

Learning Self Nurturance and Unlearning Patriarchy: A Feminist Poststructural Narrative Inquiry of Rural Mothers' Constantly Shifting Identity

Angela Hissong¹, Joyce Salls¹

¹*Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, United States*, ²*Chatham University, Pittsburgh, PA, United States*

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to glean insight from and illuminate the lived stories of four working mothers of school-aged children living in a rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven community. The objective was to discern how the storied realities of this cultural context influenced the mothers' understanding of and engagement in the meaningful occupation of self-nurturance as a facilitator of their personal health and well-being. The theoretical perspective of feminist poststructuralism and the notion of non-unitary self were the guiding framework for this narrative inquiry. Data collection was completed through an initial interview, journaling, a follow-up interview, creative synthesis project, and a final group process dialogue between the mothers and researcher. It was not surprising that each mother had her own story to tell during this narrative inquiry which comes through magnificently as narratives in motion. In addition to each mothers' unique narrative central themes arose from various angles during the story-telling which were revealed as intersecting narratives in motion. This study contributes to the field of occupational science in four primary ways. First, it presents findings from a narrative analysis inquiry of an ignored population that of rural mothers and their informal learning in a rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven environment particularly as this learning relates to self nurturance. Second, the study offers to the field additional insights as to what narrative analysis research might look like when guided and supported by a feminist poststructuralist perspective. Third, in addition to drawing on the elements of feminist poststructuralist theory and practice, it highlights the importance of creativity in ways perhaps implied but not highlighted in other discussions of feminist poststructural theories and pedagogies. Fourth, and most significantly for pedagogical implications within the field of occupational therapy, it highlights a shift in the notion that women's identity is primarily developed through relationships with others. Outcome of study brings to light that mothers need to take time to go within and develop a relationship with self demonstrating the importance of the notion of non-unitary self in terms of coming to know, learning about, and engaging in personal health and well-being.