

**Making Peace with Your Mother:  
Rewriting Your Story**

Judith Ruskay Rabinor, PhD

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**Motherhood- A Lifelong Investigation**

- 1970's: My dissertation
  - The Effects of Maternal Employment on Children's Social-Emotional Adjustment-
    - John Bowlby- Maternal Deprivation & Attachment Theory
- 1978: PhD & my Introduction to Eating Disorders
  - Sub-speciality- Mothers and daughters
- 1995: "Mothers, Daughters and Eating Disorders"
- 2002: A Starving Madness: Tales of Hunger Hope and Healing in Psychotherapy ("Like Mother, Like Daughter")
- 2021: The Girl in the Red Boots: Making Peace with My Mother

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**Writing - A Lifelong Relationship**

- Writing Helps Us
  - Slow down
  - Connect with Ourselves
  - Feel Safe
  - Develop a Cohesive Story
  - Revise our Stories
- 2021: The Girl in the Red Boots: Making Peace with My Mother

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## Agenda

- Honoring the Wounded Mother
  - Writing exercise
- Therapist as Wounded Healer
  - Writing Exercise
- Writing & Healing
- Summary
- Q&A

We are taught that pent up hostility dangerous, the real tragedy is pent up love.  
(Paula Caplan, Don't Blame Mother)

Repairing Disconnections is the process and goal of therapy and life.(R-C Theory)

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## Relational Cultural Theory

- The Stone Center group —1980's
- The source of suffering is isolation
- The source of healing is connection
- Eating Disorders= Strategies of Disconnections
  - Interventions? It Depends
- We are always building or rebuilding connections
  - Inward
  - Outward
  - Upward

Repairing Disconnections is the process and goal of therapy and life.(R-C Theory)

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## Eating Disorders are Strategies of Disconnection



What happened? R-C Theory ; The source of suffering is disconnections...  
What heals?

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### Mothers and Daughters

Making Peace is an Internal Process

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### Objectives

- We are taught that pent up hostility is dangerous, the real tragedy is pent up love.
- Honoring the Imperfect Mother-Daughter Relationship
  - Understanding the Wounded Mother in Patriarchy
  - Avoiding Mother Blaming
- Repairing Disconnections: the process and goal of therapy
- The Healing Power of Writing

Reminder: If any material is triggering: self care is primary.

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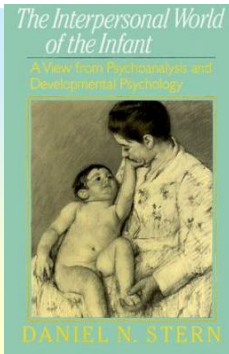
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## Baby's First Caress – Mary Cassatt



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## Winnicott's Good Enough Mother

- SURVIVAL NUTRIENTS
  - safety and protection
  - guidance
  - nurturance
    - inevitable frustration
    - imperfect empathy

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## Basic Assumptions

- We are shaped by how we were loved — and unloved
- Relationships with early caregivers create a template

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Who you are as a person is more important than what you think...or what you think you think.

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### Basic Assumptions

- We are shaped by how we were loved — and unloved.
- Relationships with early caregivers create a template.
- When children have a problem, **let's take a careful look at the primary caretaker**

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### What Happens When...

The Good Enough Mother has a **bad day/hard week/difficult childhood?**

Ex: Marcy & Elizabeth

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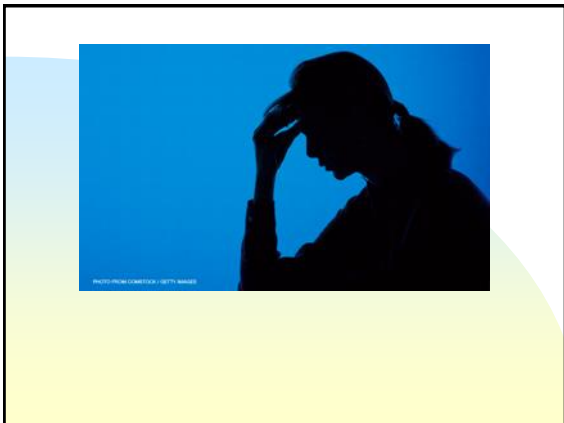
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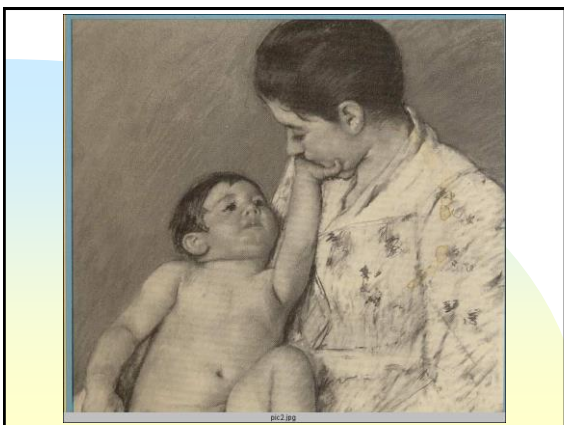
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## Myths & Realities

### Myths

- Motherhood is instinctual and unconditional
- Bonding is instantaneous & universal
- Mothers are always nurturing and loving
- Mothers and daughters should be best friends

### The Uncomfortable Reality

- Mothers are human beings
- Mothers are moody
- Mothers have needs and problems
- All human beings -including mothers- all flawed

### The Uncomfortable reality:

- Mothers are wounded
- Mothers are wounded by patriarchy
- Mothers pass down the values of patriarchy
- Attachment is a process

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## Feminist Contribution: Winicott Idealized Motherhood

- tired
- worn out
- overwhelmed
- wounded by
  - her own imperfect life
  - her own imperfect childhood
  - patriarchy

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## Motherhood in Patriarchy

- The legacy of patriarchy is generation of powerlessness.
- The Good Enough mother
  - teaches survival skills
  - passes down her own wounds
  - patriarchal values
- inadvertently contribute to an ED
- Blaming & devaluing Mothers — pervasive

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## Contributions from Brain Science

- We are wired for survival- alert for DANGER
  - “Velcro for the bad, Teflon for the good.”
- How to deal with bad/traumatic experiences
  - Working it through: “Name it to tame it”
  - Can backfire: repetition vs letting go
- Rick Hanson- emphasis on neuroplasticity
  - Focus on the good
  - H. E. A. L
- Diana Fosha- AEDP- prioritize the good
- Writing as healing

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Writing Exercise #2  
Discussion- optional

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## The Therapeutic Stance

Who you are as a person is more important than what you think or what you think you think.

Linda Metcalf  
Proprioceptive Writing Workshop

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## Irvin Yalom, MD.

- "Let the patient matter."
- "Therapy is relationship driven, not theory-driven."
- "Forget the blank screen."
- "Self disclosure is essential"

(Letters to a Young Therapist by Irvin Yalom)

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## Self Disclosure

- Ex: "Your daughter's camp trunk"
- Inadvertent vs Intentional
- Ex: I was bullied
- Benefits and Contraindications
  
- Connections heal: We're all in the same boat.
- The healing power of community

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## Therapist as Wounded Healer #1

- Therapist cannot help but carry unconscious pain
- Therapist's unconscious pain can be triggered in Rx
- Freud - analysis is interminable
- Therapist should revisit therapy every 5 years
  - Personal writing as a Meditative Experience

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## Writing: A Meditative Experience

- Spiritual
- Meditative
- Reflective
- Offers connective tissue
- Therapists' unconscious pain can be triggered in Rx
  
- Freud - analysis is interminable
  
- Therapist should revisit therapy every 5 years
  - Personal writing as a Meditative Experience

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## Therapist as Wounded Healer #2

- Therapist carries baggage
- Therapist has a mother story
- We are all unreliable narrators

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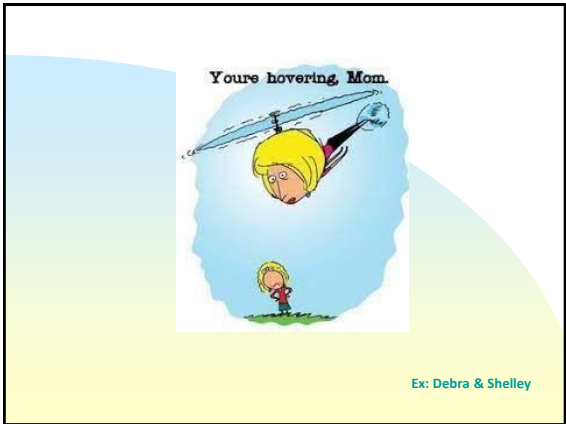
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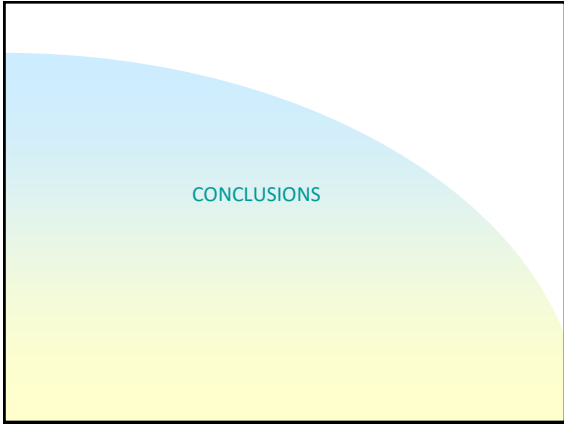
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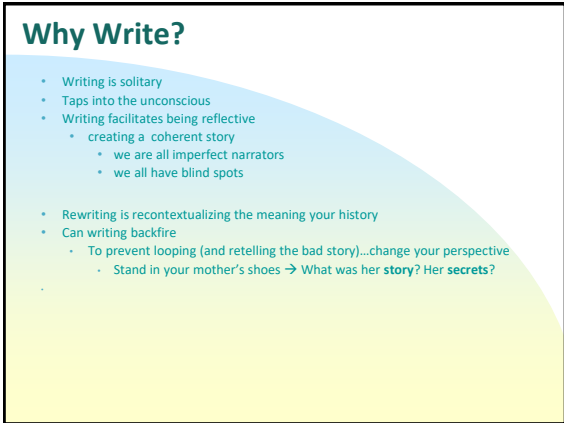
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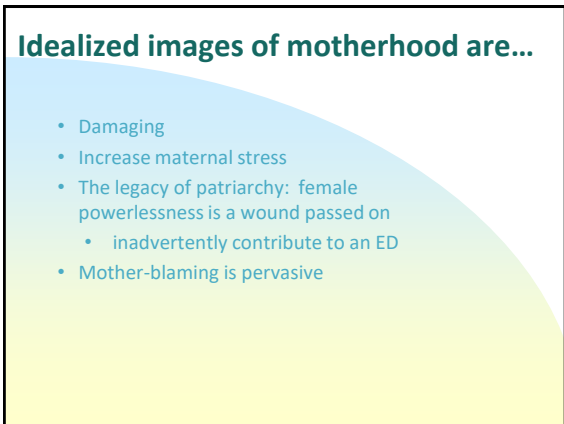
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## Takeaways

- Blood is thicker than Therapy.
- When Mothers & Daughters are at odds, the role of the Therapist is to...
  - normalize rupture and repair
    - conflict is part of growth
  - promote renegotiation of boundaries
    - every family is the same story: **ascending children** and **descending parents**
- teach communication and self regulation skills
- honor the wounded mother's survival skills

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## Takeaways

Rewriting Your Story: Making Peace with Your Mother

- Rewriting
  - May or May Not Involve Writing
- Involves Understanding Your Story
  - Recontextualizing your Mother's story
- Rewriting is an Internal Process

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## The Good Enough Mother is...

Wounded

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The Good Enough Mother is...

Wounded & Resilient

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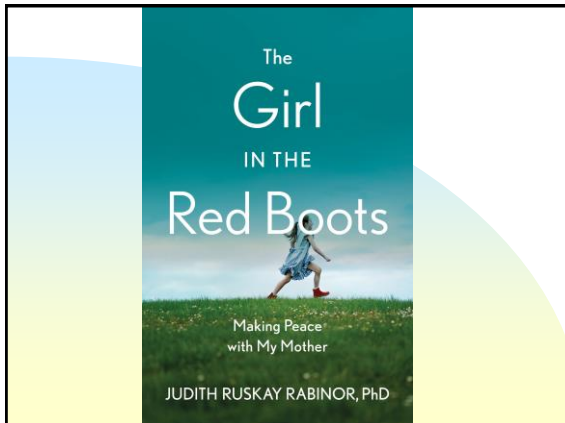
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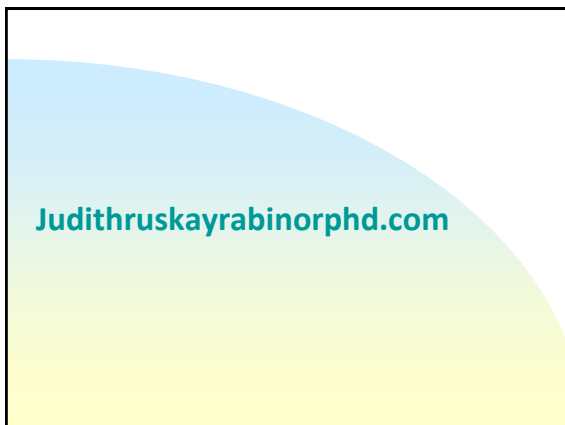
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