition instructor in this position would also walk the line between student interests and teacher interests, perhaps even involving social philosophies. "On the one hand, we wish to serve politically left-oriented or liberatory goals in our teaching," said composition instructor Paul Lynch (2009), "while on the other, we do not see how we can do so without committing the theoretically totalizing and pedagogically oppressive sins we have inveighed against in the systems we want to resist." This issue of balance can create tension between the desire to provide students with opportunities for

personal expression with the teaching intent to introduce new viewpoints that can stimulate learning.

Narrative theory is making strides in integrating personal stories and experiences into the composition classroom, including literacy narratives and cultural narratives. "In my basic writing classes at an urban college," said composition instructor Mary Soliday (1994), "I have found that literacy narratives can expand students' sense of personal agency when they discover not only that their own stories are narratable, but also that through their stories they can engage in a broader critical dialogue with each other and with well-known texts" (p. 512). Similarly, Hairston (1992/2003) said that enabling students to share their experiences is an effective way to "create a culturally inclusive curriculum in our writing classes" (p. 710).

As Soliday (1994) has found, freely allowing creative expression with the composition classroom has the potential to balance a student's personal and social environments, increasing her motivation for writing. "Students' stories of everyday life enhance their personal success as writers," added Soliday (p. 522). Establishing balance in this area, however, might create balance issues in other areas, concerning balance between a teacher's agenda and student interests, as well as the issue of balance between the roles of scholar and practitioner. These potential repercussions require more research and study.

It is also likely that the approach to teaching writing from the early years needs to be modified to present writing as a way to express feelings from the start, so that people have exposure to that approach early in life, increasing the likelihood that they would value writing more for personal expression when they get to adulthood.

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Recommendation 3: Balance Personal and Social Through Online Networks

At the beginning of this study, participants were given suggestions of private and social venues in which to write, including a dedicated online web site for public sharing among inquiry participants. No participants chose to participate in this inquiry-specific social site, although one of the participants suggested that creating a social network where working mothers could share their stories would be beneficial.

Although this recommendation emerged from this inquiry's data, the recommendation that working mothers socialize with other working mothers is not new. When women come together in groups to share their feelings and experiences, there is bonding and reciprocal support, said Games (2009). Social goals, cognitive representations of desired social outcomes, have been linked to increased motivation and improved academic performance in young students (McCollum, 2006). Similar to the recommendation to incorporate personal expression into the composition classroom, this recommendation stresses a balance between personal and social expression. In this inquiry, Ellen benefitted from social sharing with another mother with similar experiences to hers; in sharing their personal experiences, both mothers experienced healing benefits and personal growth.

In actuality, however, social networks for working mothers already exist. Although no one used the inquiry-specific website, most of the participants used social networking sites outside of the study parameters, primarily Facebook. One participant said that she found that writing on Facebook helped to keep her accountable in terms of her exercise and weight-loss goals.

Facebook is a social networking site that was initiated in 2004 and, as of 2011, has more than 500 million active users, with users spending more than 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook (Facebook, 2011). One quantitative study has found that Facebook usage builds "social capital" for users, or "the resources accumulated through the relationships among people," as well as contributes to psychological well-being (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007, para. 7). In addition to hosting personal relationships, Facebook enables businesses and specialist groups to connect with potential customers and members, including special groups for working mothers.

Many of these special groups that have a presence on Facebook also have dedicated websites, which provide resources, classes, and the opportunity to interact with other working mothers. For example, PittsburghMom.com, a division of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, maintained by university professor Heather Starr Fiedler, provides forum discussion opportunities for members as well as resources about family activities within the Pittsburgh region. Games (2009, 2011) maintains another resource site called MoonlightMomsCircle.com, where she offers life coaching for mothers, as well as the opportunity to join a cohort of other mothers who interact through forums and regular teleconferences. And *Working Mother* magazine sponsors a related website with resources about balancing work and family, as well as opportunities for sharing with other mothers such as through the "Mom's Brag Book" feature. This website also provides forums for working mothers to share their experiences through writing in their "Mom Blogs," as this researcher does periodically (Stanko, 2011).

The popularity of sites such as Facebook and other dedicated websites is consistent with an individual's need to connect with others and points to the usefulness

of writing as the means to do so, connections with others being the basis for narrative inquiry as discussed in Chapter 2. These social connections can help a person to reduce stress (Cohen et al., 2007), express her identity (Belenky et al., 1997), and develop her voice while shaping her thought processes (Vygotsky, 1986; Nienkamp, 2001; Belenky et al., 1997). As one participant in this inquiry found, it can be therapeutic and personally rewarding to use one's negative experiences in order to help others, transitioning personal, autobiographical voices into public voices to effect change (Danielewicz, 2008). Participants in both Greenstone's (2006) and Beatty's (2003) qualitative studies experienced similar personal rewards from sharing their experiences to help others.

While social networking sites can help to reduce stress, a recent meta-analysis found that participation in social networking sites might also increase stress and anxiety through what has been called "Facebook envy," where a user compares her seemingly lackluster life with the more exciting achievements and experiences of her networked friends. This meta-analysis of four studies found that people tended to underestimate negative emotions and overestimate positive emotions, a process that resulted in increased loneliness and lower life satisfaction. "Taken together," said the researchers, "these studies suggest that people may think they are more alone in their emotional difficulties than they really are" (Jordan, et al., 2010, p. 120). These false perceptions can result because people tend to post only those positive elements of their lives, and readers are led to compare themselves with one-dimensional representations of others.

Social sharing has the potential to help to balance a person's personal and social environments. As many people already have a high level of motivation to participate in

such networks by the value that they attribute to positive social interactions, encouraging such participation can decrease their levels of stress by decreasing the difference between their demands and coping abilities. Within this inquiry, the only type of writing that one participant (Ellen) found to be personally effective was writing with a social connection, also emphasizing the importance of the social element within writing.

Because of the inherent benefits that social sharing can have in balancing a person's personal and social environments, social networks for working mothers, as well as other specialist groups including students, should continue to be developed, promoted, and supported, with the caveat that users understand that others may not be representing all dimensions of their lives within the social network.

Recommendation 4: Balance Mind and Body in Composition Instruction

This inquiry has shown that personal writing has the potential to positively impact both psychological and physical stress levels, often through interrelationships between psychological and physical stress. This inquiry's results indicate that there is a connection between the psychological and the physical that can be further developed, both inside and outside the classroom. Enabling the body and mind to work together can create a balance between these elements that can enhance classroom learning.

As discussed previously, connections between the mind and the body are evident in the medical and psychological fields (Mate, 2011; Pennebaker, 2004), as well as within composition studies. For example, Cheville (2001) has discussed "embodied cognition" as being the interrelationship between mind and body (p. 7). In her study of student athletes, Cheville (2001) has found that there is a connection between body and mind and thus advises, "In the university classroom, faculty who believe intellectual

labor necessitates a mythic transcendence of mind over matter may fail to recognize, or even reject, the bodily dilemmas that situate students' conceptual orientations" (p. 3).

As has also been discussed previously, Perl (1980/1994, 2001, 2004) is a proponent of using felt sense in the composition classroom, which is using bodily responses to gauge the effectiveness of one's writing. One knows that something is meaningful when it just "feels right." Felt sense, says Perl (2004), "establishes a link between what we think (our minds) and what we feel (our bodies) (p. 5), indicating that felt sense uses intuition by linking "what we know implicitly (before words come) and what we ultimately write or say (with words) explicitly (p. 5) and demonstrating that language and thought are both "inextricably linked in the body" (p. 9). Perl (2001) also said that "showing teachers and students how to work with the felt sense may be one of the most powerful things we can do to make schools places where real teaching and learning happen" (para. 9).

In fact, as discussed in Chapter 2, many women already rely upon a form of mind-body assessment in the form of "gut" feelings, or "intuition," the latter term being defined by Bruner (1960) as "the intellectual technique of arriving at plausible but tentative formulations without going through the analytic steps by which such formulations would be found to be valid or invalid conclusions" (p. 13).

The role of intuition in writing is an area which could benefit from further study, especially in the current learning environment that places a great of emphasis on social constructivist learning, an environment in which "'cognition' itself is treated often as a bad word" (Ewing, 2009). My recommendations are similar to those of composition instructor Angela Woodward (2010), who has found that the ways in which her students

learn about writing does not need to be separated from insight, intuition, and awareness (p. 81). Woodward's approach to instruction is similar: "My teaching, too, needs to be fed by these same things," she concluded (p. 81).

More composition instructors should explore the powerful role of intuition in their teaching and scholarship, as well as in the writing of their students. Intuition and gut feelings are elements of which most people are aware, and consciously incorporating them into the writing process is consciously acknowledging the role of the whole person in the writing process. Receiving permission to engage their whole bodies in writing might make students feel more competent in approaching the writing process, increasing their potential motivation for writing and value attributed to writing. Stressing the balance between mind and body has the potential to positively impact the writing processes *and* products of writing students.

Recommendation 5: Balance Writing With Elements of Personal Value

This inquiry also raised the possibility that writing can be most effective when it has personal value for the writer, another area that would benefit from additional research. Specifically, since most participants preferred to choose their own writing subjects and schedule, this inquiry's results indicate that the topic needs to be something of value for the person so that she can be motivated to engage in the writing process. Knowing that participants preferred to choose their own writing topics is an important inquiry finding that can be applied in both working-mother journaling and classroom writing instruction, which will be discussed further in the last section of this chapter.

For someone who might not be motivated to write on her own, one way in which writing might acquire value that can thus influence motivation is to link or scaffold the

writing to something that the person already values. This type of associative or

motivational link for writing was raised by the inquiry participant who suggested that

motivation for writing might need to be connected with helping others; it was also

strongly demonstrated through the special-case public writing of the participant who

wanted to help others with pregnancy losses similar to hers.

This recommendation involves linking writing with another element of value for

the person, which may also have positive, associative effects on the writing process.

This "other" element of value could be a person, place, cause, or even another activity

that has value for the person. In this inquiry, participants have indicated that items of

value for them, besides writing, include activities with their children, social connections

with family and friends, scrapbooking, and other crafts.

This type of associative learning—using something of value to generate interest

in and increase the effectiveness of the writing process—is consistent with a tenet of

Bruner's (1960) philosophy of education, as Bruner has said that "ideally, interest in the

material to be learned is the best stimulus to learning, rather than such external goals

as grades or later competitive advantage" (p. 14). This approach is also consistent with

Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) concept of scaffolding, reflecting in the academic motivational

technique found to be useful by parents of public school-age gifted children, where

"scaffolding academic work to their child's interests was also considered valuable by the

parents in developing academic motivation" (Garn, et al., 2010, p. 268).

As discussed in Chapter 2, people are more likely to engage in activities that they

feel competent in and where success at them is personally valued (Waterman et al.,

2003, p. 1448). For someone who does not feel that she is a good writer, linking writing

with an activity at which the person feels competent can potentially help the person to also feel more competent at writing.

Linking writing to creative elements. Being creative is viewed by some as being an essential part of life, as well as a means to realize personal growth benefits similar to those possible through writing, creativity being defined broadly as "intellectual or aesthetic free play" (Bloom, 1998) or even as the ways "we relate to the world" (Harrell, 2011).

Furthermore, participation in one creative activity has been known to stimulate creativity in other areas (Francisco, 2010; Harrell, 2011), so linking another creative activity with writing might help to also stimulate the writing process. Rather than just comparing the benefits of writing (for those who consider themselves to be writers) and these other creative activities, this recommendation suggests that writing *be deliberately linked* with these other creative activities to fulfill personal and social interests for those who consider themselves to be writers and non-writers alike.

Balancing student interests with academic requirements. Approaching learning by linking writing with another creative activity can help to balance a student's interests with academic requirements, increasing the likelihood of academic success. The approach can also be useful in connecting the personal with the social, as expressivist pedagogy espouses. This associative-learning approach can more seamlessly integrate writing with other subjects and thus enhance learning when designing and implementing programs such as writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC), as well as "linked courses" between various disciplines, which can be paired by themes,

content versus applied approach, and certain academic goals such as student attrition and academic achievement (Cargill & Kalikoff, 2007, p. 84).

This linked approach may even be useful in course development as it theoretically expands course boundaries with connections that bring different disciplines together for a richer learning experience. Fulkerson (2005) has discussed courses within composition studies that involve elements of cultural interest which could just as relevantly be housed in a sociology or anthropology department (p. 661); these courses may balance a student's interest in, for example, film or literature with composition studies.

Service learning opportunities are another example where students' social interests can be balanced with academic learning, such as Flower's (2011) current social-cognitive research and work with community literacy centers, out of which has emerged "a new body of research in intercultural rhetoric and education for community consequences" (Major Research Interests section, para. 1). Service learning enables the students to apply and juxtapose their classroom theoretical learning with volunteer opportunities at philanthropic agencies, schools, churches, nursing homes, half-way houses, and shelters (Cushman, 1999/2003, p. 822).

Limitations

This inquiry was concerned with the balance issues affecting working mothers, and the ways in which working mothers choose to manage these issues can be affected by their past experiences, including those with their own mothers. Therefore, one of this study's limitations is that it did not specifically request information from participants about experiences with their own mothers and the ways in which their mothers affected

the management of their lives as working mothers. Related literature (Glickman, 1993; Hunter, 2000; Waldman, 2000; Waldman, 2009) indicates that the relationship with one's mother influences the ways in which a working mother approaches her roles and responsibilities, and limited responses from this inquiry's participants corroborate this maternal influence, indicating that this would have been a worthwhile line of inquiry to have explored through this inquiry.

Another limitation in this inquiry involved the flexible writing parameters with which participants were provided at the beginning of the study. Before beginning the study writing, participants were given specific instruction about writing duration (i.e., to write two times per week, for 20-30 minutes per session over the course of five months), and they were given flexibility concerning writing topics. All participants, however, extended that limited flexibility to the entire study framework, writing *whenever* they wanted, about *whatever* they wanted. This approach represents a limitation because instead of each participant writing consistently twice a week, resulting in a minimum of 40 writing entries over the course of the study, participant writing ranged from writing once every two weeks to writing five times a week, from producing as little as eight writing entries to as many as 100 entries. (Writing durations of core subgroup participants are provided in detail in Table 5). While this approach revealed interesting data related to writer preferences in terms of control over the writing process, it did not yield the consistent data that might have produced richer data analyses.

Suggestions for Future Research

Related to the limitations of this study, a personal factor that would be interesting to explore through future research is how a working mother's own mother might impact

her attitudes toward work and family, and the subsequent effects on the working mother's writing, both inside and outside the classroom. Pre-study interview questions could ask a participant to provide the influences on her work-life attitude and approaches that she perceives receiving from her own mother, and post-study interview questions could ask how these perceived influences have impacted the participant's personal writing, from her own perspective. This approach may provide rich data about maternal influence on an individual's writing, as well as indicate larger trends, such as when some women in the 1990s reported being influenced by their feminist mothers (Waldman, 2009) and conventional mothers (Hunter, 2000).

Another research suggestion that emerges from the limitations involves also studying the phenomenon of working mothers writing but with stricter writing parameters. Writing duration requirements could be provided at the beginning of the study, and a participant's not adhering to these stated requirements could be reason for excluding that participant's data from data analyses. This approach would help to ensure the consistency of the data collected.

While the present inquiry focused on American working mothers with middle-class socioeconomic status and little cultural diversity, future research could also include participants from diverse socioeconomic and cultural environments, examining how these environments might impact the writing of working mothers, both inside and outside the classroom. Because European countries, especially Sweden, are reported to have more progressive and supportive policies to support mothers in the workforce, (C. Evans, 2009; NationMaster, 2009), it would be interesting to also repeat this type of study in Europe, although in her review of working mothers, writer Judith Warner (2005)

found no real differences in the attitudes of mothers based upon their race or

geographic locations (p. 23).

A final suggestion for further research involves looking at the different effects that

writing in a handwritten journal versus electronic journal could have on the effectiveness

of personal writing, both inside and outside the classroom. As was presented

previously, those inquiry participants who chose to use a handwritten journal were more

motivated to engage in personal writing than those participants who wrote in electronic

journals. More research might help to determine the specific effects that deliberately

using handwriting or typing might have on the writing process and product.

Researcher Reflections

I have spent the past several years working on this interdisciplinary study, based

in composition studies but also pulling from other disciplines. I have found myself being

drawn into the vortex of this interdisciplinary approach, appreciating the ways in which

various disciplines have contributed and helped to support my inquiry results, which

may also help to explain the overall impression that I am taking away from this study.

Like in a vortex where element swirls intertwiningly with element, I have found that my

intertwined experiences as participant-researcher mirror a main finding from this inquiry:

The personal and the social seem to be inextricably connected, whether it is through art

(Woolf, 1985), conversation (Britton, 1990), individual wells leading to a common

underground stream (Progoff, 1992; Miller, 1961), webs of interconnectedness

(McAndrew, 1997), or a string cast out to touch others (Elbow, 1998b), as was reviewed

in Chapter 2. Furthermore, fighting against that interrelationship seems to create an

unnaturalness that is not conducive either to writing or to a fulfilling life balance.

Through my experiences in this inquiry, I see the value of Dewey's (1897/1959) assertion through his "Pedagogic Creed" more than a century ago:

> This educational process has two sides—one psychological and one sociological, and…neither can be subordinated to the other or neglected without evil results following….the psychological and social sides are organically related and…education cannot be regarded as a compromise between the two, or a superimposition of one upon the other. (pp. 4-5)

Understanding—and accepting—that a person does not exist in a vacuum but both influences and is influenced by her environment would be a great step toward universal acceptance of people and the writing that they can produce.

Dewey (1897/1959) has also said that one's psychological element is the basis for all education, explaining that one's "own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting point for all education" (para. 3). In this vein, this inquiry reiterated that an individual is just that, an individual, a unique person that can bring unique offerings to her world.

Simultaneously, this individual interacts with others every day, environmental elements that have the power and potential to influence her personal perspectives. She then expresses these new perspectives into her environment where they, in turn, influence other people. It is in this way that learning becomes a cyclical process.

Findings from this inquiry corroborated my viewpoints: The women that I studied were all powerful individuals and independent thinkers who were actively trying to manipulate their environment in ways that were most conducive to their families, and in

ways that best met their emotional needs. For some, personal writing was a helper in that effort, but for others, writing was more of a burden.

Amy, one of the participants who began the study enthusiastically but then dropped off in her participation due to other commitments, articulated what I feel is a key finding of this inquiry. Personal writing, Amy said in her third interview, "would need to be tied to helping others somehow to start, I think, as we don't find time for ourselves much." Furthermore, Ellen, the woman who had lost two unborn daughters during the duration of this inquiry, strongly demonstrated the strength of this type of personally rooted yet socially-based motivation through her public writing intended to help others with pregnancy losses similar to hers. And Liz, with her personal writing generating motivation in other areas of her life, including exercising and church volunteering, reflected how personal writing can be positively associated with other personally valued activities.

This insight concerning the potential association of writing with another type of motivator has influenced my fifth recommendation as presented earlier, balancing writing with an element of personal value, preferably a creative element. In this vein, I propose a Linked Value Balance Model, which shows how an understanding of motivation and value based on Dewey's (1897/1959, 1916, 1938) and Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) learning theories can potentially position personal writing as a useful tool for working mothers. This model can also be extended into the classroom to increase student motivation for writing and to enhance learning.

Linked Value Balance Model Components

This inquiry's data show that writing was more effective for some participants than others. The Linked Value Balance Model proposes that applying the associative

theories of learning can increase a person's motivation and, consequently, potential for

realizing personal growth benefits through writing.

The Linked Value Balance Model is comprised of three steps:

1. Acknowledging an individual's life challenges contributing to an environmental

    imbalance, which, for working mothers, related literature as well as the study

    data have identified as encompassing elements of work, family, and self,

    among other elements.

2. Identifying an element of value within one of these life challenges.

3. Creativity associating this element of value with an aspect of the writing

    process.

For example, a working mother would likely identify one of her life challenges as caring

for her children. An element of value that the woman might associate with her children is

the importance of remembering memorable things that her children say. A creative

association with writing might be to record these memorable incidents in a journal or

memory book, as a few of this inquiry's participants did on their own initiatives.

Potentially, the mother could then experience some personal growth benefits of writing,

such as memory benefits, which can then positively affect both her personal and social

environments.

See Figure 5 for an illustration of the proposed Linked Value Balance Model.
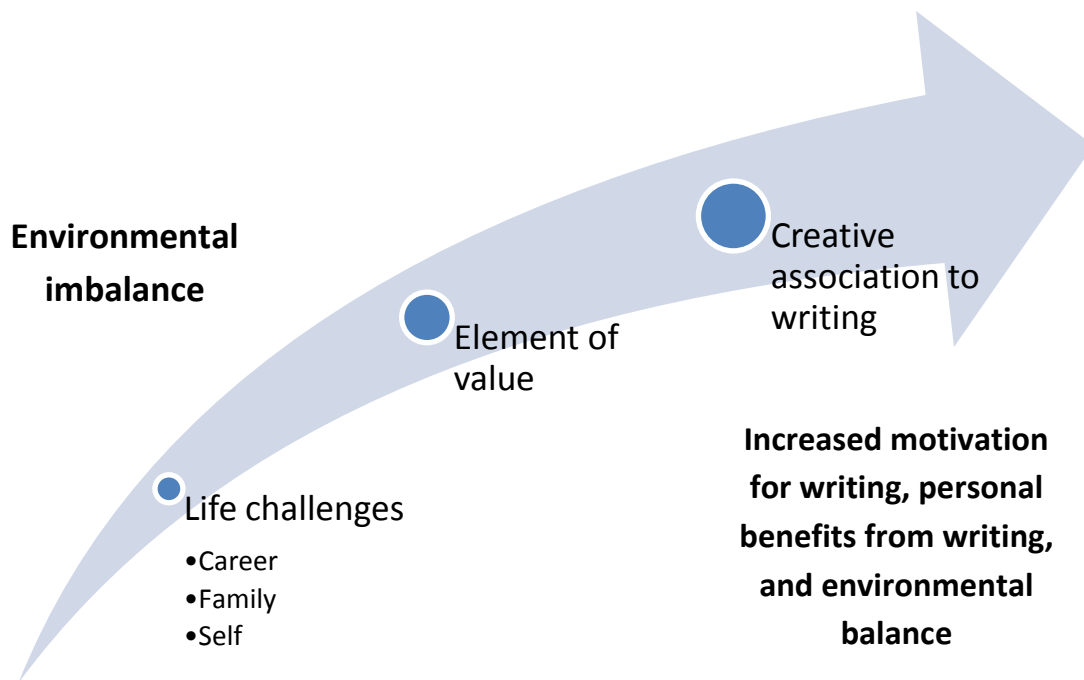
Figure 5. Linked Value Balance Model. The proposed Linked Value Balance Model suggests that an imbalance in an environment (e.g., life, classroom) can be theoretically balanced through three associative steps: 1) Identify life challenge issues involved in the environmental imbalance; 2) Identify an element of value within one of those identified life challenges; 3) Creatively associate this element of value with an aspect of the writing process, potentially resulting in an increased motivation for the writing process, as well as increased personal benefits from writing and an increased environmental/life balance.

As Dewey (1897/1959, 1916, 1938) emphasized, this model takes into account the interrelationships between personal and social elements, which is also the basis for the expressivist pedagogy upon which this inquiry is based. The model also applies Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where the ZPD identifies those functions that are not yet fully developed but are instead in an "embryonic state" (p. 86); personal writing could fall into this area in need of potential development. In this model, the "element of value" becomes the scaffold which assists the development of the person's personal writing. As the individual works with her element of value—and the associated creative expression—she also learns how that element is related to the writing process, potentially increasing the person's value of writing through this associative relationship.

Classroom applications of the Linked Value Balance Model. The Linked

Value Balance Model can be expanded for the composition classroom, as it can be

applicable to both traditional and nontraditional students. A teacher might be interested

in using this model because she perceives an imbalance between elements within the

classroom environment, such as between personal and social elements, or a general

life imbalance of her students, such as freshman who are transitioning into independent

college life.

Using the context of the transitioning freshman, here is an example of how this

model might work in a composition classroom, especially an introductory writing course.

1. The instructor perceives an imbalance in the lives of her freshman students,

   knowing that many are struggling with homesickness and transitions from

   home life to the more responsibility and independence of college life.

2. Through introducing techniques such as guided or targeted freewriting, the

   instructor can guide students in brainstorming elements that are most

   important to them personally. Associations that might emerge are old friends,

   family, pets, teachers, etc.

3. The students can then engage in guided freewriting again, this time

   brainstorming ways to creatively associate that element with the writing

   process. The most direct association is to write an essay about this valued

   topic, but other creative associations are possible as well. For example, the

   student might enjoy drawing, so she may choose to engage in an activity

   where she visualizes her inner self as it responds to this element of value,

similar to Adams (2000) therapeutic writing technique involving the drawing of one's "inner healer" (p. 86).

The student would then be armed with a deeper understanding of her relationship with that element of personal value, along with reaping the positive benefits of consciously thinking about that element. Through this model, the student would then associate these positive feelings with her writing, this association theoretically increasing the student's value of and motivation for writing.

By approaching writing through personal interests of the student which have the most value for the student, the teacher can help to ensure that the greatest number of students can realize the academic and professional benefits of effective writing, as well as help to maintain balance between the various elements of a composition classroom and in the personal lives of the students.

Final Thoughts

Society and educational approaches today seem to compartmentalize the personal and the social as separate, even disparate and oppositional, entities. This inquiry pushes against that grain, breaking down the barriers between the personal and the social and reiterating the mutual influence of personal and social that seems to have waned somewhat since Dewey's (1897/1959) assertion.

This personal-social duality was evident in my role as participant-observer in this inquiry. In this role, I was able to "experience[e] the experience and also be[come] a part of the experience itself" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81). Along with the other participants, I wrote about my challenges as a working mother while, at the same time, looked at the data objectively as an outsider.

Not unlike a working mother's difficulty in managing multiple roles, however, managing the roles of participant and researcher at the same time was not always easy. This difficulty revealed itself in an entry from my researcher's reflexive journal, immediately after I heard that Ellen's first baby had been stillborn:

I have just found out about [Ellen's] baby. It is so sickening to me on a personal level. I feel so helpless and a huge feeling that things are not supposed to be this way. I don't know if this is an appropriate reaction or not, but I look at this situation through a researcher's lens as well. How will this situation affect how I interpret [Ellen's] data going forward? Here is where I could refer to Rosenblatt's [1978] transactional theory of reading, how present circumstances shape the interpretation of the "poem." Actually, this situation will affect the reading of all documents from here on. It is a new lens of experience that I hold up that will change my perceptions.

As a researcher, I also wonder how it will impact [Ellen's] participation. Will she want to drop out? Will she stay in and find that the writing helps her through the situation? Strictly from a research perspective, it is an unusual and interesting aspect of the study, completely tragic and unasked for as it is. (November 20, 2009)

The personal side of me—that working mother participant side—was upset by her loss while, simultaneously, the researcher side was intrigued by the implications. I found myself approaching the research from a research-based self, a brought self, and a situationally created self (Lincoln & Guba, 2003, p. 283). This tension was "embedded in the task of composing field texts that are interpretive records of what we experience

in the existential world even as we compose field texts of our inner experiences, feelings, doubts, uncertainties, reactions, remembered stories, and so on" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 86). In other words, the inquiry's interpretations and recommendations emerged from these tensions. Had not Ellen had her experiences while participating in the study, for example, these results and conclusions may have been different.

In addition to functioning as a participant—who experienced writing as a working mother—and a researcher—who acted as an objective, outside observer—my experiences with Ellen also enabled me to function in the third role of "researcher as facilitator…who help[ed] the researched activate their own capacities for self-observation, critique, and advocacy" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 74). This role was evident in how I tried to provide Ellen with helpful therapeutic writing resources, as well as helping her to edit her advocacy letter in preparation for distribution. "In this way, the project has become an organic entity that changes and affects others as it changes," I wrote in my researcher's reflexive journal (January 21, 2010).

In large part because of the emergent, flexible roles that the qualitative approach enabled me to take, this inquiry is able to make experience-based recommendations about the ways in which writing can be most effective in circumstances ranging from the everyday to the tragic. Based upon the data, the inquiry is also able make a strong argument for the importance of motivation and value in the effectiveness of personal narrative writing.

Through its methodology, data collection, data analysis, and subsequent recommendations, the inquiry fulfills its purpose to expand the understanding of personal

writing's role within composition studies' expressivist paradigm, especially in terms of how

personal writing can bring a deeper understanding of balance issues to composition studies.

The inquiry also reveals ways in which personal writing can more effectively function in

balancing the lives of working mothers. And in this small way, it is my hope that this inquiry

can help to bring some semblance of balance to these frazzled women who work

unceasingly to improve the lives of themselves, their children, their families, and their world.

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    Brace.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Information Presented to Participants

Instructions.

For this study, I am asking you to write at least two times per week, at least 10-15 minutes per session. You can write about any subjects you choose for these writing sessions. But if you get stuck or need help in choosing a writing topic, I am including at the end of this information packet writing prompts that you can use for your writing.

You can also choose to complete your writing in any venue you wish, paper or electronic, personal or shared. Below is an open-ended list of writing venue options. If you have another place where you would like to write, feel free to do so!

Possible writing venues.

You can choose to complete your writing in any venue of your choosing, which could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Private venues, such as:
    - Personal journal entries
    - Poetry/creative writing
    - Writing in conjunction with creative arts, such as drawing or scrapbooking
- Shared social venues, such as:
    - Postings to online blogs or support groups
    - Postings to an online community of study participants (through a dedicated web site that I developed)
    - Writing letters and/or emails

Appendix B: Writing Prompts With Reference Information

The 10 prompts listed below are going to be presented to participants to voluntarily use at their discretion. Each prompt covers a topic that has been identified as relevant through the review of related literature in Chapter Two. Relevant reference sources are also provided.

Topic	Prompt	Source
Stress	List three things (situations, people, event, conditions, etc.) that are causing you stress right now. Write for five minutes without stopping about the impact that the biggest stressor is having on your life right now.	Adams, 2009, p. 3
Voice	Write about your negative inner voices—how did they come to you? Do you have memories of critical teachers, family members, etc.?	Myers, 2008, p. 17
Voice	Write about your positive voices—what do they say? Where did they come from, e.g., teachers, family, friends?	Myers, 2008, p. 17
Children	Read the following passage spoken by Ayelet Waldman's fictional lawyer/mother, Juliet Applebaum (taken from Mommy-Track Mystery #1, *Nursery Crimes*). How does this passage make you feel about your own experiences in balancing work and motherhood? *Anyone who tells you that having a child doesn't completely and irrevocably ruin your life is lying. As soon as that damp little bundle of poop and neediness lands in your life, it's all over. Everything changes. Your relationship is destroyed. Your looks are shot. Your productivity is devastated. And you get stupid. Dense. Thick. Pregnancy and lactation make you dumb. That's a proven, scientific fact.*	Waldman, 2000, p. 11
Problems/challenges	With your non-dominant hand, draw and/or draw a current challenge in your life. Switch hands and address a question to the challenge as if it is an entity. *Who or what are you? How do you feel? Why do you feel that way? What do you need from me? What are you here to teach me?* Continue this dialogue by switching hands, with the dominant hand questioning, and the non-dominant hand answering.	Capacchione, 2009, p. 10

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Topic	Prompt	Source
Work	Make a list of all of your present and past jobs. Choose a few and describe what you did at that job and your feelings about working in that job.	Newman, 2003, pp. 60-61
Self/identity	What do you see as your life's purpose? What do you need to set behind you to complete your particular life path?	Baldwin, 2005, p. 141
Life events/ spirituality	List the "steppingstones," or significant events in your life, beginning with "I was born." You can include events within body, mind, heart, and spirit.	Adams, 1990, pp. 150-151; Progoff, 1992
Spirituality	Dreams can provide a gateway into your heart and mind, drawing from your subconscious. Write down a recent dream that you had and any related associations it has for you.	Newman, 2003, p. 25.
Identity	Write your memoir in only six words. See this challenge at www.smithmag.net.	*SMITH Magazine*, 2009

Appendix C: Writing Prompts as Presented to Participants

These writing prompts are to be used only at your discretion if you find a lack of topics to write about. Their use is strictly optional.

1. List three things (situations, people, event, conditions, etc.) that are causing you stress right now. Write for five minutes without stopping about the impact that the biggest stressor is having on your life right now.

2. Write about your negative inner voice—how did it come to you? Do you have memories of critical teachers, family members, etc.?

3. Write about your positive voices—what do they say? Where did they come from, e.g., teachers, family, friends?

4. Read the following passage spoken by Ayelet Waldman's fictional lawyer/mother, Juliet Applebaum (taken from Mommy-Track Mystery #1, *Nursery Crimes*). How does this passage make you feel about your own experiences in balancing work and motherhood?

   Anyone who tells you that having a child doesn't completely and irrevocably ruin your life is lying. As soon as that damp little bundle of poop and neediness lands in your life, it's all over. Everything changes. Your relationship is destroyed. Your looks are shot. Your productivity is devastated. And you get stupid. Dense. Thick. Pregnancy and lactation make you dumb. That's a proven, scientific fact.

5. With your non-dominant hand, draw and/or draw a current challenge in your life. Switch hands and address a question to the challenge as if it is an entity. *Who or what are you? How do you feel? Why do you feel that way? What do*

you need from me? What are you here to teach me? Continue this dialogue by switching hands, with the dominant hand asking the questions, and the non-dominant hand providing answers.

6. Make a list of all of your present and past jobs. Choose a few and describe what you did at that job and your feelings about working in that job.

7. What do you see as your life's purpose? What do you need to set behind you to complete your particular life path?

8. List the "steppingstones," or significant events in your life, beginning with "I was born." You can include events within body, mind, heart, and spirit.

9. Dreams can provide a gateway into your heart and mind, drawing from your subconscious. Write down a recent dream that you had and any related associations it has for you.

10. Write your memoir in only six words. See this challenge at www.smithmag.net.

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Participants—Pre-study

1. How many children do you have, and what are their ages?

2. What is your educational background?

3. What kind of work do you do? How long have you been in this position? What kind of work did you do previously?

4. What kinds of situations or difficulties do you run into when trying to balance work and home responsibilities?

5. What are your biggest challenges as a working mother?

6. What impact does physical and/or psychological stress have in your life right now?

7. What kinds of strategies do you use to alleviate stress?

8. What types of problems and challenges are you dealing with right now?

9. What sorts of problem-solving techniques do you use?

10. How do you define yourself? How do you define your identity?

11. What are your relationships like with your children?

12. How are your personal relationships impacted by your work and family responsibilities?

13. When you hear the phrase "personal writing," what comes to mind? What does personal writing mean to you?

14. What experiences do you have with personal writing? Have you ever used writing to try to relieve stress?

15. What are your expectations as you participate in this study? What specific benefits, if any, do you expect to receive through participation?

16. What questions do you have for me?

Appendix E: Interview Questions for Participants—Mid-study

1. What types of writing are you engaging in for this study? Are you writing about your own topics or using the provided writing prompts?

2. In what venues are you writing? Why have you chosen to write in these venues?

3. How does it feel to be engaging in regular personal writing? What impacts, if any, has this had on your life?

4. Now that you have engaged in some writing as a working mother, do you believe that writing can have a role in helping a working mother with her life/balance issues? In what ways might writing help her?

5. What are the biggest problems or challenges facing you right now as a working mother? How has your personal writing helping with managing these challenges?

6. What types of physical and/or psychological stress are you dealing with now? How has the personal writing helped you with stress management?

7. How has participation in this study impacted your problem solving capabilities?

8. How has participation in this study impacted your memory?

9. How has your concept of self or of your identity changed since you began participating in this study?

10. How have your relationships with your children or others been affected directly or indirectly by your personal writing?

11. How has your perspective of personal writing changed since you began participating in this study?

12. Are you looking forward to continuing the writing as a participant in this study? Why or why not?

13. What questions do you have for me?

Appendix F: Interview Questions for Participants—Post-study

1. What types of writing did you engage in during this study? Did you use your own topics or use the provided writing prompts? If you used any of the writing prompts, which did you find to be the most useful and why?

2. In what venues did you choose to write and why?

3. What types of writing did you find to be most beneficial as you participated in the study?

4. What types of writing did you find to be least beneficial?

5. How did you assess the value that you gained through your personal writing, i.e., how did you decide what types of writing were most beneficial and least beneficial?

6. What kinds of physical stress were you under as you participated in the study? What effect did your personal writing have on your physical stress?

7. What kinds of psychological stress were you under as you participated in the study? What effect did your personal writing have on your psychological stress?

8. What effects did your personal writing have on your problem-solving abilities and coping techniques?

9. How did you find that your memory was affected through your participation?

10. What is your perspective of self and identity? How would you say that your personal writing affected these perspectives?

11. How have your relationships with your children or others been affected by your personal writing, either directly or indirectly?

12. How did it feel to engage in regular personal writing? What general impacts, if any, has this had on your life?

13. Do you think you will continue with your personal writing now that the study has ended? Why or why not?

14. Now that you have written as a working mother, do you believe that writing can have a role in helping other working mothers with their life/balance issues? How would you say that personal writing can help other working mothers?

15. How has your perspective of personal writing changed since you began participating in this study?

16. Are you willing to share examples of your writing from this study with me?

17. Do you have any questions for me?