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## Informal Learning Within the Mother Daughter Dyad: Effect on Behavior and Attitude

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**Abstract:** This roundtable will explore informal learning within the mother-daughter dyad and the role of informal learning on their perceptions of aging. The focus will be on how mothers and daughters understand the importance making meaning from an experience, memory, or conversation for learning to occur.

**Keywords:** Informal learning, mother-daughter relationship, meaning-making

Rather than being confined to organized formal or non-formal settings, informal learning stems from an individual's questioning, observing, creative mind. Learning from experience is the core of informal adult learning (Livingstone, 2001). Though informal learning is ever present and life-long, it is difficult to distinguish the many learning activities, especially outside the workplace (Livingstone, 2001). As Schugurensky (2000) points out informal learning is under researched even though most of the significant learning we apply to daily life occurs informally. The learning is often unintentional, a by-product of an interaction or activity. After an experience one becomes aware that learning has occurred, the learning is not conscious or intentional but recognized after retrospective reflection (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Informal learning in the family is recognized as part of life-long learning from experience; however, most empirical research has been focused on virtual, workplace and social informal learning. Families are unique social subset; they provide a setting rich in intergendered and intergenerational relationships (Broderic, 1993). Jarvis (1987) notes the importance of the social setting in learning stating that "Learning is not just a psychological process that happens in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives, but that it is intimately related to that world and affected by it" (p. 11). The family is a social setting where valuable informal learning occurs.

The process of informal learning within a family and mother-daughter pairs is through existing interpretive frames that continually adjust and adapt within context and through reflection and retrospective recognition (Schugurensky, 2000). Chodorow's (1999) reproduction

of mother's theory posits that "gender personalities are reinforced by differences in the identification process of boys and girls that also results from women's mothering" (p. 173). This process results in mother's who identify with their mother and relate to their daughters, whom they believe to be similar to themselves (Lawler, 2000). Gilligan (2003) expands on Chodorow's (1999) theory stating that femininity is defined through attachment demonstrated by the mother daughter bond, whereas masculinity is defined by separation of the son from the mother.

Females develop their identity through their attachment with their mothers and the shifting roles in the family through the life span (Gilligan, 2003). The special relationship that exists between mothers and daughters and an adult daughter's tendency to behave and react in a manner similar to her mother is the background of this roundtable discussion (Chodorow, 1999). Research is broad on mother-daughter relationships as well as a mother's influence on her daughter's attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (Bergman & Fahey, 1997).

Our roundtable discussion will explore the the role of informal learning in the mother-daughter dyad on behavior, attitude, and expectations. Discussion will focus on the importance of reflection and making meaning from an experience, memory, or conversation for learning to occur by examining some findings from the pilot study on informal learning in the mother-daughter dyad.

Participants in the pilot were asked to provide a picture illustrating the mother daughter relationship. The portrait provided was very interesting. The portrait is of Madge, Meg and Meg's two teenaged daughters. What makes this picture unique and relevant to the study is the composition, Madge standing and holding a picture of Meg, who is standing and holding a picture of her two daughters. Looking at the picture one cannot focus on one person without noticing the presence of the others. Madge said she loved how it illustrates how one generation comes from the one before, "they are all my baby girls, a part of me lives in each of them." Her statement is an example of the close bond between mother and daughters (Fingerman, 2001). When asked about the portrait Meg replied "All the women I love are in that picture, it is beautiful. My mom is so beautiful and strong. I hope my girls think the same of me" Within the mother-daughter relationship attitudes, behaviors and perceptions are continually being formed, but is this a result of informal learning?

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