



The Relationship with Self

One Woman's Perspective

By Renée Siegel

Most women are raised to be relational and to seek connections with others. We are taught that it is important to be sensitive to and aware of the needs of others.

Oftentimes, we are raised to believe that being aware of what others need is more valuable than to be aware of one's own needs. Although this perspective is changing with more co-parenting and the growing awareness that early childhood messages affect our mental and emotional health, this message has often been part of our religious education as women as well.

Our relational perspective serves us in that we are able to be supportive and fulfill roles that are meaningful in the lives of others. This is most beneficial in creating or laying a foundation for cultivating the maternal instinct and providing a nurturing and supportive environment to those we care for. However, without equal consideration of the needs of self, women are destined to be both unable and unwilling to get their needs met in relationships. The relationship with the self is the first and the last relationship we have in our lives.

What would our world look like if we were raised to take the focus of that nurturing and place it *first* in the inner landscape of ourselves?

If we began with that focus of attention and it was supported by our early caretakers, it would likely aid women in laying the foundation for healthier and more authentic relationship development. We would begin relationship development with ourselves first.

We might begin by identifying what we, as little girls are interested in. Getting the support of our caregivers to play and try on new activities that bring happiness and fulfillment would provide both additional incentive and options to those traditionally endorsed. The circle of what is "appropriate" for girls/young women and women, would grow larger. A mother's outlook in raising both her sons and daughters would grow larger too. Inevitably, tolerance, acceptance and respect for choices that might differ from hers would grow too. Happier children would emerge and that would have



an untold positive impact.

Those women raised in traditional settings with limitations and ongoing conversation about what is “appropriate” for girls oftentimes find themselves as women in codependent or abusive relationships and/or unable to identify their specific likes and passions as empty nesters.

Today, women are dating longer, staying at home until they are older, marrying later and deciding to or not to have children.

As a result of myriad shifts in women’s roles, they are more able to respond to the question: *What is important to me and what do I enjoy in my life?* Furthermore, this question is answered regardless of whether or not she is doing it with a partner.

Some of the key traits of a healthy relationship are open and honest communication, the ability to address conflict, authenticity, respect, loyalty, tolerance for differences and knowing how to offer support to others.

The relationship with the self is where this all begins.