Exploring Female Graduate Students' Multifaceted and Intersecting Roles and Identities in a Complex Educational Milieu

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological investigation explored six female Master of Education students' critical understandings of their identity and role negotiations, and their perceptions of environmental conditions that facilitated or impeded their identity explorations and negotiations within the institution. The interweaving of Feminist and Women's Development theories enabled the data to be examined under different, yet complementary, lenses. The data collection strategies included: four to five in-depth semistructured interviews, three take-home activities (involving identity mapping, object and metaphor identification, and strategy development), and the compilation of extensive interview notes as well as researcher reflections. The combination of a constant comparative method and a voice-centered method were used in tandem to analyze the data. Together they uncovered five emergent themes: (a) intricate understandings of key terms; (b) life-long learning and transformative pathways; (c) gender issues; (d) challenges, tensions, and possibilities; as well as (e) personal, professional, and educational implications. The findings underscored the possibility for both a singular static identity and dynamic multifaceted identities to exist in tandem, and the emergence of natural or logical identity intersections, as well as disjointed or colliding identity intersections. Ultimately, it is the continuous negotiation of internal and external spheres that contributes to the complexity and multidimensionality of graduate students' identities.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This is a qualitative phenomenological study exploring female Master of Education students’ critical understandings of how they negotiate their intersecting identities during graduate studies, and the ways in which their identities are either legitimized or discounted within the institution. Cummins (1996) articulates that, “The interactions between educators and students always entail a process of negotiating identities” (p. iv). While he focuses primarily on elementary and secondary education, I would argue that these same processes and negotiations transpire within institutions of higher education as well, for instance, with graduate students and their professors.

Cummins conveys:

...how educators and students together can create, through their classroom interactions, a microcosm of the kind of society where everybody feels a strong sense of belonging regardless of race, gender, language, culture, creed or sexual orientation. The creation of these interpersonal and collective spaces represents an act of resistance to those elements within the societal power structure that are intolerant of indifference.... (pp. vi-vii)

I share in this vision for educational practice, and recognize the applicability of this interactive and dynamic approach as worthwhile within the realm of graduate studies, where students should be: (a) engaged in their own learning, (b) use critical theoretical principles to analyze systems and relationships around them, and (c) become a part of diverse scholarly learning communities. Inevitably, postsecondary institutions offering graduate level programs, constitute complex milieus, where many identities are constantly negotiated in tandem (i.e., identities of professors, graduate students,
administrators, etc.).

I begin this chapter by identifying the background of the problem and statement of the problem context. Next, the purpose of the study is explored, followed by a list of the three research questions to be answered. The rationale and theoretical framework guiding the study are then described. Afterwards, the study’s importance, along with its scope and limitations, are documented, and the remainder of the thesis is outlined.

Background of the Problem

Identity itself is a very complex construct (Graham, Sorrell, & Montgomery, 2004; Williamson, 1998). Hence, there is a lack of consensus with respect to its definition (for various definitions refer to: Garrett, 1998; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Schwartz, 2002; Williamson, 1998). Most of the literature links identity development to adolescence (i.e., Erikson, 1963; Schwartz, 2002). Little is said about the negotiation of identities throughout adulthood (i.e., Graham et al., 2004; Lopes, 2002). However, it is noted that, “The adult task of structuring and integrating multiple roles within a personal sense of identity is not a simple one” (Graham et al., 2004, p. 251). Interestingly, “Despite increasing evidence that identity changes in adulthood do take place, there is little knowledge about what the process of change looks like” (Kunnen & Klein-Wassink, 2003, p. 347). While little literature exists in relation to adults and identity, even less is said about the multiple dimensions of graduate students’ identities (i.e., Barata, Hunjan, & Leggatt, 2005; Fay, 1988/1989; Mogadime, 2002, 2003). Furthermore, studies surrounding the exploration of graduate students’ identities are found within other disciplines, but are limited within the field of education.

Investigations involving the study of graduate students indicate a serious problem
in the way that institutional practices are not adequately adapting to create an inclusive and inviting environment for all of the unique populations that they serve (i.e., Mogadime, 2002, 2003; Wiest, 1999). For instance, female graduate students have common needs which institutions must acknowledge and address (Wiest). These students require various types of supports (Wiest), accommodations in light of "home responsibilities" (Bruce, 1995; Wiest, 1999), opportunities for interaction in order to combat "social and intellectual isolation" (Bruce, 1995; Hockey, 1994; Wiest, 1999), "role models" (Bruce, 1995; Wiest, 1999), "professional development opportunities" (Bruce, 1995; Wiest, 1999), and the need to be heard (Younes & Asay, 1998). Clearly, female graduate students find themselves within a complex educational environment, with unique types of needs, all the while attempting to negotiate their multifaceted identities and roles of their own.

Statement of the Problem Context

Bloland (2005) articulates that "globalism" and "globalization" are radically shifting our world and impacting our universities. Likewise, Austin (2002) describes the changing milieu within institutions of higher education, indicating that "The modern academic workplace is characterized by student diversity, new technologies, changing societal expectations, a shift in emphasis toward the learner, expanding faculty work loads, and a new labor market for faculty" (p. 97). Similarly, Polster (2007) depicts a Canadian context in academe that is multidimensional and complicated, illustrating the many widespread tensions surrounding research-driven foci, governmental influences, new values, institutional rivalry, and diverse expectations from multiple sources.

With an increasing number of universities being designated as Comprehensive
institutions, changes in their foci are sure to transpire. In all likeliness, there are two possible ways that universities can manage these external and internal conditions; they can either put support mechanisms in place to assist professors and students in their identity and role negotiations within this complex milieu, or they can create barriers that may impede their identity and role negotiations, making it increasingly difficult for them to navigate these pressures.

Graduate students, especially females and minorities, face various institutional barriers within higher education (Barata et al., 2005; Fay, 1988/1989; Mogadime, 2002, 2003; Wiest, 1999). Some of the challenges that graduate students (including females and minorities) might face are (a) irrelevant curricula which lack opportunities for personal meaning and engagement, (Mogadime, 2003), (b) roadblocks, such as “hidden curricula” (Mogadime, 2002), (c) lack of mentorship (Fay, 1988/1989; Mogadime, 2002; Wiest, 1999), (d) status problems (Fay, 1988/1989), (e) the gendering of the institution (Barata et al., 2005), and (f) lack of voice both within and outside of the classroom (i.e., Barata et al., 2005; Mogadime, 2002, 2003), all of which impact upon various facets of students’ identities, in predominantly negative ways.

How then do graduate students negotiate their multiple intersecting identities within the complex milieu of the institution? What purpose do these negotiations serve (i.e., survival, adaptation, resistance, etc.)? Examining graduate students’ identities and negotiation processes offers insight into their experiences in graduate school and the ways that they derive a consolidated “sense of self” in the midst of pursuing a Master’s degree in education.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore six female Master of Education (M.Ed.) students’ critical understandings of how they negotiated their intersecting identities and roles during graduate studies, and the ways in which their identities were either legitimized or discounted within the institution.

Research Questions to Be Answered

Both Feminist theory, and Women’s Development theory comprised the theoretical perspectives used to analyze the findings of this research study. This investigation sought to answer the following three questions:

• How do M.Ed. students theoretically, conceptually, and personally define identities and intersecting identities?

• What environmental conditions either facilitate or impede the exploration of graduate students’ multiple and intersecting identities within the institution?

• What strategies support student identity exploration within and outside of the graduate classroom?

Rationale

By understanding the intersecting identities that students negotiate during graduate school, programs can be designed and tailored to accommodate the unique needs of the various populations that they serve and be better equipped to implement various strategies that will create inclusive climates for female students.

Women have much to offer researchers in terms of their experiences, ideas, and outlooks, yet, oftentimes they are excluded from the research process. There is a growing awareness on the part of various researchers to encourage women’s stories to be known
(Bruce, 1995; The Grassroots Women’s Collective, 1999; Wiest, 1999; Younes & Asay, 1998). “Women’s voices deserve to be heard... Their stories need to be told” (The Grassroots Women’s Collective, 1999, p. 13). Female participants could have also benefited from the research itself. It offered an opportunity for network building, and an avenue for dialoguing about the significant themes in one’s life, as well as an avenue for sharing and relating, (Younes & Asay, 1998). It is extremely energizing and unifying to be around peers who are going through similar situations, enabling candid discussions of their frustrations and successes (Hockey, 1994). Likewise, Younes & Asay (1998) state an objective of their research and the positive gains that they hope to achieve: “…this study seeks to affirm the experiences of female graduate students and reduces their sense of isolation as they progress through their graduate education” (¶ 4). Assisting the research participants to improve their circumstances is an important undertaking. Moreover, the rationale for this study was similar to Younes and Asay’s (1998) rationale, namely, to date, studies have overlooked this important topic. They state:

Higher education personnel could also benefit from the study as they design flexible graduate programs responsive to the needs of female graduate students. Most significantly, this study provided female graduate students an opportunity and a forum to express their concerns and discuss their experiences regarding the process of role negotiation. (¶ 4)

When students are encouraged to voice their experiences, they often feel empowered.

This theme is of personal significance to me, as I myself am a female graduate student. I am interested in topics related to higher education and identity. Ever since I began graduate studies in September 2005, I have been reflecting upon the ways in which
my own identities have been continuously influencing my understanding of various
theories, my class participation, as well as my thinking patterns and behaviours. I am
curious about the ways in which graduate students negotiate their multiple identities
within their academic, professional, and personal lives and how this process informs their
perception of themselves. My various intersecting identities, which include being white,
female, Ukrainian, Welsh, a sister, a daughter, a girlfriend, a full-time student, a tutor,
and so on, are bound to influence my experiences and perceptions of the world in unique
ways, just as each students’ distinctive identities shape their own interactions and
reactions within the world around them. Graduate student identity is an important field of
research. This topic is worthy of study as it enables graduate students, professors, and
institutions to carefully examine and address important issues, such as (a) strategies for
preserving and valuing the identities of others, (b) ways to eliminate institutional barriers
of exclusion, and (c) opportunities for the introduction of radical critical pedagogical
methods of inquiry into university curricula.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study had three notable limitations. First, the Master of Education program
was different from other graduate programs at the same institution. This program at one
particular university was largely perceived as a professional degree. It served very
distinct populations, including a cohort of international students, as well as a very large
group of part-time students and a much smaller group of full-time students. This study
was limited to exploring the identities of the graduate students within this particular
program because of its diverse student population. The results from this study cannot be
generalized to other graduate programs offered at the same university, or the Master of
Education programs offered at outside institutions, or even all students within this program. On account of their unique needs, the study was limited to full-time and part-time female participants in the domestic program. Second, when conducting interviews, it was possible that sometimes participants might have told the researcher what they thought she wanted to hear. Third, as a new researcher, my inexperience and naiveté might have served as a potential roadblock during the research process, as my learning curve was much larger than the learning curve of an experienced researcher. Chapter Three will further describe the specific ways that these limitations have been addressed.

Outline of Remainder of the Document

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature related to adults, identity and changing educational contexts, with specific emphasis on women and graduate students. Chapter Three outlines the methodology and procedures that govern this study with reference to phenomenology, semistructured interviewing, and qualitative data analysis. Chapter Four describes the five emerging themes of the investigation including: participants’ understandings of key concepts; life-long learning and transformative pathways; an exploration of gender issues; tensions, challenges, and possibilities associated with identity negotiations within the institutional environment; as well as personal, professional, and educational implications, with reference to strategy development. Chapter Five answers the three research questions, acknowledges contributions to the field, and addresses implications for practice, theory, and future research.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter Two constitutes a review of the related literature, fostering a progression from general to specific conceptual development. The major themes explored include: Adulthood, Identity and Change; Teachers, Identities, and an Ever-Changing Educational Milieu; Negotiating Multiple Identities; Theoretical Perspectives (Feminist and Women’s Development Theories); the Importance of Women as Research Participants; Researching the Identities of College and University Students; as well as The Institutional Environment: Challenges and Possibilities.

Adulthood, Identity, and Change

Schwartz (2002) suggested:

...regardless of whether one perceives oneself to be internalizing and piecing together aspects of the outside world, or whether one believes that one is ‘finding’ oneself, the implications with regard to Eriksonian (and neo-Eriksonian) theory appear to be the same. As long as individuals deliberately participate in interactions within their interpersonal, social, and cultural environments, they are likely to develop a positive and synthesized sense of identity. (p. 322)

Therefore, in this study, identity was referred to as a multifaceted and complex construct, which could be defined differently by each individual; with each definition being recognized as equally valid. It had the potential to be both singular and plural; both independent of context and dependent upon context; both static and dynamic. It was believed to be as variable as human beings. Ultimately, each woman had to define identity in a way that made the most sense for her.

With age, one’s understanding of identity extends and intensifies (Graham et al.,
null
Accordingly, adulthood is recognized as being a period in life when complex and multidimensional identities are being explored (Graham et al.). The authors state: “...the maintenance and transformation of identity in the adult years involve psychosocial constraints and possibilities that are significantly more differentiated and informed by deeper levels of personal and social experience than are the identity formation processes of adolescence” (p. 252). Here, both age and experience are emphasized as contributing to enriched and multifaceted ways of understanding the world. Similarly, based on chronology, graduate students have transitioned into adulthood, and bring with them a wealth of personal experiences, perspectives, and identities to draw upon within the classroom context.

Identity continues to evolve and change throughout adulthood (Anthis, 2002; Kunnen & Klein-Wassink, 2003). As one research article stated, “The adult task of structuring and integrating multiple roles within a personal sense of identity is not a simple one” (Graham et al., 2004, p. 251). These researchers underscored the involved nature of identity. Graham et al. highlighted adulthood as being a period in life when complex and multidimensional identities are being explored. “...the maintenance and transformation of identity in the adult years involve psychosocial constraints and possibilities that are significantly more differentiated and informed by deeper levels of personal and social experience than are the identity formation processes of adolescence” (p. 252). Indeed, graduate students are also adult learners who are simultaneously engaging in this type of complicated identity exploration that Graham et al. reference, while pursuing their studies. Both their identities and their experiences in graduate studies are bound to simultaneously influence each other on a daily basis.
Teachers, Identities, and an Ever-Changing Educational Milieu

The consideration of teachers’ multifaceted and changing identities in the context of the classroom is an important topic to review, as it would either confirm or disprove two specific assumptions related to this research study. The first assumption was that university professors’ understandings of themselves were bound to impact upon their interactions with students, and their facilitation of identity exploration within the classroom. The second assumption was that teachers might have grappled with common identity issues in light of their shared professional responsibilities. This is of significance, as most of the Master of Education students are teachers. Gaining insight into teachers’ identities would enable a better understanding of participants’ professional selves.

Ropers-Huilman (1997) wrote an article entitled, “Constructing feminist teachers: Complexities of identity.” In her research, she explored the dynamic identities of feminist teachers that shape and influence their teaching and learning in the university context. The author communicated that identities are rich, involved, and continuously transforming. In this investigation, she compiled dialogues from 22 professors at one university in the United States, who considered themselves to be “feminist” teachers. Interestingly, one male was a part of this study. She then followed up with two professors, whom she observed engaged in their teaching. The researcher claimed that the professors’ identities were influenced by many factors including people, ideas, and experiences. Teachers were very aware of these influences and thought about the ways in which their students might perceive their actions, appearances, practices, and so on. Professors talked about presenting themselves in certain ways depending on the particular context. But I wondered how their particular understanding of themselves impacted upon
their students’ awareness of identity issues and their own engagement in identity exploration. Are graduate students’ identities shaped by the same factors that influence professors’ identities? These are some important questions, which beg answering.

Younes and Asay (1998) briefly alluded to seasonal variances in graduate students’ roles and feelings, with summer being identified as the most challenging time. How would having the summer off from teaching impact upon Master of Education students’ identity and “role negotiations?” Might they immerse themselves more fully in their role of “student” or “researcher?” Would they feel resentment in having to take graduate classes during their summer vacation? Or might they welcome the change in pace and environment? These questions are complicated by personal philosophies, beliefs, and priorities.

Some teachers view themselves as “life-long learners,” forever occupying the role of the student, as their learning never ends. Others view themselves as “experts” or “fountains of knowledge.” The first belief is likely to be a better fit within the realm of graduate studies, while the second view may present roadblocks for teachers as they venture into areas outside of their own classrooms. Perhaps various dimensions of the participants’ personal philosophies of education might emerge during the interview process, and shed light into the interconnections within their professional and academic identities. Understanding the reasons why an individual chooses to pursue graduate studies was thought to help tease apart issues of identity formation, and identity exploration, as they were possibly interconnected.

Educational and curricular reforms are hot topics that rarely leave political party agendas. Gitlin and Margonis (1995) pondered the query in what ways are teachers’
identities transformed by these changes in education? They mentioned that this particular question is often overlooked. “From the perspective of those championing school change, engagement of teachers and others is limited, in part, because reforms do not consider how these participants understand their role, relations with others, and even the meaning of change itself” (Gitlin & Margonis, p. 380). It must be a very trying and turbulent time for teachers as they attempt to make sense of the new objectives and come up with a plan on how they will approach this novel material.

Researchers have documented the numerous shifts in curricular reform within Ontario and indicated the subsequent backlash to such changes that have been demonstrated by the teachers themselves (O’Sullivan, 1999; Winter & McEachern, 2001). This reaction on the part of the teachers is not surprising, considering the undue isolation, occupational demands, and disorder that manifests when teachers are not a part of the process (Winter & McEachern). Have teachers who taught amidst curricular reform had to grapple with feelings of tension, frustration, and confusion when reexamining their own identities? Glegg (2003) commented, “What has changed is the source of expectations for teachers: they may be now much better trained and more professional, but political forces of every description combine to influence what is required of them in the way of attitudes and behaviour” (p. 18). With all of these competing external expectations, not to mention conflicting internal expectations that teachers hold, it is no wonder that “identity confusion” can result. Related to this theme, a pair of researchers offered an interesting commentary regarding the present state of affairs:

This fractured curricular world of overlapping and rapidly changing boundaries
defines the context of today’s generation of curriculum workers. Few search for curricular consensus or consolidation (which would merely be a return to the state of reductive homogenization of varied multiple interests). Most direct their energies to carving-out micro-identity spaces within the field. (Sears & Marshall, 2000, p. 209)

Likely, the only thing teachers truly have control over are the actual happenings within their own classrooms, such as their own teaching style and the ways in which they engage their students in learning. Perhaps this quote articulates the desire among teachers to concentrate their efforts more closely on this aspect of their job. It is within this classroom space that teachers can exhibit varying aspects of their identity.

Lopes (2002) conducted a study on the topic of curriculum reform and teacher identity. The investigator highlighted findings from a large body of research known as Professional Identities Construction-Situated Identity and Identity Change in Primary School Teachers (CIPROF). (This was a smaller subset of a larger project called Creativity and School Improvement). Her article is entitled “Constructing Professional Identities in Portuguese Primary Schools” (p. 241). A small group of six female teachers at one elementary school location were the participants in this facet of “action-research.” In her abstract she stated, “In this article I describe a study that analyzed changes in professional identity that accompanied changes in curriculum development” (Lopes, p. 241). This 2-year longitudinal study used: pre and post questionnaires, field notes, and group discussion as a means of collecting information regarding changing teacher identities. One of the emergent ideas that arose from the investigation included the notion that a person’s philosophy, attitude, outlook, and beliefs can influence how they proceed
to deal with changes. Moreover, there can be clashes between groups of teachers who have different outlooks and philosophies, which can impact negatively upon the milieu (Lopes). Lopes also articulated that:

The processes of the development of professional identity were revealed by the nature of intervention at the group level. The objective transactions include two aspects that are equally present and, to a certain extent, balanced: The interpersonal, or support aspect (emotional), relevant to the form dimension, and the professional or indicative aspect (cognitive), relevant to the dimension of content. (p. 250)

This researcher highlighted that teachers who were experiencing curriculum reform needed holistic support, which nurtured both their cognitive and emotional domains. Lopes seemed to suggest that this type of support would assist teachers in better understanding their transforming professional identities. Lopes also indicated that in this investigation, each teacher’s professional identity went through different, unique, and highly individualized changes. The author mentioned the influence of context (i.e., geography, history, culture, make-up of the school, reputation of school, etc.) as an important consideration in this study. As such, these findings cannot be generalized to other settings. However, they are interesting nonetheless. Changing governments mean that curricular reform can happen frequently over the course of a teacher’s career.

Amidst the chaos and confusion of curriculum reform, it must be difficult for teachers not to lose sight of their own identities. Teachers, I am sure, begin with a vision in mind for their classroom and for the school year. A change in curriculum would definitely require a reexamination of this original vision. Teachers must be continuously
aware of their own personal philosophies related to: education, assessment, child
development, parental involvement, teaching style, and even curriculum. They also need
to be able to articulate these philosophies to others, to show where they are coming from.
Such a monumental change, as that of curriculum reform, will undoubtedly necessitate a
review of these philosophies (which are linked directly to a teacher’s professional and
personal identities) and require careful decision making on how best to proceed.

According to Lambert (2003), it is essential for teachers to remain tied to their
drive and determination, no matter what lies before them. Lambert stated that:

Humans yearn for vitality, for purpose. Teachers who attain such vitality are
energised by their own curiosities, their colleagues and their students. They find
joy and stimulation in the daily dilemmas of teaching and are intrigued by the
challenge of school improvement in adult communities. (pp. 421-422)

These teachers look at change as full of possibilities. Lambert further noted that,

“Those who have managed to keep their sense of purpose alive and well are reflective,
inquisitive, focused on improving their craft, action oriented; they accept responsibility
for student learning and have a strong sense of self” (p. 422). Clearly, this strong guiding
“purpose” can help teachers cope with the changes happening around them.

Changes in society, technology, and demands placed upon teachers bring about
transformations in the ways that teachers are perceived, and ultimately with the ways that
teachers think of themselves and their roles. Burniske (1999) acknowledged the reality of
the situation as follows: “Our society’s demand for specialization discourages teachers
from becoming skilled generalists” (p. 122). Burniske critiqued this preoccupation with
specialty stating “I wondered why educators should value specialization when the
greatest challenge is teaching students to think in holistic terms, breaking down the walls that separate the disciplines” (p. 122). This researcher advised teachers to think of themselves as interdisciplinary educators rather than “subject specialists.” For some educators, this would be a radical departure from what they are used to, and may involve a rethinking of their own beliefs, identities, and roles. Lopes (2002) concludes:

Change, when it exists, necessarily and clearly involves personal change of the people concerned. Educational innovation, in this sense, always leads to personal conversion. It is the people themselves who bring up new relations of production and are changed by them. Otherwise, why would we all talk so much about self-development in professional training. (p. 252)

Clearly, teachers are also impacted by change, particularly that of curriculum reform and societal demands. In the aftermath of such monumental changes, educators must grapple with its many effects on their own self-image or identity and, hopefully, find a means of adapting. If this is not possible, then they may find themselves leaving the profession. Perhaps teacher attrition in part occurs when the tension between what educators believe aught to be valued and what is actually valued according to new and changing mandates becomes so disparate, that they cannot find a way to reconcile the two. Indeed, this would present significant barriers to teachers’ professional identity explorations. Clearly, curriculum changes impact upon adults’ self-perceptions and their own identities. It is important to proceed through adulthood with an open-minded attitude towards change and a willingness to explore our own personal identities!

Negotiating Multiple Identities

With a deeper understanding of “identities” in mind, it became necessary to
define a second emergent concept within the literature, that of “intersecting identities” (i.e., Mogadime, 2002, 2003; Ropers-Huilman, 1997). It was believed that a clearer conceptualization of “intersecting identities” would illustrate the complexity of identity research, and facilitate a more accurate analysis of the challenges that graduate students face in higher education classrooms, on account of their varied personal histories, experiences, and lived realities. One way of understanding this term is to recognize peoples’ “multiple realities” (Mogadime, 2002, 2003). Another conception is that, “…identities are layered and integrated in a complex series of negotiations and struggles” (Ropers-Huilman, 1997, p. 327). This researcher stated, “Our identities are multiple, yet enmeshed with each other in a chaotic balance of life choices and struggles for self” (p. 333). Related to intersecting identities is the concept of “identity integration” (Stewart, 2002), which is defined as:

...go[ing] beyond exhibiting consistent behaviour across differing social contexts. Identity integration specifically looks at the intersections between race, gender, class, sexuality and age, for instance, and theorizes that mature identity development in an individual will seek to continually use those identities in concert, not oppositionally or hierarchically. (p. 2)

Here it is understood that our intersecting identities do converge and help to inform an individual’s decisions and actions. Ropers-Huilman (1997) gives a real-life example of one teacher’s intersecting identities:

Gloria emphasized that it was the intersections between her various identities, rather than any singular aspect, which most significantly influenced her decisions about teaching. She described her teaching as multicultural and stated: ‘I think
that if anybody embodies the sort of intersection of multiculturalism, it’s women of colour with a working-class background. So there’s race, class and gender right there.’ (p. 336)

This actual example of the intersections between a person’s various identities enables a deeper understanding of the dynamic plurality of identities and the ways that they come together and inform each other.

In explaining intersecting identities, Stewart (2002) stated:

...what remains rarely addressed...is an intentional analysis of the multi-dimensionality of identity constructs in all human beings, across social and cultural identities. Theory development would be enhanced by an understanding of the relationships betwixt and between the differing...facets of self, allowing those facets to speak with, across, and to each other. (p. 2)

For the purposes of this study, intersecting identities involves: the coming together of an individual’s multiple identities in particular places, spaces and times, influencing a person’s lived experiences, their perspectives, their actions, and their reactions within a given context. Undoubtedly, both teachers and students have multiple intersecting identities, which add to the complexity of the classroom milieu. Our multiple intersecting identities seem to be interwoven into every facet of our daily existence, and are continuously shaped by the changing world around us.

Theoretical Perspectives

The next step involved understanding the theoretical perspectives that informed this study. Those perspectives included Feminist theory, and Women’s Development perspective (see Figure 1).
"types of knowledge" accepted and denied (Mogadime, 2002, 2003).

• "masculinity" as privileged in the institution (Barta et al., 2005)

• Education is valuable

• Prasad (2005) "...critique and change" (p. 109)

• Inclusion/exclusion/oppresion/barrier/strategies

• Hall (1990) women's "real interests"

• ground the research and the study's objectives

• Legitimize, honour women's voices, recognize that their ways of thinking, acting, and perceiving are not superior or inferior to men; merely different educational opportunities as a means to enhance female identity

• One type of feminist theory is "Women's Voice/Experience Feminism" (Prasad, 2005, p. 161)

• Gilligan (1982) indicates previous omission of females' perspectives, unique experiences and developmental differences set them apart from men, in terms of their stages of moral reasoning, their thinking, their decision making strategies, and the way they interact within their environments

• Interdependence, and relationship-centered foci as prominent in identity descriptions (Gilligan)

• Listening Guide method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, 2003)—multiple voices

Figure 1. Two complementary theoretical frameworks.
**Feminist Theory**

The feminist theoretical perspective was continuously applied throughout this study in the conceptualization, collection, and interpretation phases of the project. This standpoint complemented the purpose of the study, participants' gendered experiences, and the methodologies that I sought to employ. I viewed feminist theory as helping to ground the research and the study’s objectives.

Prasad (2005) identified feminism as subsumed under the “critical traditions.” She explained, “In short, the critical traditions are simultaneously committed to both critique and change” (p. 109). These concepts were central to this research. Prasad further indicated that, “For all their variation, the critical traditions remain united in their focus on the oppression and exploitation of different groups…” (p. 110). According to Chen (2005), “…critical theorists advocate holding a skeptical attitude toward knowledge” (p. 17). McLaren (2003) added other important questions to consider which include: “Whose interests does this knowledge serve? Who gets excluded as a result? Who is marginalized?” (p. 196). This dimension of the “critical traditions” coincided with Hall’s (1990) description of feminism:

Feminism cannot be dismissed as an insignificant ideology that has little impact on people's lives. Feminism is a value and belief system... Though feminism articulates the vital needs of any socially oppressed group, it is more likely to attract women as it attempts to address their real interests. (p. 9)

With respect to gender-related stereotypes, Wood (1997) articulated that: Perhaps no other stereotype so strongly defines men in our society as does that of breadwinner. Men are expected to be the primary or exclusive wage earners for
their families, and achieving this is central to how our society views men's success. (p. 353)

To contrast, according to feminist claims,

In the workplace, women have systematically occupied underpaid positions without much career mobility. At home, their work in caring for the family has been institutionalized as a form of unpaid wage labor, and their contributions as wives, mothers, and homemakers have gone largely unrecognized. (Prasad, 2005, p. 159)

Yet, oftentimes these contributions have come to be expected, such as their service to the family through actions like making meals, doing laundry, driving children to their different after school activities, all of which are done without renumeration, and very little acknowledgement. Gilligan (1982) and Hall (1990) used arguments in favour of promoting educational opportunities for women as a crucial means to enhancing female identity. “In tying women’s self-development to the exercise of their own reason, the early feminists saw education as critical for women if they were to live under their own control” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 129). A feminist lens of analysis assisted in exploring issues such as this one.

There are numerous forms of feminist theory, thus it has become a very diverse and multidimensional discipline (Prasad, 2005). Prasad used the label of “Women’s Voice/Experience Feminism” (p. 161) to identify the form of feminism that best fit with the context and method of analysis used in this study. “The primary contribution of the women’s voice/experience tradition lies in its refusal to accept solely male-based experiences as the foundation for explaining all social dynamics” (p. 162). “Gender is
one of the primary aspects of identity that we learn through conversations with others” (Wood, 1997, p.61). Indeed the experiences of females with respect to areas such as graduate studies and education are needed in order to broaden one dimension aspect of the current state of affairs within higher education, and the push towards accommodating for a diverse student population.

In terms of methodology,

Feminists infinitely prefer methods that bring them closer to their subjects because of their primary commitment to understanding the subjective lifeworlds of women-worlds that have largely been ignored or are simply unseen in the male-dominated domains of the social sciences. Feminists are therefore intensely phenomenological, with an interest in placing gender at the core of their phenomenological inquiry. (Prasad, 2005, p. 173).

Interestingly, Oakley (2003) critiqued the way that the interview process is portrayed (i.e., as objective, impartial, neutral, etc.):

This protocol assumes a predominantly masculine model of sociology and society. The relative undervaluation of women’s models has led to an unreal theoretical characterisation of the interview as a means of gathering sociological data which cannot and does not work in practice. (p. 244)

She indicated that interviews are far more complex and rich when other aspects like communicative, affective, and reflective dimensions are considered. This leads to the second theoretical framework employed, that of Carol Gilligan’s (1982) Women’s Development Perspective.
**Women’s Development Perspective**

Carol Gilligan’s (1982) book entitled *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* proved to be a valuable resource for this study as it offered an additional lens through which the data could be examined. In the realm of psychology, Gilligan identified a gap in existing models that omitted female perspectives on growth and change. She attempted to rectify this imbalance throughout her work. According to Gilligan, women and men mature, reflect, and understand themselves in distinct ways. Moreover, she indicated that they seem to describe themselves differently. The following results were based on the female participants that she referred to throughout her book: “In response to the request to describe themselves, all of the women describe a relationship, depicting their identity in the connection of future mother, present wife, adopted child, or past lover” (p. 159). “Thus in all of the women’s descriptions, identity is defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care” (p. 160).

Gilligan further compared and contrasted male and female development in the following way:

In young adulthood, when identity and intimacy converge in dilemmas of conflicting commitment, the relationship between self and other is exposed. That this relationship differs in the experience of men and women is a steady theme in the literature on human development and a finding of my research… male and female voices typically speak of the importance of different truths, the former of the role of separation as it defines and empowers the self, the latter of the ongoing process of attachments that creates and sustains the human community. (p. 156)
According to Gilligan, there are pronounced identity-related differences between the sexes, which researchers have not adequately accounted for.

Gilligan (1982) proceeded to describe a study that she conducted with students in higher education (at the college level), talking about how they wrestled with identifying their own beliefs, expressing themselves, and knowing who they were.

...the difficulty experienced by psychologists in listening to women is compounded by women's difficulty in listening to themselves. This difficulty is evident in a young woman's account of her crisis of identity and moral belief—a crisis that centers on her struggle to disentangle her voice from the voices of others and to find a language that represents her experience of relationships and her sense of herself. (p. 51)

This participant indicated that external perceptions and expectations do not always align with reality, or with one's self-beliefs or with societal values for that matter (Gilligan). Here the author highlighted the central theme of "voice," which was paramount to her work in revealing the pronounced distinctions in females' experiences as articulated in their own words. She underscored the complex position that females find themselves in, stating:

As the events of women's lives and of history intersect with their feelings and thoughts, a concern with individual survival comes to be branded as 'selfish' and to be counterposed to the 'responsibility' of a life lived in relationships. And in turn, responsibility becomes, in its conventional interpretation, confused with a responsiveness to others that impedes a recognition of self. (p. 127)

This investigation intended to emulate Gilligan's ability to capture participants' "voices,"
but also strived to improve on particular aspects of her methodology including the adoption of a more rigorous procedure that was concerned with providing a detailed description of the processes involved in collecting and analyzing the data.

The Importance of Women as Research Participants

It is extremely valuable to transcribe into writing the lived experiences of women, and to validate their daily existence by providing others with access into their realities. As articulated in the aims of one investigation by Younes and Asay (1998), studying the transformations in a woman’s self-concept can provide a deeper understanding of her ongoing roles, her feelings, and the ways in which she approaches everyday situations. According to Creswell (2005), one of the important dimensions of qualitative research is that “the researcher relies on the views of participants” (p. 39). Hockey (1994) touched upon the comforting feeling in knowing that others are living through analogous situations and encountering comparable emotions. This exchange of ideas and experiences is a unique dimension of qualitative research that comes from capturing the dialogue of one’s participants.

Fittingly, The Grassroots Women’s Collective (1999) highlighted “…the incredible strength women have. Their stories are about surviving, changing and sometimes triumphing, and offer hope for others who are living through similar experiences” (p. 19). While they referred to the specific cases from their book, for the purposes of this investigation, it is believed that every woman has an important story to tell, one that is worthy of being heard. As one participant in Bruce’s (1995) study indicated, female participants such as she were able to show others that women can overcome societal-imposed obstacles. For instance, in the case of education, it is not
always an easy road for wives and mothers with exceedingly hectic schedules to undertake the added commitment involved in pursuing higher education. For this reason, the participants in Bruce’s study sought out female professors as mentors to observe how they negotiated their home lives and work lives. As Younes and Asay (1998) noted, oftentimes immense sacrifices and lifestyle adjustments become necessary. Yet, women such as these can serve as excellent role models encouraging and inspiring others to persevere with their endeavours.

Moreover, the notion of “empowerment” was raised by multiple sources (The Grassroots Women’s Collective, 1999; Younes & Asay, 1998). Emmons (2003) articulated that, “People spend significant amounts of their daily lives reflecting on, deciding between, and pursuing personally important and meaningful goals, goals that lend order and structure to these lives. Without goals, life would lack structure and purpose” (p. 106). Understanding females' personal, professional, and academic goals is central to understanding who they are and identifying their priorities. Emmons also stated, “Goal attainment is a major benchmark for the experience of wellbeing. When asked what makes for a happy, fulfilling, and meaningful life, people spontaneously discuss their life goals, wishes, and dreams for the future” (p.106). The question becomes what types of short-term and long-term goals do female Master of Education students set for themselves? And do they recognize themselves as progressing towards the realization of these objectives? Responsibility and power are also common themes that females must make sense of:

Women take control of the home front; find work to support themselves and their children; learn to say no to dangerous situations; earn self-respect; hold
on to dreams and ambitions; find the way out of the trauma, out of the abyss. Again and again, the women return to the importance of achieving personal and life goals, which may include their education, work or spirituality. They document how hard it is to achieve these goals but they offer ways of struggling to keep trying. (The Grassroots Women's Collective, 1999, p. 22)

While this quote was in specific reference to the women's stories found within "Voicing Our Stories/Remaking Our Lives," it was applicable to most women's experiences and underscored the value of having women as research participants, who could share what they had been through, enabling others to learn from their experiences. Bruce (1995) called for a deeper examination of the important issues that women face.

Researching the Identities of College and University Students

McLaren (2003) stated that, "to ignore the ideological dimensions of student experience is to deny the ground upon which students learn, speak, and imagine. Students cannot learn 'usefully' unless teachers develop an understanding of the various ways in which student perceptions and identities are constituted" (p. 242). While McLaren's early works focused on his experiences as an elementary school teacher, his words have merit for teachers and students at all levels, including higher education.

Motivations

Before delving into the needs of female graduate students, it first becomes important to briefly explore their motivations for entering into their programs. Younes and Asay (1998) addressed this topic within their study. "The reasons cited for seeking a graduate degree were professional growth, personal growth, increased earning power, career advancement, increased credibility, and desire to have a degree" (¶10). It was
[Text content not legible]
evident that the participants had goals, high aspirations, and knew exactly what they wanted (Younes & Asay). “These women valued education and saw it as a vehicle to personal fulfillment, professional advancement and societal improvement” (¶15). Likely, many of the same motivations would also be expressed within the M.Ed. students being interviewed, especially since many of their careers were centred in education.

Role Negotiations

Younes and Asay (1998) listed the many roles that their female graduate student participants took on, many of which included familial roles (i.e., “wife,” “mother”), professional roles (i.e., “entrepreneur,” “private music teacher”), and social/community roles (i.e., “friend,” “volunteer”) (¶11). Younes & Asay (1998) viewed the juggling of different roles as impacting the way their participants saw themselves (i.e., their multiple and intersecting identities). Thus, roles and identities seem to be linked with each other. When an individual takes on various roles in different facets of his or her life, his or her responsibilities and “personas” are bound to impact and tie into his or her identities, probably in both subconscious and conscious ways.

Younes and Asay’s (1998), study was entitled, “Resilient Women: How Female Graduate Students Negotiate Their Multiple Roles” (p. 451). The research team gathered written and verbal responses from eight females who were working on their degrees. The researchers noted that adult learners often add to their already busy lives and schedules by taking on additional responsibilities associated with student life. Through observations, discussions, and interviews, various significant and relevant issues emerged with respect to the challenges that these participants experienced in attempting to maintain some type of equilibrium or “balance” in their lives, despite the pervading
feeling of being pulled in many different directions by these different roles that they took on (Younes & Asay).

Needs

"Addressing the Needs of Graduate Women" was the title of a study conducted by Wiest (1999), who identified this topic as worthy of study and proceeded to indicate that there was scarce research in this area. Wiest attempted to label emergent themes and needs that 12 female graduate students identified as significant to their present lived realities. Her research was conducted at a university in the United States and included multiple means of data collection including written replies, e-mails, and discussions. From these responses, eight particular needs-based themes arose surrounding: personal safety, financial support, home responsibilities, social and intellectual isolation, need for role models, professional development, respect for thinking and learning styles and sexual harassment (Wiest, pp. 30-32). Many of these themes overlapped with the findings of other studies (i.e., Bruce, 1995; Hockey, 1994; Younes & Asay, 1998).

Maslow's theory (as cited in Santrock & Mitterer, 2001, p. 371) depicts a progression of human motives and needs, starting with the need for safety and security at the most fundamental level, spanning to the highest order, the motivation to reach "self-actualization." This is a useful model for making sense of graduate students' needs. Thinking about the most basic motive, it is not surprising then that Wiest's (1999) participants mentioned worries about safety on campus, particularly during late night hours. Likely, women in particular, are more sensitive and attuned to issues of safety, perhaps as a result of societal assumptions and stereotypes, which depict females as being "weak," "in need of protection," or as likely "victims."
Juggling home responsibilities are important to female graduate students (Bruce, 1995; Wiest, 1999). This involves the negotiation of various identity roles. Graduate students have other needs as well, such as the need to be heard by administrators, the need for accommodative practices, and the need to be recognized as human beings rather than as numbers (Younes & Asay, 1998). Moreover, they also pointed to another need. They stated:

The added financial burden, emotional strain, and disregard for the well-being of students reinforces the need for mental health and supportive services on campus. Such services need to target non-traditional and graduate students who are most likely to experience the high cost of higher education. (p. 33)

As Astin (2004) indicated, spiritual fulfillment is also important to some students. ...spirituality points to our interiors, by which I mean our subjective life, as contrasted to the objective domain of observable behaviour and material objects that you can point to and measure directly. In other words, the spiritual domain has to do with human consciousness—what we experience privately in our subjective awareness. Second, spirituality involves our qualitative or affective experiences at least as much as it does our reasoning or logic. More specifically, spirituality has to do with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here—the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to each other and to the world around us. Spirituality can also have to do with aspects of our experience that are not easy to define or talk about, such things as intuition, inspiration, the mysterious, and the mystical. (p. 34)
Indeed, female graduate students have multiple needs, which require support. Ultimately, Baker (2006) reminds educators that “Students’ needs do not really divide vertically…” (p. 181). It becomes evident that students’ needs are multidimensional, complex, and often interconnected.

**Students’ Intersecting Identities**

Studies involving graduate student participants explore their many different intersecting identities. One project, for instance, discussed the formation of a “feminist research group” at the University of Windsor (Barata et al., 2005). These authors articulated their shared positioning and common objective; coming from graduate studies in psychology, they desired to learn more about both feminist and qualitative research methods in an encouraging and open atmosphere. The authors provided a step-by-step account of the endeavour involving 10 participants. Discussions centred on sharing experiences from their personal perspectives of being self-identified “feminists” in graduate studies. Also highlighted were the ways that their identities played out and influenced their personal relationships, as well as their experiences with the suppression of “femininity” and the contrasting respect for “masculinity” in higher education. Some of the intersecting identities explored within this research study included: gender, graduate student status, disciplinary affiliation, sexual orientation, and age (Barata et al.). Would other graduate student participants comment on the historical institutional climate within higher education as being “masculine?” In their views, is this climate still being experienced today? It was speculated that perhaps education students might not address this issue, as education is largely a female-dominated discipline, and in fact, they did not raise this issue.
Another study conducted by Fay (1988/1989), looked at intersecting identities involving gender, class, and graduate student status. It began by exploring the markedly similar experiences of two female graduate students studying in the area of humanities, both of whom come from working-class backgrounds. Although these students differed in age and life experience; their geographical positioning, their beliefs, and their attitudes seemed to closely align. University students must surely explore class-related identities within an institutional setting, where large sums of money are spent on tuition, books, entertainment, etcetera. It is not unlikely for students to compare themselves and their socioeconomic status with those of their peers (whether directly or internally). It was speculated that perhaps class-related identities and financially-linked identities might differ among full-time and part-time students, whereby the former group would not be able to work full-time, while the latter group would. Clearly, students’ intersecting identities are dynamic and complicated, influencing their sense of themselves.

*Student-Related Identity Confusion*

In Hockey’s (1994) study entitled, “New Territory: Problems of Adjusting to the First Year of a Social Science PhD,” student participants articulated the need for clarity in their roles and responsibilities. The researcher described that students coming into the program experienced something similar to ‘role confusion.’

The problem which such students face is that their new position is ambiguous, in as much as it is at best only vaguely defined by university regulations. Usually there is some cryptic statement within the latter which asserts that students have to produce research of ‘originality’ in order to obtain the PhD. (p. 178)
The Institutional Environment: Challenges and Possibilities

Students at all levels of education encounter various types of struggles or roadblocks in their quest to adapt and thrive within a particular institutional environment. Perhaps some of their struggles differ according to their particular educational milieu (i.e., elementary school, high school, university, etc.).

Struggle, Adaptation, and Survival

In their article entitled “The Postgraduate Chameleon,” Harland and Plangger (2004) explained that masters and PhD students are required to adapt to specific ideals, which are divergent within particular institutions, faculties, and departments. Their study sought to explore the teaching roles that these students negotiated while pursuing their research studies. Upon analyzing the responses of 63 departments at an institution in New Zealand, it was noted that in terms of “teaching duties,” “…there was wide variation in the expectations for postgraduates among departments” (p. 75). They found a myriad of practices occurring. While in some departments teaching was made compulsory, in others postgraduate students were prohibited from teaching. Students may interpret these contrasting departmental demands as indirect institutional messages regarding their competence, ability, importance, and worth. Mixed messages may leave them confused. On the other hand, they may interpret contrasting demands as preparing them for flexibility and personal action that is needed within their multiple roles. The researchers found that these students had very diverse responsibilities, a wide range of hours, and access to differential types of guidance in assisting them to carry out this role. Harland and Plangger commented on the struggles that students faced in juggling their roles.

“They had moved on from being students and the majority portrayed themselves as
academics in transition....Against this background they faced the difficulty of making the transition from student to academic, from novice to expert” (p. 77). This was especially challenging when power differential is experienced (Harland & Plangger).

A particular problem faced by PhD students was learning about research when they were part of the community of researchers they might later join. They had sole responsibility for the success of their PhD and their research was continually being judged by those in power; the same academics who would eventually be seen as their peers. (p. 80)

In the midst of this process they struggled to achieve a balance between their teaching and research related roles, each of which contributed differentially to their understanding of themselves as future professors (Harland & Plangger). Likely Masters students as well as professors themselves have struggled with juggling these two different, yet interconnected roles. Ultimately, Harland and Plangger described a flexible role-based identity that postgraduate students constructed, easily moving in and out of roles depending on what role would be an optimal fit for the situation that they were in, thus allowing them to be successful. Also noted in this flexible structure was that one identity role would often enlighten the other.

It becomes clear that there are healthy and unhealthy ways of coping with multiple roles and responsibilities. Some students feel anxious, and become self-doubting (Hockey, 1994). Others articulate that there is not enough time in the week to get everything completed (Hockey, 1994; Younes & Asay, 1998). A sense of “struggle” emerges in trying to juggle multiple roles (Hockey, 1994; Younes & Asay, 1998). Younes and Asay (1998) captured this theme:
Living a paradox truly describes the conflicts that these women strive to resolve as they attempt to integrate their personal and professional lives. Their commitment to self and career advancement directly threatens their commitment to their family and causes them to feel torn between the two worlds. (¶22)

This article illustrated the level of difficulty involved in juggling so many different roles all at once, especially if individuals in one’s life are not completely supportive, as this can contribute to feelings of being “alone” (Younes & Asay).

Hockey (1994) indicated that one’s personality will also impact upon one’s ability to effectively adjust to new roles, such as that of a PhD student. While this had not been previously considered, it seemed plausible. Someone who is more positive or optimistic, enjoys reading a lot, loves researching, and thrives amidst change, would most likely adjust more easily than someone who was quite the opposite in terms of his or her interests and temperament. An individual’s personality may also relate to his or her rationale for pursuing graduate studies. It was speculated that perhaps a trend would emerge where participants with similar personalities might have been pursuing their degrees for similar reasons.

Institutional Barriers to the Exploration of Graduate Students’ Intersecting Identities

Researchers discussed the problematic stagnation of the university professor population, specifically outlining the visible uniformity of the faculties and lack of diversity within them (Fleras & Elliot, 2002; Mogadime, 2002, 2003). Faced with these discrepant circumstances, it is not surprising then, that an array of problems and challenges ensues. Such challenges in supporting identity exploration and inclusion are noted across the disciplines ranging from but not limited to psychology (Barata et al.,

Graduate students, especially females and minorities, face various institutional barriers within higher education (Barata et al., 2005; Fay, 1988/1989; Mogadime, 2002, 2003; Wiest, 1999). For instance, irrelevant curricula are encountered which lack opportunities for students to derive personal meaning and engagement (Mogadime, 2003). In documenting the story of one participant’s experiences in graduate Women’s Studies courses, Mogadime noted that a host of insidious, discriminatory, and damaging practices were exposed, which impacted upon this woman’s critical outlook towards graduate studies and Women’s Studies, and her subsequent departure from graduate school. The participant communicated the ways in which she attempted to oppose forms of domination and power, which delegitimized her reality. She spoke of her desire for critical thinking as opposed to blind acceptance of the “expert” (professor’s) words. The participant identified instructors’ practices, beliefs, attitudes, as well as their cognizance of (and willingness to explore) identity intersections like “class, race, gender and sexuality” (p. 16), as marking the fundamental qualitative difference between classrooms.

Were students of different races and ethnicities more likely to have these types of experiences? Or, are the barriers of irrelevant curricula, discrimination, and power differential universal obstacles that most students recognize and face?

A second institutional barrier in higher education involves being confronted by roadblocks such as “hidden curricula” (Mogadime, 2002). In her study, Mogadime examined the “socialization process” in graduate studies, which leaves specific people (such as Black females) along the periphery, looking into a climate that is not inviting or
conducive to particular outlooks and knowledge. This study drew upon a focused and purposive group of five Black women from two universities in Ontario. The researcher identified Black female students in higher education as a unique population, with their own sets of challenges in terms of facing existing controls, such as a “hidden curriculum.” Her participants expressed frustration and anger at the denial of their experiences, and the rejection of different “ways of knowing.” Would other graduate students be astute to the “socialization process” that transpires in graduate school? Perhaps it depended on their particular career aspirations. If they were not contemplating a career in academia, maybe they would not be as sensitive to this process as students who were.

Moreover, numerous researchers stated concerns surrounding lack of mentorship that is both accessible to and encouraging of all students (Bruce, 1995; Fay, 1988/1989; Mogadime, 2002; Stewart, 2002; Wiest, 1999). Wiest adamantly expressed: “Women feel they need to be mentored by someone who tends to share similar life experiences and who can better empathize with them. They want to see how female professors balance professional and personal lives” (p. 31). Furthermore, Fay (1988/1989) pointed to the lack of adequate mentorship for working class students, as well as their inabilities to identify and connect with professors who are similar to them. These problems contributed to their frustrations and doubts in graduate school (Fay). Clearly, the need for mentorship is important; when absent, it can become a barrier to students’ success.

Also, the demeaning conceptualization of graduate students may impede identity exploration. For instance, Fay (1988/1989) stated:

Graduate students as a class thus occupy two related yet disjunctive low-status
positions that of a working class and that of children. These positions are in
dialectical opposition, since working class implies laborers who remain laborers,
while children grow up to become adults. Thus, on one hand, graduate students
are anonymous beings, who replace each other.... On the other hand, they are real
individuals who grow up to become real professors. Meantime, they occupy that
nebulous child or adolescent status which in our society denotes a position of
powerlessness and a reputation for irresponsibility, at worst, both invite faculty
attitudes of deprecation, patronization, and scorn, at best, recognition, which is a
kind of inattention, for the student is assumed to be unknowledgeable and, outside
of class, a drain on the professor’s resources. This differential engenders
enormous conflict for graduate students, for those who are adults long before
entering graduate programs, it causes self-questioning, repeated humiliation, and a
re-experiencing of the child’s oedipal attitude toward authority...unhealthy for the
institution as a whole. (pp. 241-242)

It is important to think critically about the ways in which graduate students are regarded
and treated within universities, and to consider the implications of these portrayals on
their identity exploration. Similarly, Pagano (1991), a professor of undergraduate and
preservice students in the United States, communicated the existence of a major
separation between teachers’ and students’ worlds and a subsequent lack of familiarity
with each others’ experiences. Would participants in the present investigation perceive
this disconnect? Or would they comment on a camaraderie or collegial relationship with
their professors, relating to them as peers?

A subsequent institutional barrier encountered by certain groups of graduate
students was a lack of voice both within and outside of the classroom (i.e., Barata et al., 2005; Mogadime, 2002, 2003). Barata et al. (2005) discussed the way in which certain group members monopolized the discussion, while other voices remained unexpressed. Their study offered a feminist theoretical lens. Fay (1988/1989) also adopted a feminist standpoint outlining the constraints that prevented female working-class graduate students from succeeding in this environment, which was rooted in oppressive systems of patriarchy, capitalism, hegemony, and hierarchy. She pointed out that particular knowledges and voices were discounted and devalued, thus these students’ identities were ultimately categorized, trivialized, and denied. These institutional barriers impact upon various facets of graduate students’ identities in predominantly negative and damaging ways.

Numerous studies mentioned the barriers of *social and intellectual isolation* (Bruce, 1995; Hockey, 1994; Wiest, 1999) that students faced. For instance, graduate students expressed the concern for multifunctional “space” allowing them room for gathering, networking, and sharing ideas (Hockey, 1994; Stewart, 2002). Limited lounge and office space meant that in order to be productive, graduate students had to seclude themselves in the library or in front of a computer, rather than being able to work alongside other graduate students (Hockey, 1994). Students also indicated that they felt alone in their endeavours, especially when engaged in research for long periods of time (Bruce, 1995; Hockey, 1994; Wiest, 1999).

When it comes to student concerns, Baker (2006) discussed the problematic and uncoordinated replies that were sometimes communicated to students by members of the institution. Baker stated that, “...fragmented and parcelled off responses leave some
needs, especially those around issues of self-integration, at risk of being unmet” (p. 181). Did supports exist in helping students negotiate their intersecting identities? If so, were students aware of these supports and did they make use of them? Might students have suggestions on how to improve and unify institutional support structures? These queries emerged as important interview questions in the present investigation.

The theme of change was recognized as prominent throughout adulthood, impacting adults’ and teachers’ identities in different ways. Two theoretical perspectives were illustrated as integral in grounding this investigation including both Feminist Theory and Women’s Development Theory. Research involving the identities of postsecondary students was explored, specifically related to their complex motivations, role negotiations, needs, intersecting identities, and experiences with identity confusion. Notable environmental barriers were mentioned, such status problems, lack of voice, and hidden curricula. Personality was also described as a factor which impacts upon one’s adjustment.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodologies and procedures that governed the data collection and analysis stages of this research-based study. The following sections are addressed: the phenomenological approach, topic refinement, site and participant selection processes, instrumentation (including semi-structured interviews), data collection, data analysis, methodological assumptions, limitations, establishing credibility, and ethical considerations.

Research Methodology and Design

According to Creswell (2005), qualitative research has evolved over time into its current form, which examines phenomena, behaviour, actions, experiences, and interactions. Creswell distinguished the qualitative approach from others by emphasizing its participant-centred orientation, which focuses on: respecting participants’ knowledges and opinions, being sensitive to the contexts and environments that play a role in their daily routines, and, ultimately, promoting transformative practices that would improve the quality of one’s existence. A qualitative methodology best supported this research study, which sought to shed light on the ways that graduate students came to understand their personal experiences with the complex phenomenon of negotiating their multifaceted identities. This investigation was participant-centred, encouraging the sharing of personal experiences, self-awareness, critical thinking, reflection, extensive engagement with the topic, and thoughtfulness towards solution-seeking.

Phenomenology is rooted in the philosophical tradition, with Edmund Husserl frequently being credited for his work in advancing this methodology (cited in Creswell, 1998; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2000; Sokolowski, 2000;
Spiegelberg, 1975; Todres & Holloway, 2004). If “Pictures, words, symbols, perceived objects, states of affairs, other minds, laws, and social conventions are all acknowledged as truly there, as sharing in being and as capable of appearing according to their own proper style” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 15), then it is up to the phenomenologist to describe their properties.

According to Johnson and Christensen (2000), “Phenomenology refers to the description of one or more individuals’ consciousness and experience of a phenomenon…” (p. 315). In this case, six female graduate students were asked to describe their experiences associated with juggling multiple identities and roles while pursuing a Master of Education degree. “The purpose of phenomenological research is to obtain a view into your research participants’ life-worlds and to understand their personal meanings (i.e., what something means to them) constructed from their ‘lived experiences’” (Johnson & Christensen, p. 315). I was able to gain insight into these female graduate students “lived experiences” by making use of situational questions, which asked participants to recall and describe critical incidents involving their identity negotiations and explorations. This is precisely the approach that is recommended to phenomenologists by Johnson and Christensen: “One effective strategy for eliciting data from participants is to tell each participant to recall a specific experience he or she has had, to think about that specific experience carefully, and then to describe that experience to you” (p. 317). In addition, as part of phenomenological methodology, in-depth interviews are recognized as an effective way of collecting information about peoples’ insights and experiences surrounding the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2000). The four to five exhaustive semistructured interviews
used in this investigation were purposely selected to align with the phenomenological tradition. “In order for research participants to explore their experience they must be able to relive it in their minds, and they must be able to focus on the experience and nothing else” (Johnson & Christensen, p. 317). It was hoped that the intense focus required of the participants could be achieved by ensuring that they were actively committed through extensive ongoing participation in the project. This type of focused commitment was a condition of their participation, which they were made aware of at the onset of recruitment. Their involvement in at least four interviews, a series of three take-home activities, and the process of member checking helped to ensure that they were recounting their experiences of negotiating and exploring their identities beyond the interview periods, and into their daily lives.

Creswell (1998) indicated that a maximum of 10 participants should be part of a phenomenological study. He further stated: “The important point is to describe the meaning of a small number of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 122). It is for this reason that I selected to work closely with six individuals. In my mind, working with more than 10 individuals would not allow for the detailed type of analysis and interpretation that I had hoped to achieve.

In phenomenology, one needs to “…bracket, or suspend, any preconceptions or learned feelings that you have about the phenomenon” (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 316). This was by no means an easy task for me, especially since I myself was experiencing the phenomenon under investigation at the time of the study. However, I attempted to “bracket” in multiple ways including: identifying my own biases and beliefs prior to the study and then trying to let them go by acknowledging the need for an open-
minded approach, having an impartial individual scrutinize my interview questions to ensure that they were not biased, leading, or closed ended, and employing a flexible approach for follow-up interviews. I remained open to participants’ voices and listened for emergent ideas and insights that they shared, which then helped me to restructure additional follow-up questions for subsequent interview stages.

“Phenomenologists generally assume that there is some commonality in human experience and they seek to understand this commonality” (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 317). This assumption was a guiding force throughout the study, so much so, that one of the stages in the data analysis process involved comparing participants’ accounts for their similarities. An examination of this study’s research questions and purpose statement provide clear and logical support in favour of a phenomenological methodology. Being described were specific students’ understandings of identities and their identity negotiations within a complex educational milieu. The three research questions provided a framework for incorporating multiple lenses, allowing participants to explain their understanding of identities in numerous ways, through self-mediation (i.e., internal dialogue, sense-making, critical thinking and defining), through a reflection of their specific interactions within an environmental context, and by considering the course of an interactive process between the self and the environment in tandem. This study also sought to illustrate how peoples’ experiences of this phenomenon could be supported through the implementation of tangible strategies. Indeed, a phenomenological approach best fit the purpose of this study, which was to explore female Master of Education students’ critical understandings of how they negotiated their intersecting identities during graduate studies, and the ways in which their identities were either
legitimized or discounted within the institution.

Pilot Studies

There were several important factors that resulted in my decision not to conduct a pilot study. These factors included: my previous experience and familiarity with interviewing, the detail and care that went into the construction of each interview script, the multistaged interview approach being employed, and the limited potential pool of only 30 students that were being drawn from. A pilot was viewed as onerous, ineffectual in terms of further refining the data collection instruments, and infringing on the already narrow participant pool. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to engage in a lengthy process of topic development and refinement, over the duration of my coursework from September of 2005 to May of 2006. While a formal pilot study was never conducted, it becomes evident that informal piloting and refining of the topic transpired over the course of the year. Each of the course experiences outlined in Figure 2 helped to inform not only the literature review process, and the methodological processes, but they also served to strengthen the conceptualization of the study itself.

Selection of Site and Participants

In terms of participant characteristics, this study was limited to female participants because my research interest involved exploring the ways that identities were defined, negotiated, and navigated exclusively among females. According to specific literature, female graduate students have their own sets of needs (Bruce, 1995; Hockey, 1994; Wiest, 1999). Drawing on the experiences of females would enable me to examine the findings through a feminist lens.

In total, 6 participants were involved in this study. This number was purposefully
Figure 2. Process of topic development and refinement.
selected as a manageable size, given the in-depth multiphase interviewing that was being conducted (Creswell, 1998). The objective of this study was not to make broad generalizations about all graduate students, Master of Education students, females, or Canadian citizens. Instead, the purpose was to examine individuals’ personal experiences associated with a very specific phenomenon, and to compare and contrast their experiences and lived realities in order to develop possible strategies that might be beneficial to some graduate students as they negotiated their multifaceted identities.

At the time of recruitment, all of the participants were screened to ensure that they met those three criteria of being female, currently enrolled in the Master of Education program at a specific university (part-time or full-time), and a Canadian citizen. According to Johnson & Christensen (2000), I employed a purposive method of sampling that involves: "...a non-random sampling technique in which the researcher solicits persons with specific characteristics to participate in a research study" (p. 175). I wanted participants to be enrolled in the program at the time of recruitment in order to avoid receiving a retrospective account and to minimize the potential of forgetting. I felt that participants who were presently experiencing the phenomenon under investigation would provide the richest insight into their current realities. It was assumed that those individuals, who made the effort to contact me, were likely to be genuinely interested in the phenomenon and willing to share their experiences. These types of participants would probably provide rich accounts of their experiences with identity negotiation. The reason for implementing the stipulation of Canadian citizenship was to avoid delving into the very different types of identity issues that international students might face (i.e., language barriers, challenges assimilating into a foreign culture, the experiencing of homesickness,
etc.). These types of issues were not perceived to be in the realm of this investigation, and were thought to be prominent in the lives of international graduate students who had only been in Canada for a short time.

Participants were recruited by one of two ways: either via e-mail, using an electronic correspondence guide, or nominated through referrals from professors in the program. Master of Education students, who had previously taken graduate courses with the Principal Investigator, were contacted via e-mail. A collegial relationship existed between these participants and myself, as they were fellow peers enrolled in the same program. It was the intention that this preexisting collegial relationship would help to ensure an already established level of comfort and rapport with me, so as to enable the interviewees to speak candidly and openly on identity-related issues. This would allow me to bypass much of the time that is usually spent engaging in rapport-building during the first interview session. A collegial relationship was useful in unearthing detailed information on potentially sensitive topics rather quickly in the interview process. The participants and I also shared numerous social locations including being female and being graduate students. According to Griffith (1998):

Where the researcher enters the research site as an insider (i.e., someone whose biography-gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and so on—gives her a lived familiarity with the group being researched) that tacit knowledge informs her research producing a different knowledge than that available to the outsider (a researcher who does not have an intimate knowledge of the group being researched prior to their entry in the group. (p. 362)

There was a high degree of trust between us based on the shared insider status. Despite
these advantages, there were also some challenges with respect to being an “insider,” and becoming too close to the participants. At times, I felt as though the boundaries were blurred between my role as a researcher and my role as a fellow peer, the two of which had to be negotiated simultaneously. On occasion, a sense of struggle or tension could be felt as I stepped in, out, and between these two roles. Meetings with past classmates often involved a period of catching up on what had been happening in our lives since we had last seen each other. Sometimes I was worried that our conversations were veering off-topic, and that they might create too casual of an environment. While my researcher self wanted to remain more formal and serious, my student self wished to create a convivial and relaxed atmosphere. Moreover, I would frequently find myself agreeing with participants, having had similar experiences in graduate studies, and I wondered whether I should be agreeing at all, or trying to remain neutral in my response. It was important to my methodology and style of interviewing that we engage in reciprocal dialogue. Despite trying to employ safeguards such as ensuring that participants always share first, and that their discussion time greatly exceeds my talking time, I still found myself questioning whether I was sharing or talking too much. Did even my small amount of sharing impact participants’ responses in any way? I used my reflective journal as a place to ask myself these questions and a space to explore the tensions that I had felt.

I addressed these issues by utilizing a number of strategies. First, I strove to always preserve the relationship of trust that I had with the participants. I did this by maintaining sensitivity around any confidential information that they shared, as well as using my personal and professional judgement as to what I would ultimately include in the document. I also asked participants to avoid giving specific names of professors, as I
thought that this would help me remain centered on the participants’ experiences rather than the individuals involved. I tried to always remain professional and to adhere to ethical protocol, recognizing myself as a researcher first and a student second. I tried to redirect the conversations if necessary. I attempted to counter-check my analyses against participants’ responses by looking within and across transcripts and using multiple data analysis processes. I made a conscious effort to identify participants’ voices by using the Listening Guide method. I tried to separate my voice from theirs by using their words whenever possible (although separating these voices did prove to be a struggle at times, as I attempted to document every aspect of my thinking process). I used my reflective journal as a safe space to explore these issues, write them down, acknowledge them to myself, and think about how they impacted upon the process. Moreover, I made a conscious decision to only share my personal experiences after a participant had already shared hers; and only to share my experiences if they closely aligned with the participant’s description. I thought that by offering my experience as confirmation that we had shared a common encounter or understanding, we would be able to more easily recognize our similarities and better relate to one another.

Master of Education students, who were unknown to the Principal Investigator, were also recruited through recommendations or referral from professors in the program. While we still shared certain social locations, such as gender and graduate student status, we did not have a preexisting collegial relationship. The biggest and most obvious difference in the interview experience with these participants was our lack of familiarity with one another. As a researcher, I felt a heightened nervousness during the first interview, and an amplified level of consciousness with respect to any pauses, silences, or
disruptions to the overall flow of the interview. I found myself paying particular attention to verbal cues, such as their rate of speech, intonation, pitch, and volume. I was already familiar with these sorts of cues exhibited by the other participants. I also tried to read their body language, or look for anything that would give me a better indication as to their responsiveness and openness. Although it was inevitable that I was somewhat guided by my first impressions of these participants, I attempted to remind myself that I needed more time with them to build up a comfort level and a rapport, and that I should not be quick to make any judgements about them or their experiences; rather, I should let the interviews, like our researcher-participant relationships, develop slowly over time. I felt like the first interviews with these participants were shorter than the other first interviews. I conducted these interviews with a sense of gratitude to these individuals who did not know me, yet were willing to share their time and their stories with me. This helped me to feel a sense of optimism. All of the challenges dissipated after our initial interview. By the second interview, I had found myself connecting with these participants in many ways, I recognized commonalities in our experiences, and felt like I had known them for a long time. Interviewing these participants enabled me to venture outside of my comfort zone, employ new strategies in the interviewing process, develop my observation and probing skills, and to realize that there is commonality in the graduate student experience.

The site for this research-based investigation was a mid-sized university, located in an urban city in Southwestern Ontario. Having been a student at this institution for the past 6 years, my insider status gave me an advantage in terms of understanding the institutional climate, locating potential participants, and having room accessibility in
order to conduct the interviews onsite. I submitted an application for the proposed study to the institution’s Research Ethics Board, and subsequently, was granted approval to use the premises in order to facilitate data collection (Appendix A).

All of the participants (whether they were previous classmates, or referred to me through professors, or invited by existing participants) were solicited formally via e-mail, using an electronic correspondence guide. This guide introduced the topic, purpose, and themes under investigation, provided a description of the interview process, and the time commitment required from each participant. This first e-mail was sent out to approximately 30-35 student contacts that were believed to fit the criteria for participation.

Upon receipt of the first electronic correspondence guide, potentially interested participants were invited to contact me via e-mail or telephone, to express an interest in the study, or to request further information. Upon contacting me, potential participants were screened to ensure that they met the criteria for participation (i.e., female, currently enrolled in the Master of Education program at that particular university for the 2006-2007 academic year, and Canadian citizen). If potential participants answered yes to each of the three criteria and were still interested in participating, I proceeded to send them a follow-up e-mail. This second e-mail included an attachment of the Letter of Invitation, which further described the study in more detail. In this e-mail, meeting times and places were established with the individuals who recontacted me and agreed to participate. At that time, it was asked that the prospective participants would pass along the information about this study to their contacts (i.e., friends and colleagues) that they identified as both potentially interested in sharing their experiences, and as fitting the participant criteria
(Johnson & Christensen, 2000). In this sense, while the initial sampling approach was “purposive,” the secondary or backup technique used to obtain the desired number of participants fit Johnson and Christensen’s definition of a “snowball sampling” method. In total, six individuals were a part of this study. Four of them were previous classmates, one was referred to me through a professor, and the other was referred to me by a participant.

Instrumentation

Data from human participants were collected through a multiphased process involving a series of four to five in-depth semistructured interviews. The interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 90 minutes in length, with the average interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Semistructured interviewing provided the right balance of structure and depth. This type of interviewing is optimal for obtaining elaborate descriptions of participants’ understandings and experiences associated with a given phenomenon (Smith, 1995). Smith identifies semistructured interviews as a common data collection method used among phenomenologists. He further articulates the suitability of this instrumentation for phenomenological studies:

The investigator has an idea of the area of interest and some questions to pursue. At the same time, there is a wish to try to enter, as far as is possible, the psychological and social world of the respondent. Therefore the respondent shares more closely in the direction the interview takes and he or she can introduce an issue the investigator has not thought of. In this relationship, the respondent can be perceived as the expert on the subject and should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell his or her own story. (p. 12)
While I spent much time creating interview questions that I felt were in keeping with my research questions, and that would allow me to explore similarities in responses across participants, I also knew that I could not fully anticipate all of the important issues or themes that might arise over the course of the individual interviews. As Smith suggests, a semistructured approach allowed me the freedom to probe more deeply into these areas, and to ask follow-up questions, ultimately enhancing my understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The purpose of the first semistructured interview was two-fold: to collect basic demographic information about each participant, and to explore their understandings of key concepts, such as identity, the negotiating of identities, and intersecting identities, which were integral concepts within this study (see Appendix B for a copy of the first interview guide). This preliminary interview encouraged participants to define key terms and then to explore them in personally meaningful ways through the use of real-life examples. Self-perceptions and personal beliefs were also explored.

The second semistructured interview was an extension of the first. It focused on exploring participants' identities and negotiations through the use of situational examples (see Appendix C for a copy of the second interview guide). Other subtopics which this interview touched upon included: students' strategies for negotiating their identities, an exploration of their feelings, an examination of their student-centred identities, experiences with identity loss, ways of achieving balance, and an identification of their unique needs.

The third semistructured interview was an extension of the second. It focused on achieving a deeper understanding of the ways that participants' identities might intersect.
It also attempted to identify environmental factors, which supported or impeded the exploration of identities (see Appendix D for a copy of the third interview guide). Furthermore, students were asked to identify their most important needs. Subsequently, they were encouraged to discuss the ways that their department was successful in meeting their multifaceted needs, and to offer some suggestions for departmental action that would better support these needs.

The fourth semistructured interview was an extension of the third. It focused on solution seeking or the identification of strategies that would support student identity exploration (see Appendix E for a copy of the fourth interview guide). This interview was framed in a positive manner, encouraging participants to think about being action-oriented through personal agency and the fostering of a positive institutional climate achieved through collaboration. Other notable subtopics included: an examination of present practices, an envisioning of future practices, understanding the import role of support systems, and identifying ways of encouraging oneself and others. In two instances, a fifth interview was scheduled as a wrap-up session, to revisit questions from any of the first four interviews that we had not gotten to because of time constraints. This allowed me to tie up any loose ends.

The second dimension of the data collection process involved a series of three postinterview activities (or take-home tasks) that participants were asked to complete after the first, second, and third interviews. These activities were created to complement the interviews, to extend the participants’ thinking on various dimensions of the broader topic, and to serve as a starting point for discussion during each subsequent interview. The take-home activities in this study provided participants with an opportunity to engage
in sustained self-reflection as understood by John Dewey (cited in Rodgers, 2002), whereby they contemplated their own identities and roles (while noting the interactions between them), and shared their insights with me. Each activity was guided by a series of systematic reflection questions for participants to probe their thinking, which offered a starting point for our subsequent interviews. Over the course of our conversations, participants recognized the depth of the interview questions, indicating that it allowed them to think in new ways and, on occasion, had profound revelations. The following is a description of the take-home tasks and an account of how they were developed:

1. The first Post-Interview Activity entitled “Identity Mapping” was a paper and pencil task where participants were asked to draw a visual representation (i.e., flow chart, diagram, picture, etc.) of their different identities. The idea for this activity emerged after reading an article by Younes and Asay (1998), entitled “Resilient Women: How Female Graduate Students Negotiate Their Multiple Roles.” As part of the study, “Participants were asked to identify the roles that they negotiated as they progressed in their degree program” (¶ 11). After the instructions for the activity were listed, reflection questions were devised (see Appendix F-1 for details). Identity mapping provided an unobtrusive way of identifying and appreciating participants' beliefs, values, and understandings of their own identities and roles. Participants articulated their inner thought processes that transpired during the construction of their maps, which allowed access into their lived realities including their role identifications. Note that at the time of the interviews, these graphic representations were called “identity maps.” Afterwards, upon analyzing the maps, it was decided that this label did not do
justice in capturing the complexity of these individuals’ lives, their thoughts, and their relationships. These documents were subsequently renamed “living self maps,” to more accurately capture the active state of being of the participants, the fluidity of the maps (a sentiment expressed by one of the participants, who felt that her map would be in a continuous state of flux, given the day, the circumstances, and the context), the personal nature of this artefact, and the multidimensionality of self, comprised of many facets including self, identities, roles, and personality.

2. The second Post-Interview Activity entitled “Show and Tell” was a multipart task. The idea for the object analysis was borrowed from an article by Barata et al. (2005) entitled “Ivory Tower? Feminist Women’s Experiences of Graduate School.” It was decided that this activity could easily be adapted to this study, with a more explicit focus on having participants select an object that told a story about one or some of the identities that they brought with them to graduate school. The addition of a written component prompted the participants to think more critically about the object that they selected, along with its meaning in relation to their own identities. The idea for the metaphor identification component of this activity came from the title of a research study by Harland and Plangger (2004), “The Postgraduate Chameleon.” This investigation described students’ “changing roles in doctoral education” (p. 73) and the juggling of teaching and research responsibilities. The researchers went on to describe their participants in the following way: “They appeared to be constantly changing identities in a chameleon-like manner that seemed to depend on perceived
advantage as they negotiated the complexities of particular academic activities” (p. 81). What metaphors might female M.Ed. students use to best describe the ways that they negotiated their identities during graduate school? This was an interesting issue to explore, which enabled students to further explain their feelings and experiences with identity negotiation over the course of their graduate studies (see Appendix F-2 for a copy of the second take-home task).

3. The third Post-Interview Activity entitled “Strategy Development” was a paper and pencil task where participants were asked to write a list of strategies that would support student identity exploration both within and outside of the graduate classroom. They were asked to consider strategies from multiple perspectives (i.e., students, professors, administrators, etc.). This activity was informed by numerous articles (i.e., Bruce, 1995; Hockey, 1994; Wiest, 1999; Younes & Asay, 1998) that included specific “recommendations,” or “suggestions” for addressing graduate students’ multifaceted needs, roles, and identities (see Appendix F-3 for a copy of the third take-home task).

The final dimensions of the data collection process involved the generation of interview notes and researcher reflections. Over the duration of the interview, observations of the proceedings were kept. Attention was paid to the participant’s nonverbal cues (i.e., body language), vocal characteristics (i.e., volume, pitch), emotional states, and her overall responsiveness. Notes were made directly onto the blank interview guide, under the corresponding interview question. Immediately after the interview was terminated, and once the participant had left the room, the researcher spent 15 to 30 minutes writing a post-interview reflection which included commentary on her
impression of the interview, surprises, points of confusion, important key words, as well as any potential themes or questions that should be revisited during the subsequent interview. The interview guide was then labelled using the participant’s pseudonym and the interview number (i.e., Alice-#1) and later placed into each participant’s file. Figure 3 shows the four interconnected phases involved in the data collection process.

Data Collection and Recording

Extensive preplanning was undertaken during the proposal phase to ensure that the data would be collected in a very systematic fashion. The detailed conceptualization of the interview scripts and post-interview activities facilitated this process. After engaging in participant recruitment and scheduling the first interviews, the data collection process began. I conducted all of the interviews myself. It was important to me that I be actively involved in the entire research cycle, as I believed that this would facilitate a sound working knowledge of the data which would aid in subsequent analyses.

As I began to arrange interviews, I quickly realized that I would have to be extremely flexible with respect to the timing and location of the interviews, on account of the complex lived realities of the participants, in order to minimize any disruption to their daily lives and routines. This meant deviating from my original plan, which was to conduct all of the interviews in a specific room on campus. In some cases, we opted to meet at other locations that worked best for the participants, and to conduct the interviews at their convenience. Although this meant giving up some control with respect to the environment and the scheduling of interviews, I wanted to accommodate the participants and their busy lives as best as I could.

I ensured that each interview was conducted in a sensitive and respectful manner.
Figure 3. Four interconnected phases of data collection.
Attempts were made to conduct interviews in quiet, spacious, and private rooms. Unless specifically requested by the interviewee, doors to the office space were kept closed in order to provide an atmosphere of confidentiality and to minimize disruptions and background noise. This enabled the participants to speak freely.

At the start of the first interview, I reviewed the Consent Form with each participant. Upon obtaining their consent, the Pre-Interview Script was read, and authorization was requested in order to proceed with the interview (see Appendix G). It was explained that all of the interviews were being audio recorded to ensure that I would be able to accurately capture the participant’s ideas and opinions. Participants gave permission for the tape-recording of their interviews. Next, I began the formal semistructured interview by having the participant identify a pseudonym. The purpose of the first interview was stated, and then the questioning period ensued (see Appendix B).

Participants were given access to different resources (including Counselling Services and Campus Ministries) in case they felt the need to discuss their feelings further. Contact information for these resources was provided to them before the commencement of the first interview, within the pre-interview script (see Appendix G), and again after the first, second, and third interviews (see Appendix F-1, F-2, and F-3). If at any point in time a participant experienced signs of distress, the interviewer engaged in some of the following strategies: paused, asked if the participant was okay, asked if she wanted to take a break, opened the door, indicated that the question could be skipped, inquired if she was comfortable resuming, and/or asked the participant if it was her desire to terminate the interview. Note that while at times certain participants did become emotional (i.e., cry), they did not exhibit any other signs of distress, and felt quite
comfortable continuing on with the interview.

Towards the end of the interview, I introduced the post-interview activity, explaining the task, its purpose, and the procedure for completing and returning it (see Appendix F-1). Each participant was given a copy of the instruction sheet. Participants were thanked for their participation. The tape recorder was shut off and this concluded the first interview. Afterwards, the participant and I either made arrangements for a subsequent interview, or we decided that the participant would e-mail me with some possible meeting times that fit with her schedule, and then I would confirm an interview time and location via e-mail. I also indicated that a copy of the interview transcript would be sent to them via e-mail shortly after the interview, which would give them an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the conversations and to add or clarify any points. However, in actuality, an extended amount of time elapsed between the period when the interview was conducted and the period when the transcript was sent to the participants. There were a variety of reasons for this delay including national and international travel, as well as active participation in a Research Assistantship and Teaching Assistantship. These other commitments meant that my own research was temporarily put on hold. Also, I had not anticipated the extensive amount of time it would take to transcribe the interviews. I did make an attempt to contact the participants via e-mail afterwards, and explain this delay. Their responses were positive and encouraging. As part of the data collection procedure, I also recorded detailed interview notes based on observations that were documented during each of the interviews, and wrote post-interview reflections.

The second, third, and fourth interviews were conducted in much the same way, with each interview lasting approximately 60 minutes (see Appendix C, G, and H for the
other interview scripts; and Appendix F-2 and F-3 for the other take-home tasks). If a
fifth interview was conducted, it served as a concluding session, bringing to a close any
unresolved questions or ideas from the previous interviews.

Throughout the entire process, I employed flexibility in my probing strategies. At
times probes stemmed from interesting comments or questions that arose during previous
sessions. Other times, I engaged in on-the-spot probing, asking participants for more
information, to clarify or extend a specific idea that they had expressed. This degree of
flexibility was very beneficial in helping me to fully understand participants’ experiences
in as much detail as possible. It also led me in different directions that I might not have
been able to explore, had I not probed any further. Participants at the end of their contact
with me received a Letter of Appreciation, which indicated my appreciation and gratitude
for their individual participation and contribution to the study.

Participants played an integral role in the data collection process. Following a
phenomenological approach, it was believed that establishing and maintaining an
ongoing relationship with them over the course of the four to five interviews would allow
me to gain a wealth of information about the participants’ understandings of their
identities and the ways that they negotiated these identities over time. I could also make
note of any changes in the way that they defined, thought about, negotiated, or explored
their identities over the duration of our meetings. This study demanded active
involvement from the participants, thus extensive commitment was required on their
behalf. Each participant was interviewed four times over a period of no less than 1
month. Participants also completed three take-home exercises which took at least 30
minutes each (although I speculate that some participants spent much more time working
on the take-home tasks). They subsequently conducted member checks on each of their
four or five interview transcripts, which took approximately 30 minutes per transcript or
more, although some participants did not request for any changes to be made. This was a
total time commitment of at least 7 ½ hours. This process-driven approach to data
collection enabled participants to engage in an important active cycle of thinking,
sharing, doing, and reflecting.

Data Processing and Analysis

As Smith (1995) indicates, “There is no correct way to do qualitative analysis” (p. 18). This means that the researcher must decide on how to best make sense of the data that have been collected. I relied on multiple methods to analyze the data gathered from the semistructured interviews, post-interview activities, and researcher-generated notes. The analysis process was informed by numerous sources (i.e., Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell, 1998, 2005; Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Gilligan et al., 2003; Smith, 1995). More specifically, the strategy that I employed involved a combination of three integrated stages. These multidimensional facets of data analysis were often overlapping and interconnected. They included: “Looking for themes” (Smith, pp. 19-20), selected aspects of “The Listening Guide Method” (Gilligan et al., 2003), as well as aspects of a “Constant Comparison Method” (Dye et al., 2000, p. 1). These strategies were selected because they complemented and enhanced one another. When employed in tandem, they enabled me to reach a deeper level of “knowing” about how the students themselves understood the process of negotiating their intersecting identities and roles within the complex institutional climate.

First, the advice offered by Smith (1995) regarding “Looking for themes” (pp.19-
20) was loosely followed. This method was recognized to complement the Listening Guide by bringing a more conventional approach to the data analysis. Verbatim, the five steps Smith recommended included:

1. Read the transcript a number of times, using one side of the margin to note down anything that strikes you as interesting or significant about what the respondent is saying. Some of these comments may be attempts at summarizing, some may be associations/connections that come to mind, others may be your own interpretations.

2. Use the other margin to document emerging theme titles, that is, using key words to capture the essential quality of what you are finding in the text.

3. On a separate sheet, list the emerging themes and look for connections between them...

4. Produce a master list of themes, ordered coherently...

5. Add an identifier of instances. Under each master theme you should indicate where in the transcript instances of it can be found.... (pp. 19-20)

Similarly, this strategy paralleled the Listening Guide as it also encouraged multiple read-throughs of the transcripts, yet it provided a more systematic way of organizing the data (i.e., through copious note-taking and list-generating) that coincided with my research style.

A secondary means of analysis involved the use of the Listening Guide as described by Gilligan et al. (2003). This method of analysis was well suited to the topic being investigated, as it has similarly been used by these and other researchers to research the concept of identity (Gilligan et al.). Important to this approach is that “...the process
of listening requires the active participation on the part of both the teller and the listener” (p. 159). Although this method has four specific phases including: “Listening for the Plot” (p. 160), “I Poems” (p. 162), “Listening for Contrapuntal Voices,” (p. 164) and “Composing an Analysis” (p. 168), I decided to loosely follow the first three, recognizing that I would later “compose” the write-up in a way that made sense to me, once all of the separate, yet interconnected, methods of analysis had been performed.

“Listening for the Plot” as described by Gilligan et al. (2003), requires answering the five W’s (who, what, when, where, and why) in order to derive an appreciation of the events and experiences within the transcript. “Repeated images and metaphors and dominant themes are noted as are contradictions and absences, or what is not expressed” (p. 160). I paid particular attention to discrepancies in statements between and across participants. I also noted topics or themes that I expected to be mentioned, which participants did not acknowledge or voice. This helped me to acknowledge some of my own biases, and also pointed to places where participants’ views deviated from existing research. Another dimension of this phase was to consciously acknowledge your reaction as a human being and as a researcher to the accounts and descriptions offered by the participant (Gilligan et al.). I kept track of my reactions when I wrote researcher reflections at the end of each interview, commenting on statements that I found interesting, surprising, or confusing, statements or ideas that I personally related to, and my own feelings throughout the process.

Gilligan et al. (2003) state:

Two rules govern the construction of an I poem: (a) underline or select every first-person ‘I’ within the passage you have chosen along with the verb and any
seemingly important accompanying words and (b) maintain the sequence in which these phrases appear in the text. (p. 162)

The I Poems provided me with another way of listening to each participant’s voice and her story. They allowed me to pinpoint specific tensions that each woman felt as she negotiated her multiple roles and identities, her desires, goals, emotions, and her beliefs, which could have been missed, had I merely listened for plot, or engaged solely in a process of “Looking for Themes.” The I Poems were also used to corroborate findings, confirming some of the more obvious patterns or ideas that I had noted.

“Listening for Contrapuntal Voices,” is depicted by Gilligan et al. (2003) as returning to the initial questions guiding the investigation, and keeping these in mind while keenly attending to the variety of voices that are expressed by one participant. I found this phase to be particularly useful in helping me to listen to the different kinds of gender issues that participants spoke of, and their particular emotions or perceptions of themselves with respect to gender. Here, I heard voices of confusion and clarity; guilt and perfection; as well as frustration and hope. I might not have detected these different voices had I loosely followed this analytic strategy.

There were multiple reasons for selecting this analytical approach. Most significantly, I liked how this method humanized the individual. It enabled me to acknowledge that a human is a person first and foremost, rather than a mere number, subject, or data producer (Gilligan et al.). I felt that this was an important point to remember throughout the entire data analysis process. Not only did the Listening Guide method facilitate an examination of both the entire interview transcripts as well as isolated segments of text (Gilligan et al., 2003), it also allowed for an analysis of a single
person’s experiences and a comparative analysis of multiple peoples’ experiences. In addition, the authors indicate how this approach validates the researcher’s personal reactions and insights and makes them a candid and important dimension of the analysis itself. This is a vital dimension which phenomenological approaches often omit from their analyses, but one that I felt was most useful for me, as I was so intimately connected with the research topic. Moreover, this method recognizes the validity of the multiple “voices” which participants may use to explain their experiences (Gilligan et al.). The authors indicate that it also sheds light into the way that participants describe themselves. “The Listening Guide method offers a way of illuminating the complex and multilayered nature of the expression of human experience and the interplay between self and relationship, psyche and culture” (Gilligan et al., p. 169). In tandem, while loosely adhering to the Listening Guide Method, I also listened for prominent feminist-based themes that emerged from the participants’ voices, including themes involving “critique and change” (Prasad, 2005, p. 109), “oppression and exploitation” (Prasad, p. 110), inclusion and exclusion (Mogadime, 2002, 2003), “barriers” (Barata et al., 2005; Mogadime, 2002, 2003) and so on. I felt that together these strategies created a powerful framework that aligned closely to my research questions, theoretical positioning, and other aspects of my methodology, which made it an optimal analytic strategy.

Third, the article entitled, “A Constant Comparison Method: A Kaleidoscope of Data” (Dye et al., 2000), loosely informed my analysis. Dye et al. used the metaphor of the kaleidoscope to illustrate this type of analysis. I found this metaphor and description of the approach particularly helpful. As a visual learner, it provided me with an image of one analytical process, including both a representation of the parts as well as the whole
picture and how themes, subthemes, and ideas are interconnected and organized in different ways. I decided not to physically manipulate the data (i.e., in a hands-on manner) as was done by the researchers. Although this was my original intent, I later decided against it because I believed it would be too cumbersome, and unnecessary, given my comprehensive analysis strategy up until that point. However, I did find the article useful as it gave me a framework for thinking about how to group codes under themes, and subthemes, to engage in revision and to look at responses to particular questions across all participants (Dye et al.). A notable difference in our approaches involved my strategy of revisiting the research questions amidst interpreting the broad themes of significance. This helped me to derive the five significant themes which were: participants’ understandings of key concepts, such as identities and roles; life-long learning and transformative pathways; gender issues; tensions, challenges, and possibilities; as well as personal, professional, and educational implications. Dye et al., as well as other researchers cited in their article did not follow this method; whereas, I found it useful to think about the investigation in a holistic way. A second corresponding step that informed the constant comparative method involved identifying the key dimensions of the investigation that needed to be answered in order to fulfill its purpose. The explicit and implicit questions emerging from that purpose statement included: What are participants’ identities and roles? How do these identities and roles intersect? How do the women negotiate these intersections in light of environmental facilitators and barriers (that might legitimize or discount these identities in various ways)? and What recommendations (if any) do they have with respect to how others can best support them in their identity explorations and negotiations? Considering the research questions in
tandem with the subquestions that emerged from the study’s purpose enabled the careful pinpointing of the five key themes which are presented in Chapter Four, and the realization that these key themes overlap, which illustrates the complexity of human beings’ identities, their identity intersections, and their strategies for negotiating these identities.

Overall, it seemed as though Dye et al. (2000) let their intuition guide them in making sense of the data. This approach appealed to me. Smith (1995) also described a form of constant comparison, a continual revisiting of each interview, comparing its contents to that of the others (see Figure 4). This, too, informed my analysis as I was able to actively look for similarities between participants’ expressions of their experiences.

Methodological Assumptions

Numerous researchers suggest that qualitative research is predominantly “inductive” in nature (i.e., Creswell, 1998, 2005; Dye et al., 2000; Smith, 1995). Specifically, Creswell (2005) indicates, “As you analyze and interpret data, keep in mind that the picture you assemble will be inductive— that is, you will organize and report findings beginning with the details and working up to a general picture” (p. 254). This inductive approach drove the research process, as I worked from the “particulars” of the interview scripts, and then attempted to look for broad patterns. "Phenomenologists generally assume that there is some commonality in human experience and they seek to understand this commonality" (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 317). I hoped to describe the interconnections in the participants’ stories, their perceptions of themselves, and their understandings of identities in a way that others could connect with at an intrapersonal
Within One Participant’s Set

ALICE 1 2 3 4
CORDELIA 1 2 3 4
ELIZABETH 1 2 3 4
KATHRYN 1 2 3 4
MARIA 1 2 3 4
MIA 1 2 3 4

Across Multiple Participants’ Sets

Figure 4. Constant comparison: Looking within and across participant data sets.
level deep within themselves (van Manen, 1997). According to van Manen,

In one of his lectures Buytendijk once referred to the ‘phenomenological nod’ as a way of indicating that a good phenomenological description is something we can nod to, recognizing it as an experience that we have had or could have had. In other words, *a good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience- is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience.* (p. 27)

I hoped to reach this level of description that would enable the participants and other readers to identify with the knowledge and experiences being presented in a way that allowed for a physical reaction or “nod” acknowledging their legitimacy and envisioning the possibility that these experiences and knowledges could ring true for themselves or mirror aspects of their own identity negotiations.

According to Smith (1995), “The interviewer’s role in a semi-structured interview is to facilitate and guide, rather than dictate exactly what will happen during the encounter” (p. 16). I went into the interviews with the belief that I did not know everything about the phenomenon being investigated and that it was my desire to learn from the participants. I followed a similar supposition made explicit in Smith’s (1995) writing, that “…assume[d] a ‘natural’ fit between semistructured interviewing and qualitative analysis” (p. 9). It made sense to use a method of analysis that corresponded with the data collection, the theoretical approach, and the nature of the research questions. In terms of examining the data that had been collected, Smith proceeds by indicating, “The assumption here is that the analyst is interested in learning something about the respondent’s psychological world” (p. 18). I was interested in learning how
participants perceived themselves (i.e., identity related self-perceptions), as well as how they understood their identities to intersect, and their inner thoughts about how their identities were either being legitimized or discounted. Moreover, Smith states that, “Either way, meaning is central and the aim is to try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings rather than take some measure of frequency. This involves the investigator engaging in an interpretive relationship with the transcript” (p. 18).

After reviewing the literature, I felt strongly that identity could not be thought of as a singular construct; instead, it had to be recognized in its plural form “identities” signifying the multifaceted nature of peoples’ numerous identities. (I later reexamined this assumption and acknowledged the possibility for the existence of both singular and plural identity constructs). I assumed that all human beings have identities, and more specifically, that these identities can intersect (or meet) in specific times and contexts. I recognized the negotiation of intersecting roles and identities as a phenomenon that could, in fact, be described and studied.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were categorized into four main areas including: sampling, data collection, participants, and researcher.

Sampling Limitations

This study had a relatively small number of participants. Some researchers, (particularly in the quantitative field), may view this as a limitation, in that the results of this study cannot be generalized from the participants to a larger group of students (i.e., all female Master of Education students within the program). Also, the method of sampling (i.e., participant recruitment) could have been more systematic. The fact that
participants were fellow peers that were known to the principal investigator, or known to professors in contact with the principal investigator, made them easily accessible.

*Data Collection Limitations*

The data collection instruments were self-developed, but modified based on the literature. In light of this process, specific procedures were used to ensure that the data collected were credible (see subsequent section for details). Semistructured interviews have their own limitations. According to Smith (1995), “On the costs side, this form of interviewing reduces the control the investigator has over the situation, takes longer to carry out, and is harder to analyse” (p. 12). Potential threats to the results were reduced by engaging in extensive planning prior to the interviews, creating detailed interview guides, brainstorming possible probes that could be used to ensure that the interviews ran smoothly, and thinking about potential responses that could be anticipated from the participants. To combat the challenges with analyzing the data, a multistep approach was used to interpret and make sense of the data from numerous viewpoints.

*Limitations Associated With Human Beings*

*Participants.* Since most of the participants knew the principal investigator, they may have been more willing and eager to participate. Participants’ personal characteristics, such as a high degree of willingness or motivation, might have influenced the results. Another limitation indicated by Smith (1995) is that perhaps participants may lie, or they may formulate their answers based on what they think the researcher wants to hear. Steps taken to combat these problems included: interviewing participants multiple times and asking similar types of questions to check for consistency in their responses,
attempting to display a nonjudgemental stance when participants answered questions, and to allow participant responses to predominate the conversation.

Researcher. According to Ray (2003),

The scientist encounters many obstacles within the hard work of research that may limit the types of questions that can be asked. Three of the most important limitations are the tools we have available to us, our shared view of the world, and our personal psychological limitations.… (p. 360)

Clearly, researchers are human and have their own biases, outlooks, and hypotheses. All of these may have influenced the ways in which the variables were operationally defined, the data were collected or analyzed, and the report was written. My “insider” position as a Canadian female Master of Education student most likely meant that I shared similar experiences and struggles with my participants. This may have afforded me an “insider positioning,” as participants felt comfortable speaking to someone who had likely gone through similar challenges in negotiating multifaceted identities while pursuing graduate studies. However, I had to be cautious that I did not project my “view of the world” or understanding of my experiences with the phenomenon onto the participants. I tried to ensure that their voices remained dominant throughout the interviews, that any personal experiences which I did share, came after they had already shared their ideas and experiences, and I often asked for clarification (through follow-up questions) on themes that they discussed, so as not to presume that I automatically understood what they meant.

Establishing Credibility

I proceeded to confirm the credibility of the study’s findings through multiple
statements from previous interviews against present interviews.

In addition, member checking was used in an attempt to ensure that the study was credible. "Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (Creswell, 2005, p. 252). Transcripts of the interviews were electronically forwarded to participants, asking for their feedback in terms of verification of the information. Finally, an extensive audit trail was kept, which contained a series of file folders housing all of the information related to the study.

Ethical Considerations

I completed an application for review of the proposed study by the institution’s Research Ethics Board. Since this study involved conducting research with human participants, it was important to carefully explain any ethical risks that might arise, including how they would be handled, and to outline the way in which participants’ rights would be safeguarded at all times. Only after receipt of official approval from the Research Ethics Board, did research with human participants commence (see Appendix A for details). For the purposes of this study, conducting ethical research meant that:

- No deception or coercion was used at any time
- Participants did not experience any physical risks
- Psychological and emotional risks were minimal; that is, no greater than those encountered in the participants’ daily life (if participants became upset during the interview, then some of the following strategies were employed: the interviewer paused, a particular question was redirected or skipped, or participants were asked whether they were comfortable with proceeding to the next question)
• Participants were given information for resources on campus, such as counselling services and campus ministries

• Participants’ rights were preserved at all times

• Participants gave their voluntary informed consent

• The Principal Investigator agreed to preserve confidentiality (i.e., pseudonyms were used, information related to participants’ identities was scrutinized to ensure that they were not easily traced back to them, names of actual places, people, organizations, and agencies were changed, etc.)

• Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any point in time without penalty or consequence

• A hard copy of the information from this study was kept in a secured location

• Participants potentially benefited by knowing that their voices were being heard and shared with others through their contribution to scholarly research

Restatement of the Area of Study

It becomes important to revisit the purpose of the investigation, as a way of grounding the study in its methodology and procedures. The main objective of this qualitative phenomenological research was to explore female Master of Education students’ critical understandings of how they negotiated their intersecting identities during graduate studies, and the ways in which their identities were either legitimized or discounted within the institution. This purposeful investigation centred on the following three research questions:

1. How do M.Ed. students theoretically, conceptually, and personally define identities and intersecting identities?
2. What environmental conditions either facilitate or impede the exploration of graduate students’ multiple and intersecting identities within the institution?

3. What strategies support student identity exploration within and outside of the graduate classroom?

The use of multiple means of data collection and analysis was paramount in describing and understanding participants’ multifaceted and intersecting identities and their negotiations from different vantage points.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The following chapter presents the results of the investigation which align with the three research questions originally posed. The results are organized around five emerging themes depicted in Figure 5 which include an exploration of participants' understandings of key concepts, such as identities and roles; life-long learning and transformative pathways; gender issues; tensions, challenges, and possibilities; as well as personal, professional, and educational implications. A chart presents the breakdown of the five major themes and their corresponding subthemes, which offers a schema for how this chapter is organized (see Figure 6 for details). An explanation of how these major themes were derived was presented in Chapter Three.

Participants' Understandings of Key Concepts

Before outlining participants' understandings of the key concepts (i.e., identity, intersecting identities, roles, negotiation of identities, etc.), it is first important to describe the participants who were a part of this qualitative investigation.

The Participants

The participants in this study included six female Master of Education students from a mid-sized university in Southern Ontario. They ranged in age from late 20s to late 50s. At the time of the study, three participants were not married (including one who was a widow), and three were married (including one who was in a second marriage, previous to that she had been a widow). Two did not have children, while four participants each had two biological children (one of which also had four step-children). Five of the six participants were educators by profession, while one was a social worker. Two of the educators were teaching at the high school level, two at the elementary school level, and
Figure 5. The results: Five key themes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants' Understandings of Key Concepts</th>
<th>Life-long Learning and Transformative Pathways</th>
<th>Gender Issues</th>
<th>Identifying Challenges, Tensions and Possibilities</th>
<th>Personal, Professional and Educational Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Participants</td>
<td>Teacher Leadership</td>
<td>Gender Differences</td>
<td>Exploring Multifaceted Identities &amp; Roles in Graduate School</td>
<td>Personal Strategies That</td>
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<td>Examining Participants' Living Self Maps</td>
<td>Returning To School: Opening Up Opportunities</td>
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<td>Describing the Negotiation of Multifaceted Roles &amp; Identities In Graduate School</td>
<td>Cross Contexts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Critical Incidents as Transformative Pathways to Self- Discovery</td>
<td>Identify their Current Gender-Related Needs</td>
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<td>Attitudes</td>
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<td>Cordelia</td>
<td>Motivation for Pursuing a Graduate Degree</td>
<td>Family-Centeredness</td>
<td>Encountering Institutional Barriers in Educational Settings</td>
<td>Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Love, Pleasure, Beauty, Hobby, Addiction: Academe as Me</td>
<td>Busyness as Deriving Contentment &amp; Purpose</td>
<td>Environmental Conditions that Facilitate The Negotiation of Identities &amp; Roles</td>
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<td>Kathryn</td>
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<td>Maria</td>
<td>Thinking and its Binary Oppositions</td>
<td>Then &amp; Now: Six Women Negotiating Societal Prescriptions/Expectations</td>
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<td>Mia</td>
<td>Recognizing Diverse Needs Across Settings</td>
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<td>Similarities Across Maps</td>
<td>Participants' Perceptions: Comparing the Unique Needs of Various Groups of Learners</td>
<td>Females' Perceptions of Gender Barriers</td>
<td>Identifying Environmental Barriers That Impede the Negotiation of Identities &amp; Roles</td>
<td>Critical questioning</td>
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<td>Theoretical Underpinnings</td>
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<td>Simultaneous Negotiations: Juggling Family, Work, &amp; School Spheres</td>
<td>Encountering Institutional Barriers in Educational Settings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Defining Identity</td>
<td>Pathways into the Teaching Profession</td>
<td>Gender Role Reversals</td>
<td>Environmental Conditions that Facilitate The Negotiation of Identities &amp; Roles</td>
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<td>Identity or Identities? A Singular or Plural Construct?</td>
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<td>Women Participants, Their Quest For Perfection, &amp; Their Desire to Please</td>
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<td>Distinguishing Roles from Identity</td>
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<td>Motherhood: Identity Loss &amp; Role Confusion</td>
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<td>Defining Intersecting Identities</td>
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<td>Women Grappling With Ageing &amp; the Body</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. A breakdown of the five themes and their corresponding subthemes.
one was working at the school board level. Two of the teachers were also employed as part-time lecturers or instructors at a university. Five of the six participants were studying on a part-time basis. They all came from three different fields of specialization: Integrated Studies (3 participants), Curriculum Studies (2 participants), and Teaching and Learning (1 participant). They were at various stages in their programs. Two were in the coursework stage, while four were working on their exit requirements (1 portfolio, 2 projects, and 1 thesis). A tabular representation describes in detail the participants’ demographics (see Table 1).

Examining Participants’ Living Self Maps

Each of the six maps constructed by the participants was completely different, yet personally meaningful to them. What follows is a description of the six living self maps, which offer insight into the essence of each of these remarkable participants capturing who they are (i.e., their unique stories).

Alice

Alice’s map identified five central domains of importance to her, made up of her identities, roles, and attributes. These five domains were personality/personal, family, cultural, teacher, and student. Around these five core domains, she depicted a list of words or statements associated with each one. In order to fully appreciate her map, it becomes important to identify the way in which she understood the terms “identities” and “roles” and what these terms meant to her. Here is how she explained the term identity: “Um...well identity is who you are, so it’s a way of...I think the way you see yourself, and that’s all important above everything else, because your perception of yourself affects every aspect of your life, your self-esteem, your interactions with others”
Table 1

A Breakdown of the Participants' Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Alice</th>
<th>Cordelia</th>
<th>Elizabeth</th>
<th>Kathryn</th>
<th>Maria</th>
<th>Mia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>31-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Status</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>full-time</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Stream</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of Study</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>final year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Stage</td>
<td>project/thesis</td>
<td>project/thesis</td>
<td>coursework</td>
<td>coursework</td>
<td>project/thesis</td>
<td>project/thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>supply teacher, part-time contract</td>
<td>high school language teacher, curriculum writer</td>
<td>high school teacher, university lecturer</td>
<td>subject specialist at a school board, university instructor</td>
<td>elementary school teacher</td>
<td>social worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
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<td>single</td>
<td>widow</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages of Children</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2 adults</td>
<td>5 young adults</td>
<td>1 child</td>
<td>2 children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The term child refers to an individual less than 13 years of age.  
The term teenager refers to an individual 13-17 years of age.  
The term young adult refers to an individual 18-25 years of age.  
The term adult refers to an individual 25 years of age or older.
(Interview #2, p. 2). In her mind, identity is something that is more stable, ever-present, or permanent (inseparable from your self). To contrast, she understood a role to be more flexible, temporary, and something that a person could move in and out of.

Of the five domains that Alice listed, she understood them to fit within three different levels related to self, identities, and roles. She envisioned the personality/personal sphere to be intimately connected to the “self.” At this level, she described herself, her interests, her character, and her attributes. Some of the words she used to describe “herself” included: “country dweller,” “dependable,” “dog lover,” “email addict,” “worrier,” “reader,” and “trustworthy.” Alice saw some of her personality traits as variable according to context, time, and prior experience; while others as consistent across contexts. Next, she categorized two of the domains as types of identities, seeing them as stable and ever-present. These included familial identity and cultural identity. With respect to her “familial identity,” she described herself as “lucky,” “supported,” “dependent (emotionally and financially), a “dog owner,” “daughter,” and “sister.”

Regarding her “cultural” identity, she labelled herself as a “dual citizen,” and an observer of “European Christmas traditions.” She also spoke frequently over the course of our interviews of the year long cultural exchange that she participated in and the way that it affirmed her ties to her heritage, enriching her awareness of her own roots. This exchange had a significant impact on Alice and her understanding of her own cultural identity. Lastly, Alice identified the other two domains as role-related. She felt that “teacher” and “student” were flexible roles that she moved in and out of and, for that reason, she saw them as being fundamentally different than her identities which she
believed to be more permanent.

On her map, four of the five labels were located on the periphery (i.e., in each of the four corners), while one was placed in the center of the page. When asked which of these roles were most salient to her without hesitation, she expressed that family remained her number one priority, coming before any of her other identities, roles, and responsibilities. Of equal importance to her, was her “cultural identity.” Next, she ranked the role of “teacher” as significant to her, since it represents her livelihood.

Alice was able to recall the thought processes that transpired during the construction of her map. She described a struggle in creating it, as she painstakingly attempted to tease out the different aspects of her “self,” which she quickly realized were completely intersecting and overlapping rather than parcelled off into neat and distinct parts. She said that oftentimes she negotiates some of these identities and roles unconsciously, therefore, identifying the process and verbalizing it presented a challenge. Yet, she articulated the need for sustained thought or reflection in this area. In her mind, she felt that the map captured a very particular instance. “...and again, I think too...um...depending on what day of the week you hit me, what time of the day...the things that I would put in there would change....” (Interview #2, p. 5). As she described, she oftentimes could get lost in her own thoughts, sharing that her friend calls her an “over-analyzer.” She also said, “Uh...I found when I was doing this, very interesting to me that I think we’re more critical of ourselves than other people are of us” (Interview #2, p. 9). When asked “...what do you want your legacy to be? And what would you like people to one day say about what you’ve accomplished,” She responded,

...I think...above all else, I’d like somebody one day to say I made a difference.
Um...and that might just be one person, it would be great if it could be more than one person, but really, if you can make a difference for one person in some way, and of course if it’s legacy, I would want it to be in a positive way. But again, that quote, and you’ll hear in teaching, you’ll hear it all the time. Here comes the teaching again! That, ‘you never know when you’re making a difference for that one student.’ And I think that’s so powerful. Um...and it really kind of ...if you challenge yourself with that, keeps you on your toes. ‘Cause it can be just one or two words that you’re not aware of at any given time that’s gonna make a huge difference. (Interview #2, p. 11)

Armed with this awareness, Alice noted being careful when making decisions and deliberate in her interactions, knowing that they may have far-reaching impacts upon the many students she encounters.

The following I-Poem captures Alice’s awareness of her own transformation during graduate studies marked by her growing self-assuredness. A once timid student, she has found her inner voice and has emerged more confident in her ideas and in her own potential.

I guess
I guess
I’ve come to realize
I’ve had a lot of realizations
I’ve also...
I’ve been able to identify
moments when I realized
I had to specifically say

I’m doing this paper
the knowledge I gained
the skills I gained
the assignments I did
the other things I did
I actually ended up extending
I ended up saying
what I did

(Interview #4, pp. 23-24)

Cordelia

Cordelia’s living self map was drawn in the shape of a Hiawatha Belt, to intentionally represent her aboriginal identity, more specifically her Haudenosaunee (Iroquoian) identity of Five Nations. In the centre, she identified her “…mind, body, spirit sense,” (Interview #2, p. 1) as her identity or “self.” According to Cordelia, the process of “personal reflection” is fundamental to the functioning of her “mind, body, spirit sense,” as she contemplates her beliefs, actions, and routines. She also listed four broad categories of roles that she takes on. To the left, she depicted her roles within her family (which were extensive and stemmed from the matrilineal organization of Haudenosaunee society). She depicted her roles within the non-native community, including that of teacher (formally and informally educating others about the aboriginal ways of life), as well as advocate for aboriginal rights and issues. To the right, she depicted her multiple roles within the Six Nations community, such as teacher, language learner, committee member, event organizer, volunteer, chauffer, etcetera. She also described her roles within the global community, which included respecting nature, being environmentally friendly, and showing gratitude on an ongoing basis. She articulated that all of these symbols (which represented the Five Nations, as well the many roles that she negotiated) were connected by a common path or roadway, in this case, two lines that illustrated their interconnectedness with one another. Moreover, she stated that all of these four broadly defined roles were of equal importance to her.
Cordeilia reviewed her inner thoughts that emerged as she constructed the map. She began to consciously think about the positioning of the symbols on either side of her “mind, body, spirit sense,” which she realized was influenced by both her Haudenosaunee and her Catholic beliefs, becoming conscious of the intersections of these different spiritual teachings or faith-bases that she grew up with.

She identified herself as being “bossy,” and indicated that others also perceived her this way (Interview #2, p. 4). Through her stories and examples, it was clear that she had the internal resolve to accomplish anything. Her roles as advocate and educator crossed multiple contexts (Interview #2, pp. 3-4) and were an important part of her mission to educate others about the aboriginal ways of life, and to advocate for aboriginal issues. Her map also portrayed her complex understanding of community.

Um...you know, for us, community is very important, but when you look at these (symbols on the identity map), they’re all about community. They’re all community. They all have a community aspect to them. So your community is...you know, you have your native community and your non-native community, but you have your family, which is also a part of your community, and then you’re looking at the world community. (Interview #2, p. 5)

Her story was one of connectedness, recognition of interrelationships, and interdependence, that everything is connected to everything else through systems of relationships. She articulated that it is not about individuals; rather, we are a part of something bigger than the self. Her “essence,” was her community centeredness. Cordelia was intensely focused on helping and giving back to her many communities. In particular, with every decision that she made, and every action that she took, she always
kept her aboriginal community’s best interests in mind. She communicated a profound sense of responsibility to the multiple communities in which she belonged, especially to her Haudenosaunee community, and felt an intense pride towards this special identity.

The following I-Poem shows Cordelia’s state of uncertainty and her lack of direction prior to her moment of self-discovery (epiphany) as contrasted with her clear purpose and path after her moment of self-discovery in the immersion program. Since that time, she has been on a quest to preserve the Mohawk language for her community and for future generations to come.

I think
I think I am
I didn’t think I would ever be where I’m at

I was just like
I went to university
I was like
I don’t know what I want to do with my life
I was 18

I think
what I wanted to do
I kind of fell into what I’m doing

I kind of think that
I’ve been successful thus far
I want to keep going
I think that
I got to do this
I need to use it

(Interview #4, pp. 17-18)

Elizabeth

Rather than using the conventional paper format, Elizabeth brought in a series of objects. She began by stating “Well my map is a metaphor done in a bag” (Interview #2, p. 1). Elizabeth described some of her personal and “familial archives,” (Weigert and
Hastings, 1977) [a diverse collection of artefacts that were most significant to her, and that captured her different identities], using them to portray meaningful moments, relationships, and roles that she perceived as being central to identifying who she is.

She began by discussing the significance of the bag which she had used to transport all of her objects. To her it signified the leadership role that she had played while holding a position on the teacher’s union. She saw this position of leadership as an aspect of her professional life and roles. She talked about this leadership role as an extremely positive part of her life, as it afforded her opportunities to travel, to facilitate workshops, to gain highly focused professional development, and to invigorate herself.

She also brought in a series of objects (i.e., a lobster, a Buffalo horn, and a clam) all of which in some way represented her cultural identity and values which stem from her East Coast identity. Elizabeth indicated that some of her personality traits come from her cultural background, such as her talkative nature, her friendliness, and her welcoming disposition. At her core, she is a “storyteller” (identifying herself as such on numerous occasions and indicating that this was a valuable role as perceived by her East Coast culture). She continuously shared stories and anecdotes that had morals which could be learned from and applied to one’s own life. Furthermore, she acknowledged having a profound sense of optimism, and maintaining a positive, and hopeful attitude.

Next, she brought in a mask which represented her passion for the arts, and a link to her professional life, and her subject specialization. However, this object had multiple meanings to her.

...And it’s double edged too because like everybody, I mean I...I wear a half mask. You only get to see half of me and that’s...only certain people get to see all
of me. And so this is a half mask, so it really I thought was a good representation of not only my career, but also the state of my being. (Interview #2, p. 2)

Another important dimension in her life was the role of faith. Elizabeth talked about a tree in her garden that represents her faith in God and how her own belief system is the centre of her life, just as the tree is in the centre of her garden. Also related to faith, she brought in a figurine of Buddha, discussing the ways in which she closely aligns with numerous Buddhist beliefs, connecting with their teachings and readings. Another object representing faith was a Christian prayer card. She used this as a way to speak of the merging of these two faiths Christianity symbolizing her past (upbringing throughout childhood) and Buddhism symbolizing her present (the current connection with this faith). She highlighted her ability to integrate both into her life.

For her, a pair of baby booties worn by her children represented her role as a mother, which she consciously decided to make a top priority in her life. She also presented a bracelet that was given to her by her children, and how it was meant to provide her with positive praise and encouragement, validating her efforts after she became a single parent. Moreover, Elizabeth talked about being a graduate student, and the learning curve that occurs. And lastly, related to her professional roles, she mentioned being a lecturer at a university and working with adult learners.

In presenting her map in this way, it became clear that Elizabeth wanted to highlight the objects’ significance not only in terms of the identities and roles which they symbolized, but also the complexity of the human relationships that had impacted her life. Elizabeth indicated that many of her core beliefs and values were acquired from role models in her life, as she was shaped by their actions. For instance, she identified her
stepfather as a role model. "I also have to say too that um... a huge part of my identity is my father. I try to practice the principles he upholds. He's one of the kindest, patient, most generous and loving people I've ever met!" (Interview #2, p. 3). Elizabeth also recognized her grandmother as a remarkable individual, strong, jovial, entertaining, young at heart, active, and always there for her.

Elizabeth acquired additional beliefs over time. For instance, she believes that everyone has strengths and abilities, but it is up to each individual to apply these strengths and abilities to be successful in life. She also borrows her philosophies from things that she has read. As an example, a saying that she firmly supports is, "One seed can start a garden, one smile can lift a spirit, one candle can light a room" [Author unknown] (Interview #2, p. 7). Her belief is that a single individual has incredible capabilities for facilitating change. She also identified her own Philosophy of Education as aligning with the passage entitled "The Star Polisher" which celebrates the teaching profession, recognizes the diversity of children, and emphasizes the importance of nurturing them all and building their self-esteem, as every child is deserving of love and education.

When asked to explain the arrangement of her map, she listed two chronological groupings, that of "past" and "present" identities and roles. Elizabeth mentioned how her personality has been impacted by her lack of siblings, which forced her to seek out others and socialize with them, to sign up for many activities, discovering the need for connection and stimulation. To that end, she said "I'm a joiner" (Interview #2, p. 10). She also expressed that her involvement in many activities provides her life with direction and satisfaction. She articulated the importance of working from her strengths, and being
willing to try new things.

When asked about the salience of these different identities and roles, Elizabeth indicated that being a mother is her first priority, and most important to her, followed by her role as a teacher, which she sees as her vocation. She expressed the validation that she receives from her students who tell her that they need her. Third, she ranked the roles that she has within her biological family (i.e., daughter, sister, aunt). Fourth, she valued her role within the support system that she is a part of, articulating the importance of sharing with and mentoring others. Fifth, Elizabeth listed her friendship related roles (indicating that she has many friends around the country, who are important to her). Sixth, she mentioned the roles she plays within her extended (nonbiological) family with whom she is connected to by marriage. Of least significance to her is widowhood. She was a vivacious, positive, caring individual, for whom mothering, teaching, and mentoring were recognized as central ways of being.

The following I-Poem speaks to the death of Elizabeth’s husband and the many challenges that ensued. She shared the devastating impact it had on her children and how she was forced to start over with very little; yet, she was able to find her strength within. She worked with her hands, creating something thriving, alive, and beautiful out of something that initially looked dark and desolate.

I was left alone
I had a kid in jail
the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do
I figured
I didn’t know
I moved
I had no money.
I got this job
I used every penny to do a garden
I’d never gardened in my life.
I think
I realized
I am one gutsy, ballsy woman
I just said
I gardened
I turned what was mud into this

(Interview #4, pp.4-5)

*Kathryn*

Kathryn expressed her delight in using software programs to assist her in creating graphic organizers or mind maps, as she believed that they help to manage information. Her map was large, clear, labelled, and systematic. It was “colour-coded” to separate her roles and emotions. Multiple kinds of shapes were used to depict different types of levels (distinguishing labels, actions, goals and characteristics related to her perceived roles). Her map also included “unidirectional” and “bidirectional” arrows, which illustrated the interconnections and “influences” between her roles. Certain roles, characteristics, and goals were also highlighted to show their connectedness to her graduate studies. Overall, the map was very complex and intricate, showing a multilayered self.

In total, she listed seven “domains” including: learner, leader, teacher, friend, passion, woman, and spiritual. She then discussed each of them more specifically. Even though on her map she had labelled them all as “identities,” she later reconsidered this term and indicated that they were actually more like roles, with the exception of one (“passion”) which was more of a guiding emotion or action. Rather than paraphrase what is written on her map, her direct words are used to preserve the vocabulary and meaning as she identified it on her living self map.

*Learner.* “I am learning about things I am interested in, looking to make new connections, to construct new knowledge for and about myself and others in the
following domains.” Characteristics include: “open-minded, flexible, schematizing, critically-thinking, [and] innovative,” with a goal: “to construct understanding in many ways.”

**Leader.** “I have a responsibility to facilitate, coordinate, engage, work toward, consider how to enjoin others to change, etcetera, in these domains.” Characteristics include: “respectful, resilient, innovative, facilitative, prudently directive, [and] collaborative,” with a goal: “to share and gradually release responsibility.”

**Teacher.** “I am focused on facilitating the learning of others and of myself in these domains.” Characteristics include: “respectful, caring, reflective, observant, [and] knowledgeable,” with a goal: “to make connections explicit.”

**Friend.** “I care about the relationships I choose to focus on. I am concerned with how I come across to others, that I am seen as approachable in these domains.” Characteristics include: “open, warm, caring, respectful, fun, [and] generous,” with a goal: “to make deep connections with people.”

**Woman.** “I grapple with gender issues of power and division of labour, [I] am a mom, [I] am a wife, [I] am a lover, [I] deal with body and ageing issues in these domains. Characteristics include: “strong, capable, insecure, conflicted, [and has a] sense of physicality,” with a goal “to find balance.”

**Spiritual.** “I think about God, about Jesus, about morality, about godly relationships, I worship, pray, meditate, ruminate, [and] consider how to help in these domains.” Characteristics include: “thoughtful, contemplative, good-seeking, connection-oriented, [and] God-focused,” with a goal “to love God and love people.”

**Passion.** She recognized it as an action or emotion that she expresses across
contexts. “In this identity lives a sense of style for home, office, [and] self, touching these domains. Characteristics include: “lives in the here-and-now, joyful, enjoys beauty, goofy, fun, colourful, [and] outgoing,” with a goal “to feel deeply.” It became clear that her passion and her deep commitment to her spirituality are at the essence of who Kathryn is as a human being, and are central to the way that she lives her life.

Above all, however, she recognized her role as teacher as a vocation, and a part of her core, for which she had an unwavering commitment. This role, along with her spiritual role, she ranked slightly above the others and saw them as “driving” forces in her life, both of which she has an intense passion, integral to her sense of being in this world. Kathryn believed that the map was a representation of her “values.” She stated, “Um...you know ‘respect’ comes up quite a bit, um... ‘connections’ comes up a lot...um ‘caring’ comes up a few times...” (Interview #2, p. 14). She is aware of her own values and the attributes that she exudes on a regular basis.

When asked to recall the thought processes that transpired during the construction of the map, Kathryn expressed the challenge that she experienced in solidifying or merging all of her thoughts together. She said that she felt as though using “adjectives” alone, would be too narrow, and would fail to adequately capture the depth of her identities and roles. “...it was helpful for me to kind of get a grip on it...when I framed it with a goal, then I got kind of a different lens than when I just had characteristics” (Interview #2, p. 1). She revealed that the goals offered her new insights and perspectives.

She recognized many parallels between the role of teacher and learner and admitted that these two roles were foremost on her mind, and offered her the starting
point. Also, she acknowledged that she constantly thought about her identities from the reference point of being a graduate student. After much thought, she felt like something had been overlooked, and came to recognize this as the role of gender in her life. She was unconsciously creating a holistic map by identifying her emotional, physical, spiritual, cognitive domains and her needs within them. She kept refining the image until all of the domains were represented. Kathryn’s ultimate realization from this activity was the recognition of her personal transformation, having changed over the years from being pessimistic to adopting a more optimistic, positive view. She credits her continued commitment to developing her spiritual life as the reason for this transformation.

The following I-Poem captures Kathryn’s awareness of her gender and how it impacts her thoughts, her identities, and her experiences. Ageing, her body, and her health were prevalent themes on her mind when speaking to her gendered sense of self.

I got
I thought
I grapple with

I am a mother
I am a wife
I am a lover

I am

I didn’t know how to
I called it a sense of physicality
I sense me in the here and now

I am getting older
I can feel it in my body
I can’t
I used to
I hurt more

I have had issues
I am pre-menopausal or peri-menopausal
I guess
I’ve had this procedure

(Interview #2, p. 4)

Maria

Maria repeatedly discussed her determination to achieve a symmetrical map. It was drawn on a Cartesian plane, containing an x and y axis with bidirectional arrows, which showed the potential of her identity and roles to shift in various directions. She indicated that the shapes depicted were “...more like water waves [rather than circles], because ...they can expand and they can overlap” (Interview #2, p. 1). She saw her identities and roles as permeable, fluid, and capable of influencing and intersecting with the others. All together, there were six concentric waves, each slightly larger than the previous.

She stated, “In the middle of the first circle...is ‘core me,’ who I really think I am, ...what I...like; myself, like my inner self, ...what kind of person I am, and my own needs” (Interview #2, p. 2). She envisioned this “core me” to encompass her self-perceptions and self-beliefs, her preferences, her character, and her needs. She identified it as providing her life with “inner meaning,” serving as “the base of every other identity” and keeping her “grounded” (Interview #2, p. 2). She suggested that without a strong base, one might be more susceptible to identity crisis or confusion, and may act inconsistently across contexts. While the “core me” represented the inner most part of the “self,” Maria indicated that the other labels listed on her map stood for broad categories of roles that she performed. She talked about each of these categories in more detail. For instance, the second “wave” on her map, depicted her “immediate family” related roles which included: “being a mom, being a sister, being a daughter, being a cousin...”
She said that these roles involve continuous negotiation and truthfulness with those around you. The third “wave” stood for her “Social” roles. These roles related to friendship, personal interests (such as her academic studies), and her plans for the future. Maria recognized these first three domains (“core me,” “immediate family” related roles, and “social roles”) as internally driven, highly personal, and inaccessible to most people.

The fourth “wave” was identified as representing her “Professional” roles (or “jobs”). She talked about being a part of the teaching profession in general, as well as being an early childhood educator, and her work as an international languages instructor. Maria articulated that she had multiple professional roles, which were multilayered. She often kept them separate, and they often required different sets of abilities and skills. Interestingly, when describing her actions and mindset with respect to her professional life, she identified herself as a “control freak” (Interview #2, p. 15). She talked about her quest for perfection, stating “...I have to be perfect.” (Interview #2, p. 15). Maria expressed her need to compartmentalize her other roles and to find a way to leave them behind when she enters into her work role as a “teacher,” because as she explained, a child’s well-being depends on your attentiveness, stating that with this role comes immense “responsibility.” She described a teacher as a detective who must rely on astute observation and careful question posing to arrive at unbiased conclusions that ultimately put the students first. Within this professional role, she eluded to the notion that ethical and moral dilemmas may arise, which will require careful decision making. She expressed other very strong beliefs about teaching, adamantly stating that grade level distinctions (as a means of categorizing teachers) must be dissolved and that teachers
ought to be viewed as generalists, who need to feel comfortable venturing outside of their "comfort zones" to experiment with a variety of levels and subjects. She believed that this allowed for new self-awareness, identification of novel interests, and it prevents teachers from becoming complacent, giving them mental stimulation and new challenges.

The last two broad categories of roles which she identified herself as negotiating included: “Societal” roles (at the local, governmental and national levels) and well as the global role of “World citizen.” Maria perceived these three as external roles often created or shaped by others’ perceptions and expectations. In essence, the organizational structure of her map began with the specific or most personal domain and ended with the most broad or global domain. She also identified the domains as being context dependent.

She remembered noting the challenge that she had with depicting her understanding of identities and roles in a graphic form. She talked about how she constantly altered the image until she found something that best captured her understanding of the complexity of self/identity/roles; with the key piece ultimately being the idea about her identity and roles that “They’re all overlapping as one whole” (Interview #2, p. 11). She made it clear that the size of the waves did not correspond with the role or identity’s perceived importance to her. She prioritized her identity and roles, and listed them in order of their importance, even before the question of salience was posed to her.

Maria understood her identity and roles to be hierarchical, one building upon the next, forming a continuous sequence. She saw this interdependence as similar to Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, stating,

If my basic needs are not satisfied first, meaning, if I don’t really know who I am
and what I like, and what suits me, and if I don’t have this family or social
[sphere] uh in place, then I can’t go into professional. I’m lost. Like I’m gonna
hate everything that I do. I probably will be one of the people who can’t find the
perfect job, or the perfect grade to teach. It’s always something missing in your
life, you’re always constantly complaining about that. Maybe those people I
believe are missing something in the base, in their basic needs. (Interview #2,
p. 20)

She expressed that knowledge of one’s self is fundamental, providing stability
within the previous identities and roles which allows an individual to successfully
negotiate subsequent roles. She felt that a lack of this self-awareness could be a link to
discontentment, identity loss, or even role confusion. To her, being aware of your “core”
is critical to leading a content existence.

On her map, she listed three driving forces that propel her roles in motion (she
called them “engines”) and implied that they work together to enable the successful
navigation of her multiple roles. These driving forces or “engines” included
flexibility/willingness to be open, organization/planning, and motivation. She referred to
these positive traits and attitudes frequently, and recognized them as critical to her
continued existence. To her, part of being flexible meant recognizing change as positive
and valuable and being at ease with it. It also meant having multiple interests and being
versatile. Furthermore, organization and planning meant having long and short term
objectives, thinking about the future, and being careful when making decisions. To her,
motivation meant being driven, self-disciplined, and having an eagerness to act upon
things. She also identified herself as both “positive” and “private.”
She was globally conscious and very interested in exploring what went on in other parts of the world. She desired to hear varied perspectives, to understand the practices that occur in various nations, and felt a profound sense of duty to be informed and to be action-oriented.

Maria expressed her preoccupation with generating comparisons. She noted how she frequently compared her roles with each other, herself to others, nations to other nations, education systems across the world, and peoples’ different thinking patterns. On many occasions, she emphatically stated, “I’m a thinker” (i.e., Interview #2, p. 11). She was analytical. She viewed herself as cerebral and theoretical. She had a very enquiring mind, and posed thoughtful questions on a regular basis. For instance, at work, she asks herself and others:

…What’s going on? Who is writing curriculum? Who are the people who are deciding about our curriculum? Who is to say? I was so interested in who those people are. Who are they? Where are they working? I want to know how the system functions, and how I end up having curriculum that I have to follow.

(Interview#2, p. 8)

The following I-Poem captures the complexity of Maria’s student identities. It documents her decision to apply to graduate studies, her willingness to take chances with her learning, and to try new things. It shows her strong sense of self, her astute emotional awareness, and her careful decision-making that is guided by the thoughts of the people that matter most in her life.

I applied
I didn’t know
I applied
I was interested
I haven’t had
but I challenged myself to learn more
why I really am
I choose
I am personally interested
I also balanced my roles
I think
how I balance them
I might become pessimistic
I am now very optimistic
who I really am
what I think is important
I always feel my roles
not that I just do things
I need to feel
I choose to do the right thing

(Interview #1, pp. 23-24)

Mia

Mia’s living self map was created using a cut-and-paste technique. It contained a series of computer generated images that represented her identity and broad categories of roles. It contained colour, simple shapes, cartoon-like imagery, and a construction paper backing. She stated, “I like the pictures. I like getting colourful pictures that represent things that are a little bit funny to look at. Um…it’s just my personality I think. I like it” (Interview #2, p. 6). While describing her map, she spoke about preserving the likeness of others, and wanting to create something that was aesthetically pleasing. She also indicated that the images were carefully selected, so that there was an alignment between the pictures on her map and the message that she was trying to convey.
Her map most closely resembled a bubble map, with the word “Me” in the centre and arrows radiating outward to depict five broad categories of roles that she negotiated, which she proceeded to describe. Two playful children and an authoritative-looking man represented her family. She identified her roles within the family, including being a wife and mother. An image of a cross-legged Buddha represented the role that spirituality, specifically her Buddhist faith, plays in her life. She identified her spirituality as enabling her to derive a sense of calmness and a capacity for reflection. Interestingly, there was a third image on her map of a seductive woman in an evening dress holding a cocktail. She talked about this past persona that she once held, formerly being someone who was exciting, who was free to socialize, and who would enjoy the night life and indulge. There was a sense of role loss, in the way that she spoke about her lively former “party girl” self. Two separate images of a diploma, and a stack of books with an apple, both represented her student-related roles, including that of a graduate student, teaching assistant, and soon-to-be instructor. The final image of a woman in a uniform, with broom and dustpan in hand, represented her work-related role, which she recognized as having to perform out of necessity (for financial stability) rather than enjoyment. There was a sense of emptiness or lack of fulfillment as she spoke of her present job. She articulated the desire for a change, and an opportunity to pursue something new. Mia identified her family and academic related roles as being salient. She articulated that both spheres enable her to feel great joy and satisfaction, offering challenges and rewards. She spoke of the love and pride that she has for her family, and the mental stimulation that she gains from academia. The two in tandem provided a balance to her life. Then, in declining order of importance, she listed: spirituality, followed by her job, and, finally,
the “party girl” as least important. Mia listed “pet owner” and “homeowner” as secondary roles that did not directly appear on her map, but were subsumed underneath the broad category of “family.”

She identified the construction of her map as an intuitive and spontaneous process. Her internal thoughts were guided by a reflection of her typical daily activities and routines. “So that just sort of came naturally, and then [I] just thought of all the different sort of jobs that I do, or places that I go, and then [I] tried to find a visual representation of them...” (Interview #2, p. 7). This retracing of her footsteps provided her with a strategy for identifying her multiple roles. Ultimately, Mia recognized her map as a statement of her values: “Um... I guess it speaks to what I find important, because those are the ones [roles] that I’ve included.” (Interview # 2, p. 7) She understood her map to be a representation of her current stage of development, “…Um I guess too, where I am in my life, it speaks to” (Interview #2, p. 7), as well as directions and aspirations, such as where she envisions herself to be in the future. She articulated a consciousness towards the relative sizes of the images she selected and the proportional relationships that were demonstrated. She felt that this gave an added layer of meaning to her map. Mia articulated that the little image of the “worker” captured the insignificant role that her job plays in her life, and the dissatisfaction and exhaustion that she feels associated with work. On the other hand, the proportional relationships conveyed her interests. “Um...the fact that I think I’ve represented academic tendencies twice, probably speaks volumes to the fact that I really enjoy doing that and that’s where I’m headed right now” (Interview # 2, p. 7). Much of Mia’s subsequent discussion focused on her present interest in higher education, which was a pathway that she intended on
exploring further. Ultimately, she identified passion for her family and her studies as driving forces in her life.

The following I-Poem illustrates Mia’s understanding of success. There is a duality in this poem, as you listen to her conflicting portrayals of herself. On one hand, she acknowledged her progress through the program, and deemed herself to be successful; yet, on the other hand, she saw her shortcomings, and perceived her accomplishments to be minor rather than extensive. She grappled with her compulsion to add to her heavy workload, and to become increasingly involved in a variety of things. She came to a realization that straining herself in this way could be detrimental.

I don’t know why
I mean
I got into a conference on my own
I don’t know if that’s a big thing or not
I’ve made it to my thesis
I’ve stuck it out
I’m successful

I’m such an overachiever
I’m not published
I’ve only presented at this conference
I always see what more there is to do
I’m having a hard time writing this,

How would I define success?
Doing what I’m doing
I don’t know
I just always have that…
I have to do more
I always overextend myself
I have to stop that.

(Interview #4, pp. 15-16)

Similarities Across Maps

There were some notable similarities across participants’ maps and throughout
their discussions of themselves. Most of the participants shared personality characteristics and personal foci. Evidence of direct and indirect perfectionism was noted among five of the six participants, four of which even used the word “perfectionist” when referring to themselves. Three participants said that they were “over-achievers,” and two identified themselves as “control-freaks.” Two of the participants talked about their cautiousness when making significant decisions in their lives. Most of the participants discussed their openness to new ideas and novel experiences. They also referred to their genuine desire to help others and to make a difference.

All six of the participants spoke to some extent about “driving forces,” “purposes,” or “legacies.” Many of them even talked about multiple guiding purposes within their personal and professional lives, whether it was to give back to their community, to make a positive impact in someone’s life, to contribute to society, to help students, to be a good parent, to learn, or to be a spiritual being. Only one participant indicated that she did not derive a sense of purpose from her present professional life; however, her familial and academic life provided her with a deep sense of purpose.

Four participants talked about spirituality, faith, or religion as being important in their lives. They indicated the richness that comes from living a spiritual existence. For three of the participants, maintaining balance in their lives was a major priority. Three individuals also placed a focus on making connections and building relationships. Three of the six also indicated that teaching was their vocation. Two participants emphasized the importance of staying true to themselves. While most of the participants mentioned the theme of ageing, for two of them, it was part of their immediate lived reality. Participants’ living self maps were complex and authentic; yet, they also shared
Various commonalities.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Most of the participants did not articulate having any prior knowledge of identity-related research or theories. Those participants that remembered having previously read some literature in this area did not recall or provide any specific details as, in some cases, much time had passed since their introduction to identity theory. However, three of the participants did refer to other types of theories or theoretical terms (i.e., complexity theory, flow theory, Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs theory, “impostor syndrome,” etc.) to explain the negotiation of their own identities and roles as graduate students, as learners, or as human beings. Accordingly, their understanding of the key concepts related to this study was grounded in their own very personal experiences, their thoughtful conceptualizations of these constructs, and their integration of other theoretical models to explore, identify, and describe their own identities and roles.

Defining Identity

Interestingly, two of the participants indicated that the word “identity” evoked negative first impressions and feelings. Kathryn’s first thoughts were of “spies,” and “identity theft,” while Maria’s first thought was of a “scary,” “formal,” “rigid,” and off-putting entity. However, Maria identified a disconnect between her initial images and feelings evoked by the term, and her own personal understanding of it.

A common thread across all of the participants’ discussions of identity was the idea of it being a sum of many things (be it roles, daily actions, etc.).

Alice’s first thought on identity was that it included “parts of being.” Personally, she said, “For me it’s the three parts right now, the family aspect, the professional aspect,
and then the student aspect” (Interview #1, p. 2). For her, identity involves the sum of the spheres in her life, which include her roles within these spheres. Maria saw the sum of her life experiences and actions as playing a role in shaping her identity (i.e., her conceptualization was of the journey she has gone through thus far in her life, and key experiences through this journey which she believed were instrumental in shaping who she is at this point in time).

Both Maria and Elizabeth referred to identity as a collection of “recipes.” For Elizabeth, these recipes provide her with a working understanding of her roles and the necessary actions that govern them. “Personal identity is...is having (for me) a definition and...and an operant scheme wherein I can determine what I should be doing, how should I be functioning as a mother? How should I be functioning as a teacher?” (Interview #1, p.3)

Together these many “recipes” contribute to her identity.

Kathryn articulated a similar sentiment, understanding identity to be a collection or group of features. “So to me, I would say probably identity is that unique set of not just skills, but knowledge, skills, um...thinking patterns, you know that make me who I am” (Interview #1, pp. 5-6). She identified multiple factors that contribute to one’s identity, internal factors, like personality (which other participants have mentioned), but also external factors like geography and socioeconomic status.

A total of four participants referenced the idea of internal and external dimensions being a part of identity. Alice, for instance, indicated that one’s personality and beliefs (internal constructs) as well as their roles (external tasks and behaviours) are an integral part of identity. Similarly, Mia highlighted two parts to identity, personal identity as understood through a person’s own eyes, and identity as defined through society’s eyes.
Her definition suggested that these two components were not mutually exclusive, but were bidirectional, interacting with each other, as they happened in tandem. She indicated that there are societal expectations or labels imposed upon people, while at the same time, people are trying to make connections to the information that they are receiving and attempting to internalize it. This dual process influences peoples' identities and self-perceptions, which, in turn, has an effect on their outward projection of themselves and their interactions with others. Here, relating and connecting internal and external factors becomes significant to identity.

Another trend across the participants' definitions of identity was the idea that self-perceptions are involved. Alice articulated this sentiment as follows: "...so it's a way of...I think the way you see yourself, and that's all important above everything else, because your perception of yourself affects every aspect of your life, your self-esteem, your interactions with others" (Interview #2, p. 2). Elizabeth understood her own identity in terms of her self-defined priorities; what she puts first in her life. To her, identity involved personal awareness of her roles and corresponding behaviour. She stated, "Identity for me is the **perception** of what my role is, or what **channel** I should be on" (Interview #1, p. 2).

Two participants expressed the notion that identity also encompasses one's beliefs. Cordelia indicated that identity is:

> Who you are, but who you are, not only um...who you are in the sense of the quote unquote **label** that you would give yourself for identity, but who you are in the ideological sense. You know, what does who you are (the label) have to do with the way you think, the way you act, the way you interact with **people**, all of
those types of things. (Interview #1, p. 5)

This notion was mirrored by Alice as well.

An added component of identity noted by two of the participants was its connection to a larger plan (i.e., vision) or significant contribution that an individual could make or be a part of. Alice felt that identity was connected to “legacy,” which, for her, was about leaving behind a positive imprint, by helping others, or touching peoples’ lives in some way. It was linked to her specific hopes regarding “accomplishments” that she was striving to achieve. Cordelia recognized identity as being part of her shared Haudenosaunee community vocabulary and imagery. She stated, “…I see identity almost as like my purpose for being on this earth…” (Interview #1, p. 11). Cordelia identified her purpose as helping preserve the Mohawk language for the benefit of her entire community.

Two participants acknowledged that for them identity was about balance. Cordelia noted that her Iroquoian “cultural” tenets, “oral traditions,” customs, and teachings of identity were about the maintenance of balanced systems of relationships in the world, about harmony, and interconnectedness. Maria noted that personally identity was about achieving balance and stability in her own life.

**Identity or Identities? A Singular or Plural Construct?**

Overall, participants’ responses with respect to the nature of identity were classified into three groups: identity as a singular construct (i.e., one core identity), identity as a plural construct (i.e., multifaceted identities), or identity as both (i.e., a person can have one core identity, and multiple identities operating in tandem).

Four participants referred to a “core” identity, using it to represent a singular
construct. Cordelia strongly believed in the singularity of identity. “I see myself as having one identity, multiple roles” (Interview #1, p. 10).

While she is unwavering in her belief of identity as a singular construct, she does demonstrate some uncertainty with respect to its state (whether it malleable, or constant and unchanging over time). Likewise, other participants’ responses also showed disagreement with respect to the state of identity. Alice believed that the core is flexible. “I think you have a core identity that I think is always open to change, and to influences…” (Interview #1, p. 4). To her, it is permeable and malleable. Contrastingly, Maria and Elizabeth recognized the “core” as unchanging. For them, it is the central guiding identity that remains the same across situations. Maria views her “core me” to be largely predetermined. She suggested that it is the inner most part of the self. She felt that her needs must be met in order to have a strong and secure “core.” Elizabeth linked her core to the religious teachings that she grew up with. When she referred to her core, it was synonymous with her constant values and morals that guided her across situations.

Kathryn was adamant that people have multifaceted identities. Similarly, Alice, Mia, and Elizabeth all indicated that they personally had multiple identities; however, their different responses related to the construct of identity, proved that they believed it was possible to have both a singular identity as well as multifaceted identities that operated in tandem.

No one was more adamant in her belief of the simultaneous existence of a singular identity and multiple identities than Maria. Her response shed light on the possibility for both types of constructs to coexist. She felt that it ultimately varied from one individual to the other. She thought that peoples’ beliefs, behaviours, and ideals
would determine which view of identity they would subscribe to. Maria went on to identify two categories of people, each likely to hold a different view of identity. She articulated that people, who have a specific approach to life, are content with staying in the same job, do not embrace change easily, have clear interests and do not deviate from their predictable routines, are likely to see identity as a singular construct, and to recognize themselves as having one identity. Whereas, she thought that people who experiment, are open to change, juggle many things (multitask), feel restless when they spend a significant amount of time at one task, strive to keep their numerous identities stable, and demonstrate increased disparity in their actions across settings, would likely view the concept as plural, and recognize themselves as having multiple multifaceted identities.

Maria did believe that it was possible to have both a guiding core identity as well as multifaceted identities in coexistence. She was the only participant who clearly identified herself as having both kinds of identities.

I think I have one major identity mould that has been formed by fitting many different identities. That mould doesn’t have a final shape because it can expand and slightly change because identities certainly change to blend with all internal and external factors and roles in our daily lives. The only thing that might stay the same is the core of the each person’s identities... That might be something that you always bring with yourself no matter where you go, such as a heart of one person, however your identities can change to reflect your roles you have in society or in you personal life. Roles are as an engine, which can move the different identities, but how you prioritize them depend of that core central
identity that person has. (Interview #1, p. 23)
For her, the core identity stays consistent and stable, while the other identities are variable and largely shaped by one’s roles; however, the two operate in tandem. She pictured the core identity as responsible for common behaviours, views, and priorities across settings; whereas, the multifaceted identities account for differences in behaviours and responses across settings.

Alice, Mia, and Elizabeth recognized themselves as having multiple identities, yet at different points in time, they referenced the possibility of the existence of a “core” identity within their discussions. Here is an example in the duality of Mia’s response, whereby she indirectly acknowledged the existence of both a singular identity and multiple identities.

I think it’s probably multifaceted because there are so many different roles that you play, you wouldn’t just be one person all the time, some people may be, but I think the majority of people act differently in different circumstances, and how they act defines who they are. (Interview #1, p. 3)

Although she leans more heavily in supporting the notion of multifaceted identities, her statement that “some people may be” the same across contexts, shows her open-mindedness to the real possibility that both can exist, as evidenced by individuals’ actions. Alice, like Mia, leaned towards picturing identity as a multifaceted construct, recognizing the plurality of identities. However, she also stated that it largely depended on the individual and his or her self definition, indicating that there was a spectrum of possible definitions from “narrow” to “broad” possibilities.
**Defining Roles**

Participants had different definitions for the concept of a role, from simple to more complex understandings. At a basic level, Elizabeth likened it to being job related, involving the specific duties, activities, or responsibilities required of her. She stated, “...a role is the tasks attached to the position that I’m in” (Interview #1, p. 4). While Cordelia and Alice recognized that roles can be linked to occupation, they understood the concept as extending beyond it. Cordelia believed that one’s behaviour and actions in roles influence other people and systems of relationships. She felt that a role encompasses something larger, more global, as one contemplates their place in the world, and searches for a sense of community. Alice also identified the notion of belongingness and “fitting in” as questions that one seeks to answer when in role. Similarly, Alice spoke of a broader understanding of roles, involving different sets of expectations which influence one’s performance. In her mind, expectations, choices, needs, and relationships with others are negotiated within a role.

Kathryn believed that identities and roles can be categorized hierarchically. “...I guess a role is kind of almost like a subset of your identity...” (Interview #1, p. 9) She described complexity theory as offering an understanding of the intricacies of identities and roles, involving a “nested relationship” with many “branches.” Urry (2005) discussed the prevalence of complexity and noted that it is “...loosely known as chaos, complexity, non-linearity and dynamical systems analysis. There is a shift from reductionist analysis to those that involve the study of complex adaptive (‘vital’) matter that shows ordering but which remains on ‘the edge of chaos’” (p. 1).

Kathryn and Maria noted two types of roles, ones that were self-selected, and ones that
were imposed. Maria articulated that the two types of roles can have different impacts on one’s identity and understanding of his or her self, especially if they do not fit with a person’s own self-awareness. “…You can have external roles and internal roles. The roles you are giving to yourself, or the roles that you cannot control from the outside world. Sometimes you might be placed in a role that really doesn’t fit you” (Interview #1, pp. 19-20). According to Maria, a challenge exists if prescribed roles clash with your vision or perception of your roles and yourself. However, she noted that the opposite is also true; you can feel positive and as though you are on the right track if both align, and this is precisely how Maria feels. Kathryn acknowledged a very similar sentiment, indicating that when people are placed in roles that they never envisioned themselves performing, their self-perceptions may suddenly clash with their newfound role. She said that this might lead individuals to experience “cognitive dissonance,” and determine whether they can fit these different sets of information into their image of themselves and their identities.

Mia spoke of roles as being performed, linked to a series of behaviours and emotions. To her, roles represented different personas. She noted that roles were context specific. Mia stated, “They’re feelings that I have, or people that I feel that I am at different times” (Interview #2, p. 2). She feels connected to her roles. Like Mia, Maria also notes an emotional association as being important to her roles. According to Maria, roles are influenced (and set in motion) by one’s performance within them, one’s feelings, beliefs, self-expectations or perceptions, as well as one’s identity. Moreover, Kathryn said, “I think also our roles are multifaceted as well” (Interview #1, p. 9).
Mia’s understanding of roles suggested that she believed they provide an individual with flexibility and freedom to act in new ways. While in a role, there was a sense that Mia could take on different characteristics than she would normally associate with herself. She identified that her character traits and abilities shift when she is in different roles, as she demonstrates flexibility to do what is needed or expected of her in a given situation. This especially came through when she recognized the need to be flexible and adaptable as a graduate student.

Participants’ identifications of their own roles that they perform are depicted in tabular form, including the number and type of roles that they perceived themselves to negotiate on a regular basis. From the table, it is evident that some participants have grouped or organized their roles under broader themes (i.e., “work” or “home life”), while others merely presented their roles in list form, without providing any kind of organizing system. Predominant categories of roles across participants’ identifications included: familial, occupational, academic, community-centered, and friendship-related roles, although there were many more (see Table 2 for details). Alice perceived her family related roles to be mainly “voluntary” or self-selected rather than imposed. Ultimately, it becomes important to distinguish participants’ understanding of roles from their understanding of identity.

Distinguishing Roles from Identity

Lines appeared blurred with respect to participants’ distinctions between “roles” and “identities.” Multiple participants used these terms interchangeably and spoke of the similarities between identities and roles. Mia, for instance, expressed her own challenge in highlighting the minute distinctions which she perceived to exist.
### Table 2

**A List of Participants' Perceived Roles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alice</th>
<th>Cordelia</th>
<th>Elizabeth</th>
<th>Katharyn</th>
<th>Maria</th>
<th>Mia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family (usually voluntary)</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Big Sister</td>
<td>Home life provider</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Student (learner)</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>(breadwinner)</td>
<td>wife</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life-long</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Neighbour</td>
<td>mom</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohawk</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>wife (friend &amp; companion)</td>
<td>graduate student</td>
<td>sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>staf member</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>daughter</td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daugheter</td>
<td>subject</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>close friend</td>
<td>sister</td>
<td>educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sister</td>
<td>specialist</td>
<td></td>
<td>friend</td>
<td>worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>granddaughter</td>
<td>senior mentor</td>
<td>facilitator</td>
<td>neighbour</td>
<td>friend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(eldest)</td>
<td>advisor to</td>
<td>presenter</td>
<td>role model</td>
<td>sister-in-law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>niece</td>
<td>administration</td>
<td>consultant</td>
<td>(for her daughter)</td>
<td>daughter-in-law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>member of society</td>
<td>member of</td>
<td>pet owner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Girlfriend</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>home owner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>voter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canoe Club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>taxpayer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girlfriend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregiver (pets)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
...I think they’re probably similar. I mean something that you identify with...there’s probably a slight difference in them. I’m not sure what that would be or how you’d articulate it, but I think that they’re quite close in definition. Perhaps that slight...you know that one or two parts of the definition that makes it different, but that they’re very similar. (Interview #1, p. 4)

Likewise, Elizabeth stated that a role “...it almost laminates with identity...” (Interview #1, p. 4). She offers the insight that human beings are complex and their multiple roles are layered with their identities, intimately connected to each other or bounded together.

Four participants also spoke of the bidirectional relationship that exists between roles and identity, as they influence each other. Kathryn indicated, “Within your identity, you have many roles that you play. Um...but they certainly inform one another, so I would say it’s not unidirectional” (Interview #1, p. 10). Similarly, Maria noted that roles and identities do not operate in isolation. In her mind, there is interplay between them. Not only do roles influence other roles, but they influence identities, which, in turn, influence roles. It is a back and forth (bidirectional) system. Cordelia indirectly acknowledged the multidirectional relationship that unfolds by articulating that you have a sense of self, and negotiate many roles which are directed externally, all the while obtaining feedback from your environment, which influences your identity, informing the self, and perhaps even impacting upon your behaviour. Her responses captured a complex system or cycle that is continuously occurring. Mia also expressed that a heightened level of self-awareness can be gained by being attuned to the bidirectional relationship that exists between your different roles and identities.

Participants highlighted three key distinctions between identities and roles. First,
they saw roles as subsets of identity. Second, they saw roles as directly contributing to
the formation of one’s identity. Third, they saw identity as being internally driven, and
roles as externally driven. Three participants distinguished identities from roles by their
hierarchical positioning. They viewed identity as occupying a higher level than a role,
believing it to be more global, while a role was a lower level subset of identity. Kathryn
indicated, “...If you had to hierarchy them, I would say your identity is higher than your
role” (Interview #1, p. 10). Mia stated, “Maybe identity would be more encompassing
like larger, with a role being sort of a sub-category of it, underneath” (Interview #1, p. 4).
Likewise, Elizabeth acknowledged, “For me, an identity is the big picture, it’s the whole
bag. The role, for me, is a part of that identity” (Interview #1, p. 4). These women feel as
though identity is more holistic, while a role is a specific branch of one’s identity.

Two participants perceived roles as directly shaping a person’s identity. Maria
explained, “I think my identity might be defined by my roles in life. The roles play a big
role in my life and in creating my identity” (Interview #1, p. 23). She described her
multidimensional roles as integral to her identity. Likewise, Kathryn articulated, “…I
think your identity will come sometimes because of the roles that you play…” (Interview
#1, p. 10). Emerging from one’s roles is a theory of who they are, which informs their
identity. Maria indicated that roles propel identities, steering them in different directions.
According to her understanding, roles give your identities momentum, guidance, and
direction. She went on to explain how roles inform identity and are integral to the process
of identity formation.

A couple of participants distinguished identities and roles according to the sources
where their definitions are coming from. Both Alice and Cordelia talked about identity as
something personally defined, and intimately connected to oneself, while they understood roles to be externally defined or driven. Alice expressed that “…an identity is self-defined, whereas a role can be again the expectations that are placed on you by somebody else” (Interview #1, p. 6). She saw a difference in terms of who is doing the defining. Likewise, Cordelia indicated, “…Because identity is a personal thing, like I said, a role is something that you have to do to something or for someone else. Um… your identity is the way you view yourself in the world” (Interview #1, p. 9). Here the distinction is based on perceptions (i.e., self, versus other/society). She understood a role to be action-oriented, externally driven, and focused on doing, whereas identity as perception-oriented, internally driven, and focused on “viewing” (i.e., of oneself). However, as others have acknowledged, the two are not completely separate, but interactive, dynamic, and always in motion.

**Defining the Negotiation of Identities**

Participants used words, such as “juggling,” “grappling with,” “balancing,” “self-reflecting,” “rearranging,” and “prioritizing,” to describe the process of negotiating their identities (see Figure 7). Three participants defined it as attempting to achieve some sort of balance in their lives, with respect to their roles, spheres, experiences, and their own internal stability. Kathryn and Maria identified contemplating philosophical questions related to their identities, in the midst of seeking balance in their lives.

Most of the participants perceived negotiating identities to be both an external and internal process happening in tandem, amidst outside factors and influences, and within one’s own mind. It involved a back and forth between self and environment. Discord can result from juggling your personality and self-understanding, your life circumstances, and
A continuous process that involves one or more of the following actions:

Everything in tandem

- Constructs, in light of time and change, individualized process, requires energy
- Contemplating actions, motivations, decisions, consequences
- Internal (self, mind) & external spheres (context/environment), questioning, “cognitive dissonance,” belonging, tension
- Striving for balance in their lives (roles, spheres, internal stability)

A complex process that can be both conscious, and unconscious

Figure 7. Participants define the negotiation of identities.
your behaviours or reactions concurrently. Ultimately, Kathryn identified the need to ask herself questions, such as, “...how does this fit? Where do I fit? [and] What do I think about this?” (Interview #1, p. 7). Maria and Cordelia similarly identified the need to address the theme of belonging when negotiating identities and roles.

Maria described the process of negotiation as largely “internal.” So, too, did Alice, who viewed there to be a necessary struggle within the mind, in an attempt to maintain harmony between her multiple roles. Maria mentioned that the mind conceptualizes an ideal situation, which contrasts the lived reality of negotiation. These two often opposing situations create tension.

Elizabeth and Alice made reference to the added dimension of change which impacts on negotiation. Elizabeth explained, “I think the negotiation of identities for me will be that when the times changed, when the decades passed, when different demands developed over the years, it meant that sometimes my constructs had to be rearranged” (Interview #1, p. 3). Elizabeth recognized the need to adapt, accommodate, or readjust in order to ensure an alignment between new demands and societal changes, and her own conception of herself and her theories.

Cordelia referred to the internal negotiation of her roles as a process of contemplation, as she attempted to understand her own actions and motivations, as well as explore alternative approaches. She stated, “...for me, it has to do a lot with self-reflection. What did I do? Why did I do that? You know, what if I would have done it this way?” (Interview #1, p. 7). Taking time to contemplate and thoughtfully deliberate big “decisions” was a central aspect of negotiation for her. She also noted that because she resides within a relatively homogenous community where people share many key aspects
of their identities, less negotiating is required, whereas when she leaves her community, more negotiating is required. Mia recognized negotiation as continuous. She said, “...everything is negotiation, trying to figure out what you can give to each one [i.e., person, sphere, role, etcetera]” (Interview #3, p. 3).

Participants had different views with respect to the level of consciousness involved in negotiating identities and roles. It was perceived as variable depending on the situation. Kathryn felt that the process is “complex” and involved the act of prioritizing. Ultimately, Mia captured the chaos involved in negotiating. She explained, “That’s probably when you have more than one role competing with another one for your time” (Interview #1, p. 3). She identified competing demands and roles as warring or vying for your attention. Participants understood the process of identities intersecting, as something slightly different.

Defining Intersecting Identities

Participants used an array of words to express their understanding of intersecting identities, which included: “combined,” “ordered,” “multi-layered,” “multifaceted,” “overlapping,” “self-discovery,” “informing,” “shifting,” “confusion,” “natural,” and “unnatural.” These different; and at times opposing, words illustrate the complexity of the term and of their experiences with intersecting identities. Maria understood it as highly “personal,” unique to each individual and influenced by a person’s upbringing, or critical incidents in his or her life.

She felt that many different factors (i.e., individual behaviours, decisions; motivations; and emotions) impact on the ways that a person’s identities intersect, or for that matter, which identities intersect.
Three participants explicitly commented that the intersecting of identities was an inevitable and frequent occurrence. Alice and Maria felt that intersections were unavoidable because human beings are incredibly multidimensional. She also conveyed her belief that roles are continuously intersecting within the mind, with one role informing a person’s thoughts about the other role, each influencing the other. This is similar to Mia’s understanding of intersecting identities. She said, “Mmmm…I guess that might be where things overlap. I would imagine that all the identities that you hold intersect with other ones...So I think that all your roles intersect inside of you to make who you are” (Interview #1, p. 3). She is referring to the point of intersection that forms the “self,” or the “core” of a person. These perspectives contrast Cordelia’s understanding of intersecting identities, which she felt to be infrequent revelations or moments of “self-discovery.” She described a critical incident in her life, when she had this type of profound experience, whereby clarity was achieved and different pieces of the puzzle came together. It resulted in a new understanding of herself, as she discovered a way to assemble the parts of her life and herself into a coherent whole. While intersecting identities brought a newfound simplicity to Cordelia’s life, they added complexity to Alice’s life. She felt that prolonged time spent in a given role often leads to more complex thinking and understanding of it. Elizabeth felt that intersecting identities could result in confusion, requiring a difficult period of adaptation. She understood the experience to result in “shifts” within a person’s identities, which correspond to “changes” in the level of “demands” within one’s roles, necessarily involving a renegotiation of one’s priorities (usually temporarily). Kathryn agreed.
Maria noted that in some instances, there is an easy or “natural” meeting (or coming together) of your identities and societal prescriptions (or ascribed expectations), while in other instances, there is a major “disconnect” between the two. In her mind; either the two come together and fit (coalesce), or the two come together and collide. Personally, Maria indicated that her identities fit well with her conception of herself, which makes for easy intersections, closely aligning with who she understands herself to be. Similarly, Kathryn recognized natural or logical intersections and unnatural or surprising intersections where a “disconnect” occurs. According to her experience, this latter type is rarer. She indicated that she experiences tension when two identities that normally do not cross paths, meet. In this instance, she must recognize and readjust her behaviour and reactions based on her self-defined priorities. She identified the intersection of motherhood within the work setting to be a rare occurrence, and described an instance when her daughter visited her workplace. She found it difficult to negotiate these two identities in tandem as they intersected within the workplace setting. Kathryn also described frequent intersections between her work life and school life, and although these intersections happen regularly and are logical ones (as her school work and professional work overlap with each other), she still experiences tension with respect to separating them and creating distinct boundaries between them. Nonetheless, she recognized that one “informs” the other, and in essence when her identities intersect, there is a bidirectional interaction, where each is enlightened as a result of this meeting of identities.

Life-Long Learning and Transformative Pathways

This theme captures the significance that all of the participants placed on learning
within their lives. They continuously conceptualized themselves in the role of the “learner” and often attributed their development (be it personal, professional, spiritual, or emotional) to their eagerness, receptiveness, passion, or necessity to learn.

Two of the participants specifically used the term “life-long learning” to describe their ongoing roles as learners. They conceptualized learning as a journey that never ends. While the other participants did not necessarily use this specific term, it was clear that they felt similarly, describing learning as a continuous act (Maria, Interview #2, p. 11), as crossing domains and transcending roles (Kathryn, Interview #1, p. 11) and as uniting people because it is something we are all capable of (Kathryn, Interview #2, p. 11). Yet, Cordelia explains that it is also a highly individualized process, influenced by our varied “identities,” and “experiences” (Interview #1, p. 6). Two of the participants spoke of the value of education. Kathryn, for instance, articulated “...I really do believe that education is...an equalizer and gives kids at least a stab at a fair chance” (Interview #1, p. 5). She proceeded to state that “...with education comes a levelling of the playing field... you know we can overcome an awful lot of...difficult circumstances...with education....and people do have access to many more opportunities through education” (Kathryn, Interview #2, p. 10). Learning and becoming educated was seen as a means to triumph over adversity, and to ensure that there is equity in outcomes for all students. Maria also saw education as the necessary foundation for being able to make a contribution in this world.

Teacher Leadership

Harrison and Killion (2007) ascertain that teacher leadership can take on a multitude of forms. Various leadership roles that they list coincide with the broad
education-related roles carried out by some of the participants in this study, including: "resource provider," "curriculum specialist," "learning facilitator," "mentor," "school leader," "catalyst for change" and "learner" (pp. 74-76). Kathryn talked about one of these roles,

You know, sometimes I have a role as a facilitator, however it's leadership and it's definitely I think, it’s very much shared leadership, but you know where I’m making something happen, like it wouldn’t happen at all if I didn’t play that role.

(Interview #1, p. 9)

Of the five teachers, two identified themselves as enacting formal leadership roles at the schoolboard and union levels. Elizabeth, for instance, spoke very highly of her formal leadership experience, describing the "blazer" she wore, the mindset she had to adopt, the significant people she interacted with, the opportunity for travelling, and the diverse training she received. Three of the other participants did not explicitly recognize themselves as having engaged in teacher leadership; however, this is not to say that they did not actively engage in teacher leadership, perhaps they merely did not distinguish it as such. There was evidence suggesting that these three individuals were, in fact, engaged in teacher leadership in a variety of ways. For instance, two participants had been a part of designing curricula for new programs, two spoke of their involvement in staff meetings (as an opportunity to exchange information, strategies, and questions which facilitated their learning and the making of connections), and one described the process of collaboration that transpired when a group of teachers attempted to decipher a particular document. As previously described by Lambert (2003), these are all images of teacher leadership in action. Kathryn, like Lambert, believed that teachers are leaders and she
described the support that she provides other teachers with, helping them to discard their preconceived notions of leadership, so that they can begin to see teacher leadership in a new way. She talked about the parallels between the role of teacher and learner and how teachers must simultaneously assist students in acquiring knowledge, while also gaining knowledge of themselves. She expressed an eagerness to learn strategies that will help her be the most effective teacher possible.

*Returning To School: Education as Opening Up Opportunities*

    Each of the participants valued education tremendously and noted that it has been a vehicle for opening up many opportunities in their lives. After getting out of an unhealthy relationship, Cordelia made the decision to go back to school and finish her degree. She was able to recognize her own intelligence and her potential and saw education as an opportunity to make a difference and to increase her salary. Since then, she has recognized education as a means to give back to her community, and to assist her in her quest of preserving the Mohawk language. Education has given Kathryn and Elizabeth opportunities to gain additional qualifications and training, to take on new positions, and to experience intellectual growth and fulfillment, and to enrich their lives in many ways. Maria has always enjoyed thinking and learning. Education has provided her with an opportunity to diversify her own learning. After immigrating, it has enabled her to build a life for herself and her family here in Canada, one that she is immensely proud of. Currently, she is working towards finishing what she started in her country of origin, by completing a Master’s Degree. More importantly, education has greatly contributed to her own personal development and her happiness. Alice used to perceive education as “a means to an end,” a way to gain employment in teaching. Along the way,
it has provided her with an experience to study abroad, to learn new strategies, and to gain confidence in herself. She now sees education taking on a new role in her professional life, one focused on “needs” oriented skill development. Originally, education assisted Mia in obtaining a position in social work. Since then, she has emphasized that her education pursuits have been strictly for her, rather than for advancing her current career. Like others, she expressed a profound passion for learning. Education has provided her with an opportunity to do something for herself, to take on leadership roles, to discover an interest in teaching at the postsecondary level, and to consider making a change in careers. All of the participants recognized that education (be it formal or informal) will continue to play a critical role in their lives, as they learn and grow, both personally and professionally.

**Critical Incidents as Transformative Pathways to Self-Discovery**

Participants identified critical incidents in their lives that acted as transformative pathways allowing for self-discovery. The following is a description of the six participants’ critical incidents. These experiences were mentioned repeatedly in different ways when participants spoke of their identities, and on occasion were even labelled as significant life events. Interestingly, some participants had common critical incidents that led to self-discoversies including graduate-school related experiences, participation in language centered educational programs, and loss of spouses. Other critical incidents included experiences of parental divorce, and immigration. Broadly, these events fall into three overarching categories involving education, loss, and resettlement.

*Critical incidents in graduate school.* Four of the participants spoke of critical incidents within graduate school. Three participants spoke of their previous self-doubts
about their ability and competence to study at the graduate level. Some of these insecurities might have stemmed from previous educational experiences. Elizabeth recounted her academic history, including mediocre grades and challenges in school. Elizabeth and Alice recalled specific instances in their educational careers where they received negative feedback or messages from a teacher or guidance counsellor, which they were hurt by. However, these previous conceptions of themselves as students were replaced with positive successful images during graduate studies. They mentioned very specific instances over the course of their studies where they had defining moments of self-discovery, recognizing their own potential and competence. For Alice, it constituted an instant in her final course where she confidently expressed her own opinions while delivering a presentation. This moment revealed the major transformation that she had made since the start of the program, and the incredible amount of confidence she had acquired. The moment of self-discovery for Elizabeth came in her introductory graduate course, when she received a great mark on her first term paper. She recalls this moment fondly, as an indication to herself that she was capable of success, and that she could have a positive perception of herself as a good student.

It is the entire period of graduate studies that constitutes a longitudinal critical incident for Mia and Maria, as they perceive it to have renewed their passion for learning, and offered them an opportunity to do something for themselves. Maria indicated that this endeavour is her way of staying informed, her way of subverting the politics that go on at her school, and her way of nurturing her core identity. It has helped her feel a sense of purpose, which is to continue learning and to contribute to society, and allowed her to see that she can push herself to reach new levels, as she learns new things, ventures outside
of her comfort zone, and finds creative ways to rise to various challenges. Mia recognized that at first, she experienced what is known as “the impostor syndrome,” corresponding to her initial self-doubt in her ability to do a graduate degree. This is “a term coined in the 70s to describe the fear that one is not as smart or capable as others think” (Buchanan, 2006, p. 37). However, graduate studies provided her with time to reflect upon her own transformation. She conveyed her astonishment in her own abilities and in her growth and indicated that being a graduate student has enabled her to become serious about doctoral studies, and about making a significant career change in order to help her achieve professional satisfaction. Now she exudes more confidence in her capabilities.

So, I guess it’s what, I think Brookfield calls it the ‘impostor syndrome.’ You don’t think you can do it. So that was a struggle. Now I know I can do it. And then you think of the PhD the way you think of the M.Ed., where you’re like… I can’t do that. I think that through grad school I’ve become like a T.A., and R.A., and stuff, and those were things I never thought I would be able to do, to teach people, or talk in front of people as much as I do, so that’s a big change in my identity… so just realizing I can do those things I think that used to terrify me.

(Interview #3, p. 4)

Likewise, Elizabeth and Alice have also experienced this notion of an ‘impostor syndrome.’ Alice, for instance, indicated that it has repeated multiple times over the course of her life, including at the time of entry into graduate school, and at the time of entry into the teaching profession. She noted that at both junctures she moved through feelings of doubt and questioning, to determination and confidence.

*Critical incidents in language centered programs.* Alice and Cordelia each
participated in a unique language centred educational program in university, which turned out to be a critical incident in their lives. This experience for Alice was a year long exchange program studying in Europe. There she was immersed in a different language and culture. She mentioned that it was her first time away from her family, and initially she felt a range of emotions including fear and uncertainty. She talked about this exchange on many different occasions, and indicated that it was one of the most significant experiences in her life. She articulated that she has realized how much it is linked to her identity and how it has changed her in positive ways, as she was able to become more independent, and become more in tune with her cultural identity. Alice said that she divides her existence into the “two major periods in my life” (Interview #3, p. 1) which included the “pre” educational excursion period and the “post” educational excursion period.

Cordelia came from a diverse background, one of her parents being of First Nations decent, the other being of French Canadian decent. She explained that growing up, she often felt as though she did not belong in either sphere. She experienced rejection as each group perceived her to be an outsider. She was seen as “too White” for the First Nations community, “too Indian” for the White community. Her strong self-confidence enabled her to carry on regardless of others’ opinions of her. She remembers stating to others, “If you have a problem with me, that’s not a reflection on me, that’s a reflection on you. You’re allowing yourself to feel that way” (Interview #1, p. 8). She was cognizant that other people had their own insecurities, and challenges embracing differences. She knew that having a positive attitude and staying true to herself was the best strategy.
Cordelia's critical incident happened years later, in an intensive immersion program that she was taking. She talks about this incident:

Um...for me, I can say that I've had an epiphany once in my life, where everything became completely clear. And I never was...I never felt so peaceful, and so relaxed and so...Oh! Like it makes sense! And that came about with the intersecting identities, figuring out how to put it all together. (Interview #1, p. 8)

The incident was a moment in her language class where she derived new understanding. It was an instance of clarity, where she was able to achieve a state of peace, a realization of how all of her different roles and identities were interconnected, which validated who she was, how she came to be that way, and, ultimately, revealed the path that she is currently traveling on in an attempt to preserve the Mohawk language.

Everything that I had always wondered about myself, started to make sense, the way I thought, the way I felt about different things, the way I saw the world....This is why I'm me, and this is the way that I think and this is how it's supposed to happen. And so it changed my whole life, because I did feel at peace and I felt like I had some sort of direction and purpose when I started to learn the language and I caught onto the language fast, and I...you know I had this...I...I wanted to learn and I had felt like I had to learn and I had to learn because it was important to my community for me to learn and for me to go to school and that's why I was doing what I was doing. So at that point in time, it was like this lightbulb went on. And so those identities intersected and as a result, like people have said, you're an entirely different person! And I said yah! I am! Because of that! Because of that one experience, but I had an experience that made your
whole world make sense. Not everybody gets to have that! Not everybody gets to have that! (Interview #1, p. 9)

Her epiphany enabled her to engage in self-reflection, resolve some of the challenging early experiences of not fitting in, and go through a powerful self-discovery. Cordelia’s critical incident not only revealed her purpose, giving her drive and determination to preserve the language, it helped her see her own growth and potential to learn the language quickly, and it was also recognized to transform her in many ways.

**Critical incidents related to loss.** The loss of a family member, significant other, or separation from an individual can be a difficult experience to go through. Oftentimes, it may involve the demise of one or more identities. Two participants recognized the experience of losing a spouse as a significant life event. One of these participants also spoke of the divorce of her parents at an early age as impacting upon her identity development. In their own ways, these individuals experienced an identity loss.

Elizabeth indicated that the divorce of her parents at a young age impacted her at home and at school in negative ways. She states, “...in one sense, it definitely fractured me...” (Interview #2, p. 6). She realized how this critical incident transformed her, in a sense, robbing her of innocence and leading to other challenges. Not only was she treated poorly at school because of the divorce, but from that point on, she began to have a rocky relationship with her mother, which disintegrated over the years. Elizabeth indicated that in her later years, they went a long time without speaking to one another. She has come to use this experience as a teaching tool for herself, in an attempt to break the cycle, and ensure that she creates a strong relationship between herself and her children. Out of this situation, she discovered what she did not want to do or be. She changed her attitude and
mindset to ensure that the past would not be repeated in her own mothering approaches. It also enabled her to appreciate her strengths and skills that she had acquired from her mother. "Um…although my mother was very hard on me, I realized that my mother gave me huge balls. And that’s not a very polite way of saying it, but I am one gutsy, ballsy woman" (Interview #2, p. 4). She sees her own determination, and draws upon it when placed in difficult situations to help her through them. One such circumstance (and a second critical incident in her life) was the death of her husband. At that time, her family life was in a state of chaos. She explained that her children did not deal well with their loss. "Watching my daughter destroyed was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do" (Interview #2, p. 4). Not only was her family life in upheaval, but she was in a state of financial instability. She recalls, “…my husband left me with debts that were unimaginable!” (Interview #2, p. 4). She is still battling to repay these debts today. These events taught her that she was capable of starting anew; cognizant of the past, but not letting it dictate her future.

Kathryn also experienced the loss of a spouse, and recognized this as a critical incident in her life. “My first husband died and I think that impacts my…who I am and the way that I approach life” (Interview #1, p. 1). The experience changed her. She reordered her priorities, identifying the nurturing of human relationships as critical to one’s existence. She stated, “Probably the biggest thing that affected me is um with my first husband dying, and just realizing that uh it’s really important to connect with people, ‘cause you just never know when it will be their last” (Interview #1, p. 5). Both Elizabeth and Kathryn talked about the growth that they have experienced in their spiritual lives, which has been very powerful. Kathryn comments, “…I used to be a very negative
person...a lot of that has changed...Oh it was definitely a spiritual change... I worked very hard on it for years and years and years” (Interview #2, p. 14). From both of these experiences of loss, has come the recognition of newfound growth and potential, and acknowledgement of personal transformation.

A critical incident of immigration. The final critical incident involved Maria’s immigration to Canada. The journey meant leaving behind loved ones and starting over in a foreign place. One of the ways she coped with this adjustment was to immerse herself in learning. Her strategy was one not of complete assimilation, but one of accommodation, that respected her previous knowledge and skills, as she added to them. She indicated that immigration impacted some of her decisions, such as delaying to have another child in order to first obtain financial stability. She acknowledged that building a “new life” had its opportunities and its challenges, but accredits her successful experience to perseverance, a positive outlook, and the establishment of a new social network of support. After trying numerous jobs, the immigration experience helped her rediscover her true passion for teaching. Even though her teaching certificate from her home country was not valid in Ontario, this did not prevent her from teaching. She returned back to school, worked hard, and became an Ontario certified teacher. Maria commented that many relationships can disintegrate after immigration; however, her relationship with her husband grew stronger. Her past and present life have merged, both guided by a common purpose of teaching, learning, and contributing to society. It is clear that Maria recognized her potential to overcome the geographical and other obstacles in her way and to emerge with strength, a positive attitude, and confidence in her ability to adjust to change.
Motivation for Pursuing a Graduate Degree

Participants' motivations for pursuing a graduate degree can be divided into three categories: personal reasons (for myself), external reasons (for others), and a combination of the two (for both myself and others at the same time). Each individual had multiple motives for continuing their education. In total, these students identified 19 different motivations that factored into their decision to attend graduate school.

Personal reasons. The first nine motives were highly personal and tied to the "self." Both Alice and Kathryn talked about not wanting to be idle, and desiring to live an active life. They saw education as a way to keep active. Both Mia and Maria mentioned that the M.Ed. allowed them an opportunity to explore their interests. These two participants also declared that flexibility was important to them. Mia recognized flexibility within the degree to pursue diverse topics of study. Maria, on the other hand, recognized flexibility within the Integrated Studies program stream, emphasizing that she could take courses from across the other streams. She stated that this provided her with the flexibility she desired; flexibility that was missing from additional qualification courses. She also highlighted another reason, specific to the institution she was studying at, which included being able to preserve her multiple roles and identities because of the size of the institution, the friendliness of the people there, and its personal or human approach. In addition, Maria was adamant that she was pursuing this degree for personal fulfillment rather than career advancement or monetary gain. She expressed a deep satisfaction with her present role in the classroom:

...most of the people I knew who would take graduate studies, especially working already as teachers in a school, their major reason for taking graduate studies is to
become vice principals. So for me, it was like totally like a contradiction to what I really wanted to do in my life because I love being a teacher and why would I take courses which would move me to a totally different area of work? (Interview #1, p. 3)

Her intentions are to remain on the front lines. She sees her career aspiration as already achieved. She also mentioned that her affective domain played a role in her decision making. She noted it is about doing “what makes me feel good” (Interview #2, p. 8). Her other motives included a desire to increase her knowledge base in certain areas (i.e., “The Canadian Education System” and “politics in education”) and to facilitate her continued open-mindedness. She recognized graduate education as an opportunity to assist her in appreciating different perspectives and, ultimately, helping her to be receptive towards changes that are continually occurring. Mia explained that pursuing a Masters degree has been a personal desire of hers for quite some time.

External reasons. Participants were motivated to pursue their degrees for others, and identified six specific motives that fit into this category. Both Maria and Cordelia wanted to improve their teaching effectiveness. Cordelia sought out ways to use new knowledge and insights for the benefit of others. She also mentioned her desire to improve the delivery of a specific program that she had been working on. Another motivation was her ongoing quest to find ways for all students to experience success. Cordelia also articulated her motivation to continue learning as much as she could, ultimately for language preservation and for her community. Alice, on the other hand, described being motivated by a desire to please her parents.

Combined reasons. Participants identified four different motivations that were an
amalgamation of personal and external reasons. Mia described her ongoing interest in studying; yet, she articulated that it was the support and active encouragement she received from her husband that ultimately helped her make the decision to apply. Alice indicated that she was motivated to “prove to myself, but also prove to others” (Interview #2, p. 19) that she had the ability to successfully pursue a graduate degree. Elizabeth’s motivations appeared similar, both personal (to show herself what she was capable of) and professional as required by one of her employers. Kathryn spoke of her own desire to keep up with her parents (both of whom had graduate degrees). She said that her desire to match her family’s achievements influenced her decision to apply to graduate school. Finally, Alice discussed the external environment and spoke of the challenges in finding full-time employment as a teacher at the time that she graduated. She thought that this degree would enhance her own learning, while also likely giving her additional time to find a job.

Love, Pleasure, Beauty, Hobby, Addiction: Academe as Me

Mia and Kathryn used the word “love” to describe the way that they felt about thinking and education. Kathryn stated, “I feel passionate about my learning” (Interview #2, p. 6). The notion of thinking and learning as pleasurable was also expressed by Maria. Similarly, Kathryn indicated, “I did include enjoys beauty because I do find that...that there is something beautiful about getting pieces to fit together” (Interview #2, p. 6). She recognized feeling great pleasure when clarity is derived, when the pieces of one’s learning become whole, and when sense-making is achieved. She linked this type of experience to Mihály Csíkszentmihályi’s flow state which is described as “enjoyed absorption” in something (Namakura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 87). Namakura and
Csikszentmihalyi articulate:

The flow state has the following characteristics: intense and focused concentration on the here and now; a loss of self-consciousness as action and awareness merge; a sense that one will be able to handle the situation because one knows how to respond to whatever will happen next; a sense that time has passed more quickly or slowly than normal; and an experience of the activity as rewarding in and of itself, regardless of the outcome. (pp. 88-89)

Kathryn noted that there is joy in thinking and discovering interconnections. She can be immersed in this state and forget about the world around her. She, like others, recognizes it as a satisfying endeavour. The flow experience was also shared by Maria, who talked about feeling “happy,” “energized,” and a profound sense of “enjoyment” when she is able to make connections (Interview #1, p. 4; Interview #2, pp. 14-15). Mia and Cordelia expressed that learning is their hobby, whether it is general learning as mentioned by Mia, or specific language learning, as mentioned by Cordelia. Learning is something that they are always interested in doing. For Mia and Kathryn, it has become an “addiction.” An addict is “a person who has given himself [or herself] up to a habit or obsession” (Avis et al., 1983, pp. 13-14). Mia articulated, “...I’m addicted to school!” (Interview #1, p. 1). Kathryn conveyed an addiction to her subject specialization, expressing, “That’s a sickness! It’s my sickness!...” (Interview #1, pp. 4-5). The power of this word “addiction” shows the magnitude of their compulsion with education, a driving need in their lives to learn and to know more. In a slightly different context, Alice talked about the consuming quality of schooling, and how it has been a part of her life ever since she could remember. Interestingly, two participants explained how academe was a part of
them, and allowed them the space to have intellectual pursuits for themselves. Maria spoke of the degree as a supportive base that provides her with opportunities for self-awareness.

So I think my Masters of Education strongly grounded my identity as a student. It’s definitely grounded in my...in my social, in my core, in my family. It’s definitely strongly grounded the tendency to give me a perspective to understand my identity.... (Interview #2, p. 19)

She also recognized her graduate education as helping her to explore issues of identity and belonging, enabling her to question national and global identities and perspectives, and to locate her position within them.

The university gave Mia a chance to be herself, to leave her family-related roles and obligations at home, and to forge an academic-oriented identity. She explained, “…I guess you know, when I’m here [at the university], I’m not Bonny’s (pseudonym) mum, I’m Mia” (Interview #1, p. 4). For her, the institution was, in part, a refuge or safe haven, providing her with a partial escape from a busy life and distractions at home. More importantly, it afforded her an opportunity to be validated and acknowledged on her own merits and for people to see her as herself, rather than associated with one of the many other roles that she takes on.

The Multidimensionality of Self as a Student and Learner

Cordelia identified student-related roles as multidimensional. Two of the participants saw their student roles as intersecting with other roles in their lives. For instance, Kathryn pointed to the overlapping nature of her work roles and her student roles, while Cordelia identified her student role and community role as inseparable. For
these two women, the intersection of roles contributed to tightly woven interconnections, and blurred boundaries. Participants listed a host of student-related roles, which have been classified into eight categories including: learner roles, receptive roles, thinker roles, leadership roles, assistive roles, entertainer roles, consumer roles, and change-related roles. Three of the participants indicated that one of the roles that they associate with being a student is the role of a learner. For these individuals, the role of learner takes on numerous forms in their own lives including: life-long learner, language learner, graduate student learner, undergraduate student learner, honest learner, and thesis advisee (or novice learner). Also linked with being a student is the receptive role associated with being an active listener, which was mentioned as an important role by one of the participants. Two of the women indicated the role of the thinker as being connected to their own roles as students. To Kathryn, this role of thinker meant being a “critical consumer.” She explained it in the following way:

…I think we have sometimes a role as a critical consumer and that…that’s probably a role that I’ve really enjoyed, that’s kind of different about I think studying at the graduate level, is just that you be critical, and I don’t necessarily mean in the sense of criticism, but that you…you know, [to] be a thinker is valued, that’s really…that’s really nice. I really enjoy that. (Interview #1, p. 12)

To be a critical thinker is important, especially when presented with many different sources of information and perspectives. Students must evaluate what they read, making judgements about it.

Three of the participants understood that at times, being a student requires them to take on leadership roles. Two of the participants indicated that as students, they lead by
being presenters (either at conferences or within their courses). Other leadership roles mentioned included becoming a published author, serving as an instructor, and developing as a researcher. In addition to leadership roles, there are also assistive roles that can be affiliated with being a student. Three of the participants talked about the assistive roles that they take on, including that of teaching assistant, helper, resource person, advocate, volunteer, and preparer/organizer. Mia spoke of her recent role as a teaching assistant and striving to facilitate students’ learning. Cordelia spoke of her role as a helper within the community, and her assistance in preserving the Mohawk language. She also recognized that when she is in the role of the student, she is simultaneously a resource for her peers and an advocate for her people and for issues of importance to them. Recently, Alice has come to play the role of volunteer, offering ideas, information, and coming to the assistance of her peers within the adult-learning environment. Mia described her tedious behind-the-scenes role as a preparer and organizer who spends hours getting ready for presentations, completing assignments, and reading material.

Both Elizabeth and Maria spoke of the role of entertainer associated with being a student in the classroom. For them it meant being a comedian, an entertainer, engaging peoples’ attention and interest, or making them laugh. Interestingly, Kathryn indicated that at times, she is conscious of her role as a customer or consumer, who pays money for the courses she takes and, in turn, has certain expectations about the quality of the service that she is provided with. Lastly, two participants spoke of change-related roles that they have witnessed either among themselves as students, or among other students that they know. For instance, both Alice and Elizabeth spoke of the transformative role of the student, who can look back over a period of time and recognize his or her “progress” and
growth. Elizabeth identified a second change-related role often linked to students, which involves “transitioning to become a graduate” (Elizabeth, Interview #1, p. 7). This category of roles also illustrates that being a student involves positive change and the negotiation of numerous roles in action. The participants helped to shed light on the complexity of being a student as understood from their own lived experiences.

Thinking and its Binary Oppositions

Kathryn recognized thinking as both a de-stressor and a stressor. She articulated that it can be a point of tension and a point of relaxation, having the potential to bring out these opposite feelings. On one hand, she indicated that it is pleasurable to be immersed in thought or the study of a topic; however, being excessively engrossed in thinking can leave you tense. Likewise, Alice explains that her mind is continuously at work. The more education she accrues, the more diverse her experiences become, and the more perspectives she is exposed to, ultimately, the more complex her thinking becomes, which leads to a complex self. Alice identifies thinking as both a conscious and unconscious process. She says that at times, “…you can choose to think and reflect on something…” (Interview #2, p. 16), where there is a deliberate intent to contemplate. While on other occasions, “It just happens!” (Interview #2, p. 16). Here it is more of an involuntary action or reaction.

Recognizing Diverse Needs Across Settings

The six participants came to recognize an array of needs as fundamental to their personal, professional, and academic lives. Some of these needs crossed contexts.

Needs that crossed contexts. The first set of needs that will be explored include the overarching individual or human needs that participants acknowledged across
multiple spheres. Together they represented a cross section of needs as conceptualized by Maslow (1954) in his famous *Hierarchy of Needs*, including: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization (pp. 80-92), as well as a host of others. Whether she is at work, at school, or at home, Kathryn expressed the need for a safe learning environment. Maria indicated the need for survival, including the development of skills and strategies that would enable her to be independent and exist on her own if necessary. Alice, Cordelia, and Elizabeth expressed the need for human connection. This includes the ability to communicate with others, have social interaction, as well as derive a sense of community and belonging. Elizabeth spoke about the necessity to combat loneliness and to have a strong social network of important people in her life. She indicated that this meant ensuring that she put these people first, and made the building and maintaining of relationships with them a key priority. This included having a strong relationship with her grown children.

A major need across five of the participants’ lives included the need for support, which can take on numerous forms. Cordelia indicated the importance of having parental and community support. Maria emphasized the necessity to have friends and loved ones who understand, support you unconditionally, and care about you enough to point out when you are neglecting your own needs. Alice also stressed that support comes from people who challenge you. Mia and Alice highlighted mentorship as being important in the learning environment. Elizabeth mentioned the need for guidance and help from others throughout one’s lifetime. Cordelia also indicated the necessity to have support from others who have shared common experiences, articulating that these people serve as an outlet for you to talk to.
Maria indicated that from a global perspective, she needs “to be treated equally” (Interview #3, p. 12). She shared examples over the course of her life when this need has not always been met, such as instances when she has experienced discrimination. Closely aligned with equality, was the need for respect, which Kathryn and Maria spoke of. Kathryn articulated the need to be respected crossed contexts:

I need to feel respected. Um…and I think that that fits well too, and it…it doesn’t mean like you have to respect me because I am so smart, but you just need to respect me; that I am, that I have the right to be here, and the right to think, and the right to exist here (laughs). I have the right to exist in this spot. (Interview #4, p. 22)

Maria felt that the need to be respected within her professional life was not being fulfilled. She articulated her frustration about others’ perceptions, who deem her role within the school to be less significant than theirs. Likewise, there exists the need for mutual understanding, which Maria recognized as being fundamental, and a need for voice, so that others listen.

Most of the participants spoke in direct and indirect ways about their need for financial stability. Increased finances were required to help participants with the high cost of living. Mia mentioned being dependent on her job for the income it provided her and her family. Being dependent in this way was a source of frustration for her. Elizabeth noted the need to be careful with her money and to plan for her future (i.e., retirement). Another need expressed by Maria and Cordelia was to feel productive and to contribute to society. This gave them a sense of direction and purpose in their lives.

All of the participants shared the need for time, which crossed contexts. It was
clear that these women led very busy lives, and they felt like they could always use more
time in the day to accomplish everything that was important to them. Two participants
spoke of needing time for writing (Maria and Mia); while two others indicated that they
needed time for thinking (Cordelia and Alice). Maria also referred to the importance of
the passage of time as a necessary process in solidifying ideas, and having new
revelations. Maria said that she needed time to visit with friends. Three participants
(Kathryn, Elizabeth, and Alice) highlighted the need to take time off from other roles
when pressing matters, such as health issues or family emergencies, arise. Cordelia
indicated that she needed to “find the time to finish” her project and complete this degree
(Interview #3, p. 20). Alice indicated that time was an ongoing issue, as she needed to
tavel between places, be with her family, and lead a balanced life. The need for
downtime was also mentioned by four participants (Cordelia, Maria, Elizabeth, and
Kathryn). Maria and Cordelia identified personal or alone time as fundamental to them.
Kathryn expressed the need for breaks, especially with respect to studying, learning, and
marking. Cordelia and Elizabeth needed to escape at times from their chaotic lives.
Cordelia talks more about this particular need:

    Um, sometimes I have a great need to like escape, like do no work; have no
telephone like I would love to go into the bush for like ten days, by myself, well
maybe not by myself, but with someone who would like enjoy it as much as I
would, because there is just so much stuff that is just coming at me that
sometimes I feel like I just have to get away from this. (Interview #3, p. 16)

Similar to downtime, two women spoke of their need for outlets to release their stress.
For Cordelia, this meant physical activity, or being outdoors with nature. For Kathryn,
this meant mental relaxation, doing something that required little thought. She felt that this was helpful in improving her subsequent level of performance, when she returned to the task at hand. The need for rest or sleep was mentioned by two participants as fundamental to their state of mind, their energy levels, and their overall functioning (Mia and Maria). 

Kathryn was adamant about the need to undergo personal transformations in outlooks and attitudes from time to time. In this respect, she highlighted the need for grace, from herself and from others. 

I need, and by grace I mean I need the fresh start that grace affords me, and I think that...I think that we all need that opportunity to not be boxed in by whomever we’ve been in the past, you know, when we talk about change, personal change, you need to have...somebody needs to graciously welcome you in your changed or changing state...and I think that’s really...I think that’s really important. (Interview #4, p. 22) 

Embracing change as a part of the learning process was important to Kathryn. Four participants also recognized the necessity to be open-minded to ongoing learning. With this, Maria expressed freedom as essential, allowing her to keep an open mind to the possibilities, to choose topics of interest to her, and to be flexible in her thinking and in her actions. Cordelia felt that prior experiences lay the foundation for present learning. Mia expressed that it is fundamental to learn from negative experiences, and recognize them as teaching tools and character builders. Kathryn articulated the need for openness to consider different perspectives and accommodate new understandings. She said,
I need to feel comfortable enough that, it’s okay when I reframe, when I say, okay, oh you know I’ve always thought of it that way, but you know, that’s a really interesting way of looking at it. Or I make a new connection that might send everything else moving in a different direction.... (Interview #4, p. 23)

The desire to live a spiritual and moral life was also necessary for Kathryn and for Elizabeth. Elizabeth also mentioned the need to be aware of her important role as a teacher and the “moral and ethical” obligations involved in this occupation.

*Professional needs.* As working people with careers, these women were conscious of their professional needs. The need for boundaries was mentioned by three of the participants. For Maria, this included maintaining professionalism and distancing herself from co-workers and from discussions surrounding her personal life. For Elizabeth, this meant maintaining boundaries with students, so as not to be perceived as a “buddy” or “friend.” For Kathryn, the need for boundaries meant the desire to establish more definitive distinctions between work and school. A second professional need mentioned by two participants was for adaptability or flexibility both from oneself and from others. While Alice said that as a teacher, she needs to be adaptable to consider what works best for her students, Mia relied on the flexibility of people like her coworkers, who would switch shifts with her and, in this way, help her to manage some of her other responsibilities. A third professional need underscored by Alice, was to concretize her own beliefs and philosophies about education, so that she would be able to articulate them clearly to others. She also required ongoing feedback from others as a means of validating her ideas and her progress.

*Academic needs.* These individuals conveyed a host of academic needs as learners
and as graduate students. Four of them expressed the need for space. This meant an area to study and to do work. Kathryn noted it was important that this space be comfortable and away from traffic. Alice needed it to be a quiet environment. Both Alice and Cordelia mentioned the need for physical as well as mental space, to be able to think and reflect. Mia expressed the need for mental stimulation as vital. Cordelia indicated that the need to pose questions and to be able to contemplate was most significant for her as a learner. Alice highlighted the need to find relevance among her courses. Both she and Kathryn expressed the need to be authentic, to adapt and modify ideas and strategies, and to fit their own styles. Similarly, meaning-making and the making of connections were necessary to Cordelia and Kathryn. The need to have a voice was critical to Cordelia. She expressed that in the role of the learner, it is paramount for her to be able to articulate her positions, experiences, and knowledge, especially related to unique topics, which other educators might have limited background knowledge of. Alice identified choice in learning as essential, especially when working on projects or assignments. Two participants spoke about their need to either be pushed by others, or to push themselves. Alice spoke of her need to be encouraged and prompted by others, which often acts as a catalyst propelling her to work hard. Maria, on the other hand, spoke of this encouragement and drive as coming from within, as she pushes herself to venture outside of her comfort zone, and prove to herself her capabilities. Kathryn stated that she needs to be future oriented, to think ahead and to contemplate her next intellectual pursuit. Mia was adamant about her need to make progress, to feel like she is moving forward with positive momentum.

At times, Kathryn recognized that as a learner, there are instances when she needs
to follow the expectations and directions of others. Another learning related need was for opportunities to exchange information including knowledge and resources. Because of Cordelia’s very specific and underresearched interests, she expressed the challenge in meeting this need, and in finding all of the resources and information that she desires to help inform her learning. The final learning need mentioned by Kathryn was the need for accountability to oneself and others. She indicated that at the graduate level, a person must take ownership of his or her learning, and be accountable not only to oneself, but to the institution for his or her progress. Barriers or challenges were created when participants’ needs went unfulfilled. At other times, recognition and verbalization of their needs allowed participants to engage in the process of self-awareness. Ultimately, when their needs were satisfied, these women felt supported and able to move forward in their identity and role negotiations.

Participants’ Perceptions: Comparing the Unique Needs of Various Groups of Learners

The participants also offered their perceptions of the differences in needs between multiple groups of learners including: part-time and full-time students, undergraduate and graduate students, as well as graduate and postgraduate students. Although there was a feeling that some of their needs were ultimately similar, they recognized a few differences between them. For instance, three of the participants believed that part-time students have many demands in other spheres of their lives, and focus more time negotiating the home and work domains than full-time students might. As such, Maria expressed the need for flexibility within graduate programs. Cordelia identified different needs associated with time constraints. She believed that since full-time students have less time to complete their degree, they have to be more expeditious to manage their
school work efficiently. Kathryn noted that part-time students may be able to better have their needs for relevant and interesting courses met, since their coursework phase spans over a longer duration of time. She saw this as an advantage of part-time studies.

Again, the participants felt that there are likely to be some shared needs between undergraduate and graduate students; however, they indicated that there are differences in needs as well. Three of the participants commented on the independent nature of graduate studies, and felt that students at this level would need more time for independent thinking and creativity; whereas, they perceived undergraduate studies to be more focused on memorization and regurgitation. One participant mentioned that graduate students were older, may have been out of school for multiple years, and likely juggling more roles than undergraduate students.

Participants drew on the experiences of those they knew who had completed postgraduate studies, when contemplating the needs of students at this level in relation to the needs of students at the graduate level. Again, there was the perception that some of the needs would be very similar, perhaps just more intense. Here, Cordelia described the parallels between graduate and postgraduate studies.

...I think they are pretty close, you know what I mean. It’s just a longer process. It’s more work, but it’s more of the same work, you know. Certainly more reading, and there certainly is more freedom to take it where you want to take it, and this is what I’m finding with wanting to start my PhD and investigating it, is that the Masters degree is just like training you for the post graduate stuff. Like, here’s the process, and here is the research method stuff, and you know, this is the steps you need to do to get through it, so by the time you get there, you already
know how to do it and they don’t waste time teaching you that. They like dive right in. So I think that you know, essentially the needs are the same. (Interview #3, pp. 18-19)

Mia believed that an amplified level of support is required when doing a PhD because of the workload, and Alice has heard that it is more difficult to juggle teaching and research at this level. Acknowledging one’s needs is the first step. Next, one is able to set achievable objectives for themselves, and work towards realizing them.

*The Importance of Goal Setting: Identifying Short-term and Long-term Objectives*

Three of the participants recognized individuals as being in control of their goals, which they perceived as flexible and revisable. For instance, Cordelia stated:

...what I decide to do that day, you know, and any long term plans or goals that I have, you know...I can make them, then it’s my decision whether to carry them out or not...and how I do it. Um...I think we definitely have control over that...”

(Interview #3, pp. 11-12)

Similarly, Maria expressed that her own goals allow her to push herself and to reach new limits. Mia felt that a measure of success is determined by one’s ability to achieve his or her goals. The six participants candidly shared their many ambitions, which were classified into: short-term objectives, long-term objectives, and life-time objectives that related to their “personal visions” that they have for themselves.

*Short-term objectives.* Participants perceived short-term goals to be ones that could be realistically achieved in the not too distant future. On the mind of one of the participants was the goal of completing the course that she was taking and then subsequently completing a thesis. Four participants expressed their present objective as
graduating and obtaining a Master’s degree. Alice explained that goal setting in one role or dimension of life may involve making sacrifices in other roles or spheres. She explained how her pressing goal of making the deadline for graduation meant temporarily postponing an active job hunt. Elizabeth articulated one of her short term goals as follows, “to live one day at a time the best I can, grateful for what I have, and not being driven by fear of ageing or what I might not have in the future” (Interview #5, p. 6). She also desired to contribute to the lives of others in constructive ways. In addition to immediate goals, participants also held numerous long-term goals for themselves.

Long-term objectives. The participants identified a series of long-term objectives that were grouped into three areas including: learning and education, professional accomplishments and opportunities, and meeting one’s holistic needs. Learning and education-related goals were prominent on the mind of these graduate students. Three of them spoke about their goals to be life-long learners, desiring to be continuously learning over the course of their lives. Four students mentioned that they were considering aspirations of pursuing doctoral studies. Three of them indicated that engaging in PhD studies were definite objectives, while for the fourth participant, future doctoral studies were in the realm of possibilities. Alice had ambitions of learning an additional language. Kathryn spoke of trying to find creative ways to meet her academic objectives, such as looking for intersections between her courses, readings, and topics of study.

Four of the participants spoke of their long-term professionally oriented goals. Three identified potential career transitions that they aspired to make in the future. Mia articulated a strong interest in teaching at an institution of higher education. Alice, on the other hand, talked about becoming a subject specialist or consultant. Kathryn indicated
that she does not want to be closed minded about any opportunities that might come her way. Exploring careers in the fields of social work, writing, or administration are all viable possibilities. Elizabeth wanted to continue lecturing at the university for as long as she could. She also desired to continue making a difference in the field of her subject specialization. Other long-term professional objectives held by the participants included: getting published, expanding upon professional qualifications, and participating in a teacher exchange program.

The remainder of their goals could best be described as needs-oriented objectives which focused on holistic development. Two of the six participants listed needs that fell into this category. Kathryn articulated a series of very specific goals for herself, in each of her different roles. These goals related to her spiritual growth and fulfillment, cognitive development, affective expression, her need for human interaction and dependency, and the desire for balance in her life. Kathryn was conscious of her own needs, as well as the needs of others who were close to her, and considered them when making decisions. Finally, nurturing positive human relationships was a similar goal for Alice who listed her desire to potentially get married and have a family one day.

*Life-time objectives or visions.* Participants also had life-time objectives which corresponded to their "personal visions," the directions they saw their lives heading in, as well as the hopes and dreams that they held for themselves. A genuine sentiment shared by the participants was their desire to "make a difference" in the lives of others. This was a common personal vision that they all aspired to achieve. For instance, Kathryn had very strong convictions to always keep children at the forefront of her agenda.

Well, whatever I do, I want it to be, definitely want kids to be at the center...
guess the thing that I love the most about my job, and what I do, and of course my Masters will just, feed my job, is, I love it that I really can make a difference, and so whatever I do, it will make a difference.... (Interview #4, p. 39)

Likewise, Elizabeth strives to make a difference in the lives of her students. She desires to convey a passion and excitement for the subject that she teaches which inspires them tremendously. She wants to continue being productive, giving, outgoing and involved in many things. Cordelia wanted to make a difference in her language community and help preserve the Mohawk language.

Mia's personal vision for herself finds her in a career that offers her flexibility, fulfillment, stability, and an opportunity to help others. It is fascinating that their personal visions coincided, and that “making a difference” was a way to bring meaning to their lives and to make positive contributions in the lives of others. For some of these women, the goal of becoming an educator was one that they held on to early in their life. For others, this goal was not revealed until much later.

_Pathways into the Teaching Profession_

The five certified teachers appeared to follow one of two pathways into the teaching profession. Two of the five noted straightforward pathways; entering into teaching directly out of university or teacher's college, without deviating, and in the classroom is where they have remained. The other three have had more complex pathways that ultimately resulted in the pursuit of teaching. Both Maria and Kathryn identified themselves as a “Jack-of-all-Trades.” They spoke about the diverse careers that they have held, from working in retail, to editing, to banking, to video and film production, and so on. They have had rich experiences and backgrounds, they are flexible
and versatile, and are willing to approach teaching and learning in unconventional ways. This pathway that has involved exploration ultimately led three of them to a common realization; it reconfirmed their innate desire to teach. Kathryn spoke of her initial resistance at the thought of teaching, since many of her family members were in the profession. In a sense, she rebelled from entering into the family business, not wanting to follow in their footsteps. She explains, “I came from a big long line of teachers and I thought you know, there’s gotta be more to life than just being a teacher. And so I discovered of course that there actually isn’t....” (Interview #1, p. 2). She gave up resisting it and found herself pursuing something that she was very passionate about. Like Kathryn, Cordelia also questioned whether this was the right career path for her. She, too, had experimented with other jobs, but then, ultimately, came back to teaching; this time with confidence that she was making the right decision. Finally, Maria was a teacher back in her home country and loved it. After immigrating to Canada, she held diverse positions, but decided that teaching was her love, so she made the sacrifice of going back to school to obtain a Canadian teaching certificate, and today finds herself back in the classroom. Whether they originally resisted teaching, explored other options, or moved to a new country, the final outcome remained the same, each of these women returned to the profession, having confirmed for themselves that this is where they belonged.

Gender Issues

Engaged in conversation, each participant explored her understanding of gender issues, and perceptions of the ways that gender impacts her daily personal, professional, and academic life.
Gender Differences as Perceived By the Participants

The participants perceived there to be some notable differences in response styles, teaching styles (or professional interactions), and needs between men and women. While some of these views may confirm societal gender-related stereotypes, they do represent the views of these participants. For instance, Cordelia states “...you know, women are just different creatures. Like we think about things, and we feel things more and like...men tend to be more like black and white and rational...” (Interview #3, p. 7). She contrasted her own highly emotional response state, especially in difficult familial times, as compared with her boyfriend’s calm demeanour.

Next, Mia outlined her belief regarding different gendered ways of teaching, juxtaposing the two approaches as dictating versus collaborating. The first approach more closely resembles the “sage on the stage” metaphor, with students sitting and listening. The second approach aligns with the “guide on the side” metaphor, drawing on a cooperative, facilitative style of interaction. Mia also believed that her husband had a need to be perceived as the family’s “breadwinner” and that he viewed himself as fulfilling this role, although she felt that this might not be a completely accurate self-image. She thought that she might even contribute more financially, however, through diverse sources of smaller incomes combined, in comparison to his single larger source of income.

Not only is it useful to be aware of gender differences, but it is also important to be cognizant of how gender impacts other facets of life including one’s thinking and behaviour, as Kathryn discovered first hand. She spoke of the bidirectional relationship that exists between gender and her thinking patterns. “…being a woman, for example, I
think influences the way I am as a learner, but also being a learner influences who I am as a woman…” (Interview #2, p. 2).

Maria talked about her high level of emotional intelligence, attending to peoples’ feelings, and taking on the perspectives of others. While this sensitivity may help her as a teacher, or as a mother, she also expressed the toll that it can have including: suffering emotional exhaustion, getting run down, weakening her immune system, and even losing touch with her own feelings. Maria articulated how she expends energy that is needed for her own wellbeing, not always taking proper care of herself. Kathryn and Maria described the emotional connection or response that is tied to each role and decision that they make. Both the cognitive and affective domains worked in tandem throughout their role negotiations. Kathryn provided an example of how she operates in her professional role, demonstrating emotional openness and passion, which she hopes will stimulate positive reactions from others. “…I just need to bare all, and hope for the best and while you know what, you know what winds up happening, is that some people respond to it, and that’s…that is so gratifying….” (Interview #3, p. 19). Even if everyone does not respond favourably, knowing that she has made a positive impact on at least a few people gives her the satisfaction she needs, to continue being forthcoming, emotionally open, and enthusiastic. Participants also indicated that women have different needs.

Being Female: Participants Identify their Current Gender-Related Needs

Alice conceptualized men and women to have similar needs. The other participants, however, identified some of their own needs that they perceived as largely associated with being female. Most of these gender related desires would fall under Maslow’s (1954) categories of: Belongingness and Love, as well as Esteem Needs (pp.
89-91). Kathryn indicated that as a woman, she needed both love and respect. She saw love and respect as going hand in hand:

...I don’t see those as different and actually, I’ve read that...like men need to be respected, women need to be loved. And I’m about to read another book, it’s sort of the same point of view. I don’t see them as...I see them as horrendously overlapping, you know, you can’t...I don’t know that you really can love; I couldn’t feel loved, if I feel disrespected. (Interview #4, p. 23)

This need was important not only within Kathryn’s home life, but also within her spiritual life as well. Maria expressed that her family base gives her stability and security. She noted the need for validation from her family, acknowledgement of her efforts within the home. “I...I really am recognized as a mother and being loved and I’m giving one hundred percent of me as a mother and as a wife and being recognized from my husband that I am dedicated...” (Maria, Interview #1, p. 19). She explained how she needs this support and validation, without it, her other identities and roles would suffer.

Cordelia was adamant that as a female she needed “a sense of belonging and community” (Interview #3, p. 20). She linked this need to both her cultural background and heritage, as well as her gender, indicating that “Haudenosaunee women are always together” (p. 20) and that their society follows a “matrilineal” system of organization (p. 20). “Basically decisions are made by the women, and the women work together to basically hold things together” (Cordelia, Interview #2, p. 2).

Maria conveyed a strong need to “be, a good mother and wife” (Interview #3, p. 11). She strived to do her best and to give of herself to others. She feels the need to take on most of the responsibility for her family’s wellbeing; in the meantime, putting
any of her own needs last. Cordelia referred to her similar desire, always putting family and community before herself.

Mia identified that one of her biggest needs as a female and mother is for reliable childcare. On a couple of instances, she expressed her desire to have someone look after her children from time to time, so that she could negotiate some of her other commitments, and have peace of mind that her children were well cared for. Related to this need, was her desire to always be reachable or accessible in case her children needed her. Although Alice did not have any children of her own, she did acknowledge that it was predominantly her female classmates who needed to be able to juggle the family, work, and school spheres concurrently.

While all of the participants at one time or another spoke about their need for support, Cordelia and Mia specifically linked this need to their gender, indicating that the support of others was essential to their success. They often drew upon other females as part of their supportive networks (i.e., mothers, sisters, best friends, girlfriends, female coworkers, etc.) who helped them during challenging times. Finally, both Cordelia and Elizabeth mentioned that there have been instances when they have needed time away from their chaotic family lives and home responsibilities. Despite needing time away, they did emphasize the importance of being family-focused.

**Family-Centeredness**

While being a mom was often identified as a predominant role, the participants also considered it to be an identity, inextricably linked to themselves, an integral part of who they were. For instance, Elizabeth indicates, “Well I think I identify myself first as a mother. Yes, I’ve had these children and now they’re young adults, and as far as identity,
if I prioritize, then that is my first priority. Still is my first priority” (Interview #1, p. 2). Similarly, Kathryn identifies motherhood as “my first career” (Interview #1, p. 1). Mia mentions that her children are her focus, to the extent that she has given up past hobbies, which have been replaced with the demands of motherhood. Yet, she indicated that that her family brings her a great source of joy.

The women mentioned how their families took precedence over work and school. Kathryn indicated that other roles can be put on hold, but children cannot wait. Many of the women mentioned that if critical family matters were to arise, all other roles and responsibilities would be temporarily put on hold. For example, Kathryn said, “… the only thing that I really allow to interrupt…is family, you know family issues…” (Interview #2, p. 16). She also explained that no matter her location, if her daughter was present, then she would put her first by taking on more “motherly” attributes. She described her change in demeanour when her daughter visits her at work:

…and then when she comes, it’s like okay, that softer part of me, the you know, the more nurturing part of me needs to come out. I can’t just be chop chop with her when I’m at…even if I’m at work, that’s a more important aspect. (Interview #1, p. 8).

Kathryn conveyed a deliberateness in the way she communicates with her children, and a consciousness of the messages that she sends via her actions and responses. She articulated that there is much “hard work” involved in parenting.

Both Mia and Elizabeth knew quite well of the challenges involved in parenting, especially when it comes to parenting children with special needs, which can be extremely demanding. Elizabeth acknowledged that she has written about this topic, and
expressed a willingness to converse with other parents of children with special needs, to share her insights and experiences. “And so I always find time, because I’ve walked that walk and it’s a very difficult, very difficult walk to have a child with a special need like that” (Interview #1, p. 2). She strives to help other families and convey to them the message that they are not alone. Besides helping others, the participants are busy with many other roles.

*Busyness as a Way to Derive Contentment and Purpose*

Five of the six women identified themselves as “busy.” Oftentimes, it was one of their first self-descriptors. This word had a deeper meaning, for it was in this self-selected state of busyness or continuous action that participants derived a sense of comfort, contentment, and purposefulness. Both Mia and Maria felt that residing in a continuous state of busyness prevented an unhealthy or idle state of mind. It kept them engaged and interested in the world around them. Maria indicated that, “…if I stop doing all of this, I think I would be the first person who would get into depression” (Interview #2, p. 10). She went on to state, “I see me as being constantly busy, being active, being busy. And that helps me relax” (Interview #2, p. 12). There was a sense of calmness that she felt in this ongoing state of activeness. Similarly, Mia feels that without this state of busyness, she would be restless, indicating, “…but I like being busy so I find if I don’t do too much at once, I feel bored, even though it seems like way too much” (Interview # 1, p. 4).

Although to others it might appear as though she is overextending herself, to Mia it feels right. Likewise, both Elizabeth and Kathryn expressed contentment and comfort in being busy. Elizabeth also felt as though it gives her drive, and a feeling of usefulness.

… and I’m really quite at ease when I’m juggling. And I juggle a lot of things,
and I...really am happy when I juggle a lot of things, it gives me pleasure, and sense of purpose and that's a huge part of my personality. (Interview #2, p. 5)

Kathryn expressed this similar state of bliss that comes from busyness, although for her, it can also lead to disorder within her physical environment. She articulates, "...I do tend to be a person that I am happiest when I multi-task, now it also drives me crazy, because I get cluttery..." (Interview #2, p. 18). This state of busyness is more than a description of negotiating multiple demands; rather, for these women, it is about choosing to get involved in things that are personally meaningful and fulfilling, and the mental or internal calmness (the feeling of satisfaction, productivity, and comfort) that comes from successfully negotiating an external state of busyness in their daily life. It is a deliberate choice that these women have made; one that they feel has enriched their life. Cordelia described some of the tasks she carries out within her home and community, including chauffeuring older women from place to place, organizing activities, doing errands and visiting family, as well as conferring with others over the phone. Ultimately, busyness enables these women to lead a productive, content, and purposeful existence.

Women Participants Strive for Balance

Maintaining balance in their lives was hugely important to all of the women. It was Kathryn’s primary goal as a woman. Participants described some of the many things that they balanced, including: their needs alongside the needs of others; internal negotiations and thoughts against external physical acts of negotiation; core values and attitudes against societal values, roles, and attitudes; expectations from many sources; as well as work, school, and personal spheres. Cordelia stated, "...a lot of time I feel like it’s a tug of war because like there are so many things that are happening..." (Interview # 3,
The push and pull of many roles, demands, and feelings can be stressful. Participants identified numerous reasons why balance is important. Maria felt that it is the key to effective “functioning” as a human being. She articulated, “… you have to have some kind of balance… to be a healthy person” (Interview #1, p. 13). It is about finding a state of equilibrium, both internally and externally, as she described:

But the balancing and negotiating ... goes through your head and if you can balance that internally, um you can be happy with yourself... And... and you can function well. But, if you put too much on a plate and you misjudge your abilities that you can... can actually balance that, then you're gonna feel you are slipping through the crack, and you will feel unhappy.... (Interview #1, p. 14)

Again, it is impossible to be in this state of equilibrium at all times, but Maria said it will not stop people from trying. Sometimes Maria found herself trying to achieve balance out of necessity, to restore stability when her life becomes chaotic. Kathryn noted that it was about maintaining some type of order in her life even though she realized that there is an element of unpredictability in occurrences and it can take a while before order is revealed. Maria also mentioned that when an individual is off-balance, he or she is more susceptible to identity confusion or lack of direction in his or her life. According to Kathryn, some individuals have more roles and demands to balance than others. She illustrated this by comparing two students, one who is a single young man living in his parents’ home, versus a married mother. In this case, she conceptualized the female student as negotiating more roles than the male.

The participants listed numerous examples of balancing that they engaged in both in their professional and personal lives. Maria and Kathryn described teaching and
lecturing as a balancing act, focusing on maintaining balance between student-centred and teacher-directed approaches, as well as between information dissemination and student engagement (interest). Maria spoke of balancing within the home, through shared parenting strategies, as well as spouses bringing complementary personalities, attitudes, and skills which adds harmony to the family. Alice identified her effort to achieve balance in both spheres by dividing her time to ensure that she is able to fulfill professional as well as personal obligations. However, she was unsure with how well she achieves this balance.

Cordelia’s appreciation for balance came largely from her Haudenosaunee background, where an integral aspect of identity is about maintaining harmony with everything around you. “…it’s very cyclical, like everything is related to everything else and like nothing is more important than the other thing. But much of what the story talks about is balance and it’s that mind, body, soul balance” (Interview #1, p. 5). As Cordelia recognized, balance comes in many forms including: physical, mental, spiritual, relationship, and global dimensions. The participants gave numerous examples of balance and articulated its importance in their busy lives. Granted, it proves increasingly difficult to achieve balance when negotiating societal expectations.

*Then and Now: Six Women Negotiating Societal Prescriptions and Expectations*

The participants were cognizant of societal expectations placed upon women. Elizabeth spoke of her early awareness of social norms and values surrounding appropriate academic and professional pathways for women.

Even in my generation, prescription was ‘what did successful girls do?’

Successful girls took the academic courses in high school, and went on to not
college, university! Or your second choice was nursing! Oh yes! And very clearly! And also, successful women went into teaching. That had a tag on it! If you were going to be a teacher, you were going to be an upstanding member of society! Well respected! (Interview #1, p. 3)

She explained how women attempted to follow socially acceptable pathways enabling them to be viewed as successful by society's standards at that time. Clearly, in the past, the teaching profession was held in high esteem. Although most of the participants recognized it as a noble profession, one where people can truly make a difference, some acknowledged that it has become undervalued in recent years.

Elizabeth also articulated that traditional gender roles were clearly defined by society during the time when she was a young mother.

Very clearly in my generation, it was very clear what a mom should be. A mum should have a hot meal on the table, and a mum should be there to help with homework and a mom should, and a mom should. So from my generation, which would go back to the sixties and early seventies, when I did get married, that prescription was very clear, you were the driver, and you went to the hockey games, and very clearly, the mother also cleaned the house. (Interview #1, p. 3)

Cordelia also used the word “prescription” to acknowledge that there are culturally “prescribed” gender roles in Haudenosaunee society, which men and women are expected to follow.

Participants recognized that at times, societal attitudes were at odds with their own beliefs, which left some of the women feeling confused, unappreciated, and torn. Alice, the youngest participant, expressed that certain individuals still have difficulties
accepting the concept of the working woman. She spoke of a past partner who saw her place as being in the home, and this completely infuriated her. While she indicated that she would like to have a family, she also intends to have a career. She stated that it was for this reason (for the advancement of her professional aspirations) that she continued her postsecondary studies. Alice commented that stereotypes regarding males and females still exist. Kathryn expressed her frustration with externally held assumptions regarding gendered responsibilities. She finds them archaic.

...there are expectations of me as a woman who runs, or at least participates in running of the home. It's stuff that I hate, let me add, I hate it that people, you know, look at my messy house, and...I am the one that they would be critical of, not my husband. (Interview #3, p. 20)

Societal gender role expectations are still very much prevalent, and impact upon these women in various ways. Yet, there are other segments of society that feel women should be out in the workforce, and devalue the stay-at-home mother. Elizabeth was frustrated by this perception:

...and motherhood is not seen as a career, and I walked that walk...like trying to get a credit card or trying to...you know, go to a party and say, ‘what did you do this week?’ and I’d say, ‘oh we went to the park and...’ ‘you what?’...I think society really ranks a working woman before a mother.... (Interview, #3, p. 9)

Ultimately, many women, like these six participants, are left in a “no win” situation, caught between these two opposing views and a host of contradictory pressures and expectations (self, familial, societal, etc.). As Mia articulates, from these contradictory messages, somehow women develop the perception that they are expected to do it all and
this is a heavy burden to bear.

Um...I think it's very much run by what you think society thinks that you should be doing...I mean you're supposed to be like this super woman or wonder woman. I guess it would be better to do it all, not be tired, and your hair still looks great, and it just doesn't happen (laughs)...not for me anyway...I walk around, I've become comfortable looking like a bag...and there's a time where I couldn't handle it, now I'm like whatever, if you don't like it, don't look (laughs).

(Interview #2, p. 12)

While Mia has come to terms with the discrepancy between idealistic notions of role negotiations between the multiple spheres in her life, and the differing, harsher realities, other women may not find this easy to do. This disconnect between a utopian ideal and a chaotic reality is bound to produce feelings of guilt or failure for some women.

*Negative Gender-Related Feelings: Experiences with Selfishness, Guilt, and Resentment*

Participants frequently spoke of being consumed with negative feelings, such as selfishness and guilt, which were linked to the comparing of their perceptions of themselves against their perceptions of societal expectations that they feel are placed upon them as females and mothers.

*Selfishness.* Maria and Mia identified feeling selfish when focusing attention on themselves, rather than on their children. They held the perception that putting themselves first was a selfish thing to do. Maria, for instance, listed her "core self" as her most important identity, then she followed up by admitting that her response might be perceived as selfish, since she did not list family, social, professional, community, or global identities as more important. Mia, on the other hand, felt selfish for enjoying
academic pursuits, which, on occasion, may take away time she could be spending with her family. She said, "I try to be a good mum even though I'm a little selfish 'cause I like doing my school work stuff" (Interview #1, p. 4). Here, Mia believed that by engaging in intellectual pursuits for herself, she would be judged by society as not being a "good" mother. For Mia, the clash between a desire to achieve personal fulfillment on one hand and to follow perceived societal expectations on the other, creates these feelings of guilt.

Guilt and regret. All six of the participants spoke about their feelings of guilt and/or regret. Oftentimes, these feelings were related to their perceived failures or shortcomings as mothers. For instance, Kathryn regretted taking a passive approach with her daughter who was struggling at school. She indicated the complexity that exists when the role of "parent" and "teacher" intersect. She indicated that boundaries can become blurred. Both Maria and Mia felt guilty as they perceived themselves at times as being preoccupied with school work, feeling as though they might be neglecting their families in the process. Mia describes this sense of guilt that ensues when she is engaged in school work in the home:

Part of me believes that I should wait; like you have so much time left, right? Look at some of the Profs; they didn’t go back to school until they were much older. And I have small children at home. I think that I should be focusing more on them than I do, um...and sometimes I feel very guilty about the fact that...you know, they’re running around and playing and, I’m on the computer doing homework instead of running around playing with them...as, I always thought when I became a mom, I’d be very much like that, and I’m not as much as I thought I would be. So I guess that’s why I sort of feel guilty that I’m not doing it
like when they’re in bed I do it, because I would be too tired, and you know, it’s a rejuvenation thing for me...which you read things, you watch Oprah and they say you’re supposed to take care of yourself too, which is what I’m doing, but there is still that guilt that, they’re always, ‘When are you going to be home?’ ‘Why are you working again?’ ‘What do you mean you’re going to be at school? You know, those sort of questions that now they verbalize...and you’re like...I wish I didn’t want to do other stuff, but I do. (Interview #2, p. 9)

Mia feels guilty for spending time pursuing her interests. She realizes that the best thing a woman can do is to ensure that she nurtures her own identities outside of the family, making time to have other interests, as this provides her with stimulation, satisfaction, and rejuvenation, which ultimately enables them to reenter the family, and continue to make positive contributions in this sphere. However, this knowledge is not enough to extinguish the guilt she feels in doing so. Mia was adamant that she needed to parent to the best of her ability, or else feelings of “guilt” would ensue for not adequately fulfilling her obligations and duties. She felt that having children was a deliberate decision that she made, and as such, requires a continuous commitment. Likewise, even though Cordelia does not have her own children, she is always doing things for other people, as opposed to doing things for herself, and expressed a real challenge in making her needs a top priority.

Kathryn indicated that for her, guilt often surfaced when there was a lack of time. She conveyed that there is only so much time in a day, and she feels guilty knowing that not everything can get accomplished. In choosing to focus time and energy on some things, she knew that others were left aside. Alice felt similarly, and provided a poignant
example of this speaking of the mental anguish that ensued knowing that her professional role was taking up so much time, that she was forced to put aside her student role. Mentally, this weighed on her and the guilt would not fully dissipate.

Other forms of guilt which manifested in Maria’s life included: guilt for feeling disingenuous on occasion, guilt at the thought of letting others down and letting herself down in the process, guilt over forming misconceptions about others, and guilt for not performing to the best of her ability. Interestingly, Kathryn noted that during the construction of her living self map, the feeling of guilt first appeared around the role of woman. Kathryn said, “...I would also describe myself as having all kinds of not so obvious insecurities, I think we all do” (Interview #1, p. 11). In her second interview, she explicitly linked these insecurities and “conflictedness” to gender.

Resentment. In the past, two mothers described feeling “resentment” towards their work. They begrudged having to work outside of the home, especially when their work schedule conflicted with the family’s schedule. Mia identified this as an ongoing experience, stating, “So I... I guess I resent a bit that I have to you know, work weekends and work at night and not be able to take them [the children] to all the things I want to do, and get time to do me stuff too!” (Interview #2, p. 5). Not only is it difficult for her to juggle work and family, but it is challenging also finding time for herself. Elizabeth also identified a time when she was forced to reenter the workforce before she felt she was ready. She really yearned to stay at home for a longer period of time to be with her children; however, there were urgent financial pressures which drove her to resume teaching. She described the struggles that she faced, feeling as though she really was not as “present” in either role (i.e., teacher and mother) as she should have been.
Female Participants' Perceptions of Gender Barriers

A couple of the participants commented on their perceptions of gender-related barriers that exist within professional, academic, and spiritual realms, which impact on women, such as themselves.

Within the professional sphere, Mia noted salary discrepancies among men and women, specifically commenting on the difference in income levels between herself and her husband. She explained that her husband can work 3 days a week and make the same amount of money that she would make in an entire week. Kathryn, on the other hand, did not perceive gender to be a barrier with respect to her leadership roles and professional roles. She perceived her profession (teaching) to be fairly equitable and unrestricted based on gender, especially when contrasted against different fields. She felt that she has a voice and that people listened to her at work.

Alice sensed that another sphere where women experience gender barriers is within academics. She felt that intelligent, highly educated females are viewed as "intimidating" by certain males. She indicated that perhaps this belief is somehow misguided, but that she believes it to be true. Later she continued to explain, "...I get the feeling that there's still a whole lot of parts of society that want to stay patriarchal... that woman that has the career, that has the degree, um...I think that's intimidating for some people" (Interview #2, p. 20). Although Kathryn indicated that sometimes people perceive her as "intimidating," she did not explain why.

Kathryn identified gender barriers that exist in the spiritual realm, especially within organized religion. She indicated that in this sphere, men still hold predominant authority, voice, and decision-making power. Females are limited, often prevented from
having a voice, which was extremely frustrating to her. Despite facing many barriers, these women continue to successfully negotiate their multiple roles.

*Simultaneous Negotiations: Juggling Family, Work, and School Spheres*

The six women often provided examples of simultaneous negotiations that involved juggling responsibilities within the family sphere along side responsibilities within other spheres in their lives. These complex negotiations were tested at certain junctures, including points of intersection between: work and motherhood; school and motherhood; as well as work, school, family, and the spousal relationship (see Figure 8). The women noted that each of these intersections brought about complex feelings and responses which they had to deal with. Mia identified the home as the place where her multiple identities intersect, especially on account of her and her husband’s shared love of academia. “...like when we’re at home, it’s not that I’m strictly a wife. I’m still talking about or doing school preparation, or talking about my thesis, and our kids have always had to listen to everything (both Mia and the Interviewer chuckle). So they all overlap…” (Interview #1, p. 4). Mia noted that it becomes difficult to separate these multiple spheres, as they are intimately connected with each other.

*Intersections involving work and motherhood.* All four mothers spoke of the challenges that result when motherhood and career collide. They described different instances in their lives when these intersections have happened. Maria recalled the challenge she experienced negotiating a new job and a new baby at the same time. She began her first full-time teaching position immediately after the birth of her second child, which was a big adjustment for her and her husband. Elizabeth recalled instances where she was focused on her professional duties, and was not as “present” as she should have
The six women often provided examples of simultaneous negotiations that involved juggling responsibilities within the home sphere along side responsibilities within other spheres in their lives.

Instances when motherhood (or home roles) and career roles overlap or collide, involving difficult, daily struggles, perceived to get easier as children grow older

Example: Elizabeth

Instances when motherhood (or home roles) and school roles overlap or collide, involving balancing and juggling of time and activities

Example: Mia

When participants’ roles from all three spheres collide, they articulate its multiple impacts including: feelings of stress, exhaustion, and negative impacts on their spousal relationships. At times they find ways to cope on their own, while in other instances, they draw on assistance from others. Example: Maria

Figure 8. Women juggling family, work, and school spheres in tandem.
been for her children. Overall, Mia identified that while she is at home, negotiating her multiple responsibilities, her children make themselves known, and seek out her attention. Kathryn marvelled at how some people can juggle these multiple spheres, especially if they have small children to care for. She commented that once children have grown, this negotiation becomes easier. Mia confirmed that reality, indicating that since her children have become school aged, they have developed increased “independence” and are able to entertain themselves while she focuses her attention on other necessary tasks. Interestingly, Elizabeth understood it to be very difficult to “work full-time” and raise a family. She spoke of some women that she has encountered who attempted to deceive others and themselves by creating the illusion that it could be done effortlessly, which she understood from her reality to not be the case:

...And this myth that they are trying to perpetuate, that you can have a full-time job, and you can raise kids, and...it’s a myth because something goes. And they don’t see what goes. My thinking, part-time is ideal, you know, you make the hockey games, you make the dance recitals, you do have the mental stimulation, but you’re not too tired for your husband, or you’re not you know, too tired to really play. I think a lot of those young moms think that they are present, and they are not, because they don’t hear themselves at lunch hour... I’d like a law passed that says parents (two people) can only work one and a half. I would like to see a law passed that says you can’t have two full-time working people, because I see the damage, and I know the damage because I lived it. I know how much more I should have given to my kids, and it’s not material things. I didn’t have time to sit and play card games because I had...[work obligations] and I had....I had stuff to
do, and I had to clean the house, and I can’t play with you right now…. (Interview #3, p. 10)

Most of the participants agreed that this negotiation is by no means effortless. They articulated that it is one of the most difficult things that they do on a daily basis.

*Intersections involving school and motherhood.* Mia spoke largely of the intersections that arise for her within the realms of school and motherhood. She gave a personal example when these two roles overlapped and she could not be in two places at once. She recognized that balancing separate individual time for her to engage in her interests and for her husband to engage in his was also important to coordinate, stating:

...so, for me to be a wife, and a mother, I had to figure out a way so that I could stay where I was, so he could go do what he wanted, and yet still have somebody to get the kids. So literally, the babysitter was in our house for probably twenty minutes, because she got them off the bus and I just made it home…. (Interview #2, p. 10)

Mia was continuously faced with these kinds of negotiations as a mother, wife, and student. Again, she provided a second example of juggling multiple roles saying,

Like if you’re a student and you’re a mother to small children, you’re gonna have to negotiate between the two—how you get your homework done and how you put the kids to bed and make dinner and do all those things. (Interview #1, p. 3)

She spoke from her own experience as these are real tasks that she must manage on a regular basis, and they can prove to be challenging.

Engaging in these types of ongoing negotiations impacts the individual, their feelings, and their relationships with those around them, as illustrated by the participants.
Maria, for example, talked about her internalization of the negotiation process, as though it was her personal struggle, which she dealt with on her own. She talked about being in the present moment, giving 100% of herself in any given context, for if she divided her attention, she felt that it would have negative consequences not only for herself, but for others as well. "...so my kids...they don’t need to know how much is on my plate tonight or tomorrow morning. I have to be there for them, that moment, that time..." (Interview #1, p. 14). Internalizing the negotiation process can be a huge weight for one to carry. Mia and Cordelia identified lack of sleep as an outcome of negotiation. Put in the situation, they do what needs to be done. At times, this may cause displeasure as their own wants may be sacrificed. Cordelia described an instance of negotiating multiple roles (i.e., familial, relationship, and work) referring to the stress that she sometimes feels. She said that on occasion, it has been her boyfriend who reminds her of her limits, and to avoid becoming "burnt out." Both Maria and Cordelia have referred to negative impacts on their health, such as increased susceptibility to illness and exhaustion. Kathryn referred to feeling "conflicted" and second guessing her decisions.

**Family, work, and school intersections and their impacts on relationships.**

Juggling multiple domains also has implications for the spousal relationship, as indicated by Kathryn. She described how her busyness with school work at times has taken its toll on her husband, especially early on in their relationship, when she was at home, yet unavailable because of her on-line coursework commitment. Kathryn also mentioned that deciding how to negotiate the "division of labour" is a serious consideration when one is juggling multiple demands. Ultimately, she felt that although it may prove challenging, it is essential to find time for each other. Kathryn also pinpointed another challenge; when
your significant other does not have some of the same roles and responsibilities that you do. She was adamant that in this situation, a high level of “understanding” is essential.

Not only were these women negotiating between spheres, they were also negotiating within a single sphere. Kathryn mentioned that as a spouse, she navigates between being a “wife, friend, [and] lover” (Interview #1, p. 7). Mia articulated a similar negotiation, and articulated that on occasion, she encounters role confusion as a wife.

...sometimes it’s hard to figure out what I am supposed to be when I’m a wife, because I think that, I am and he’s not...feeling that I am enough, or vice versa, because we have so many other things that we both do. You’re so busy parenting, or then doing homework, and you wonder why he is grumpy, because you realize you haven’t actually opened your mouth and talked to him in two days, but in your head, you’re sort of talking to him. (Interview #2, p. 19)

Mia identified that relationships are tested with challenges, especially when individuals have many commitments to fulfill, and get consumed with their other roles. This can negatively impact the relationship if the couple does not make time for each other and fails to keep communicating with each other. This is precisely what happened to Elizabeth. She explained how in the midst of juggling a multitude of roles, she ended up abandoning her role as a wife. “I gave away my role as a wife; that went to the very bottom...don’t touch me, don’t come near me...” (Interview #3, p. 10). Elizabeth articulates that similar outcomes have happened to many other couples:

...and I really believe I’ve seen so many relationships...it happens anyways...and then when you put all those time obligations, and your fatigue goes up, and your desire for intimacy goes, and you just...in turn you go, ‘What can you do for me?’
I'm doing so many things for other people, What can you do for me?' and it isn’t

What can I do for you? Because you don’t make the list. (Interview #3, p. 11)

As she emphasized, relationships can disintegrate when an effort to maintain them is not made a priority. Instead, individualistic motivations dominate, and compromises are no longer negotiated. In order to simultaneously negotiate multiple spheres, oftentimes women must call on their significant others for assistance. This, in turn, may result in gender role reversals, as partners take on additional roles.

_Participants’ Experiences with Gender Role Reversals_

All four of the mothers described periods in their family lives when their husbands took on the role of primary caregivers, to facilitate the negotiation of their other demands including the pursuit of full-time studies or employment. This gender-role reversal (be it short-term or long-term) involved collaborative decision making between partners and a renegotiation of the division of labour. Elizabeth described a period when her professional duties were numerous and intensive, requiring long hours at work. To successfully meet these demands, she relinquished duties at home, referring to it as “shifting,” whereby her husband stepped in to assume certain responsibilities that typically were hers. Maria described her first full-time teaching position, which she happened to commence only 6 weeks after her son was born. At that time, they decided that her husband would take paternity leave and remain at home to raise their son. Kathryn also identified a time when her husband stayed at home, while she worked, and also while she went to school. This gave her peace of mind, knowing that someone was at home. Finally, this was a negotiation that Mia experienced at the time of our interviews. She explained, “…right now my husband’s taking more of a parenting role than he has in
the past. Now that I’m in school more, he’s become sort of the primary caregiver because his schedule allows it...” (Interview #2, p. 15). Although these types of gender role reversals were experiences that the participants may not have been accustomed to, they made changes based on what suited their families and what allowed them to successfully negotiate the demands that had been placed upon them at that time. Ultimately, they did what they felt was best, and what worked for the couple and their family unit. It clearly involved willingness, understanding, and compromise. 

*Women Participants, Their Quest for Perfection, and Their Desire to Please*

All of these women mentioned their quest for perfection or their focus on striving to be successful at their multiple roles. Three of the participants even used the word “perfectionist” when describing themselves. This desire to be “perfect” transcended the different spheres of their lives (home, work, and graduate school). Mia articulated this desire; yet, she was aware that in reality it was difficult to achieve. “So everybody thinks they’re going to be the perfect parent, but it’s hard once you do it, but I think I try to provide a good home, be a good student, [be] nice when I meet people, [and be] considerate” (Mia, Interview #1, p. 4). Even though perfection is an impossible standard to achieve, it will not stop these women from striving to be perfect.

Both Maria and Mia recognized their immense desire to please others. Mia articulated, “...I try to find a way to make everything work” (Interview #2, p. 10). She spoke of juggling multiple schedules and looking for creative solutions to ensure that everyone in her family is happy and is able to make their respective activities. She indicated that at times, all of this manoeuvring and coordinating is taxing. Likewise, Maria stated that it takes a great deal of effort to please others, as it oftentimes
involves being a good listener, being helpful, and being fair.

I’m a pleaser I think. I like to please my family members and my friends…I try to be a good listener, even though I like to talk a lot (laughter). But I try to understand and be helpful. And that’s also some kind of activity required… you have to sit down everyday and to stay constantly open, it takes so much energy away. But, I think that’s also being fair, like you…what I said in a previous interview, you’re trying to divide that time equally to everybody, so everybody’s happy with the portion they’re getting from you (laughter). (Interview #2, p. 12)

She did not want to short-change anyone, and gave of herself readily to others. She was conscious of her actions and strived to serve as a positive role model for her children.

“…I’m trying to give a lot and to be as an example to my kids so they grow up to be givers too, not to be users” (Interview #2, p. 13). She felt that her actions as a parent would impact her children even into adulthood and hoped that her children would learn to reciprocate and give back to others around them. Ultimately, she desired for her children to be caring human beings.

Caring Across Contexts

Each woman made direct or indirect references to her caring nature, oftentimes indicating that it crossed contexts. These women frequently described themselves as “helpful,” “caring,” and “loving.” Mia wished that all people could focus on maintaining nurturing relationships and building character. Maria also shared this hope for a caring environment, showing genuine concern for the world and for others, stating, “See, but I really care! I really care about what’s happening and what I could do maybe to help, or to change some things” (Interview #2, p. 6). Her caring approach does not permit her to sit
on the sidelines. Instead, she engages in acts of caring for others, both at home and at school.

All of these women worked within the "caring professions" including teaching and social work. As the educators spoke of their personal philosophies of education, they believed in demonstrating care and concern for others. Cordelia spoke of a caregiving role that many women find themselves in, caring for an aging parent or grandparent. In her case, at the time of our interviews, she was caring for both grandparents, one who was in the hospital (and was to, subsequently, pass away), and the other who had recently moved in with her. Undoubtedly, one of the first caring relationships that a daughter will experience is the caring relationship she has with her mother.

*Mothers as Teachers: Participants' Reflections*

According to Wood (1997), "...a girl's first efforts to define her own identity are infused by the relationship with her mother" (p. 53). Three of the six participants referred to their mothers during our interviews. Two of them indicated that their mothers were a source of support. They were incredible role models whom these women could consult with regarding strategies for negotiating their multiple roles. Cordelia spoke of her mother frequently, indicating that her mother has been instrumental in encouraging her, validating her efforts, and supporting her through challenging times. She recalled her mother's own struggles and triumphs with a source of admiration, indicating that her mom pursued a PhD while raising a family. She referred to her as a trailblazer, considering that not many people in their community had attended university. She acknowledged the ongoing support she receives from her mother, who knows intimately the kinds of struggles and challenges Cordelia faces and will face in the future, because
she, too, has experienced them first hand. It is clear that this mother and daughter have a very special relationship. Alice indicated that she recalls the various strategies that her own mother used when negotiating multiple roles, and emulates these approaches in her own life. They have become valuable tools, helping her juggle multiple responsibilities. However, she also described identity intersections that she has experienced in the past, moments in time when suddenly she says something that her mother used to say, and realizes that she has become like her. Finally, Elizabeth described her relationship with her mother as a tumultuous one; however, this rocky relationship did enable her to gain strength and determination. These mothers were conceptualized as teachers, modelling parenting, coping, and management strategies for their daughters, some of which were deemed more successful than others, ultimately learning that motherhood has its challenges.

*Motherhood: Identity Loss and Role Confusion*

While Mia and Elizabeth experienced immense satisfaction in being mothers, they have also experienced identity loss and role confusion. Mia described transition periods in her life, from being single to married, and from being childless to having children. With these new identities comes the loss of past ones, which she feels takes time to get used to. “...being a non-parent versus a parent was a huge identity loss, ‘cause you went from being free and only having to answer to yourself, and maybe your partner, to suddenly being controlled by somebody else, and their needs and their wants...” (Interview #2, p. 18).

Role confusion is something that Elizabeth was grappling with at the time of our interviews. She explained that her children were grown and her role as a “mother” was
more difficult to decipher, especially when her children continuously sent her contradictory messages. In her mind, they would always be her children; yet, they had reached a point in their lives where they wanted to be recognized as adults. However, they did not always act accordingly. Their conflicting reactions, feelings, and needs made it difficult for her to adapt. She articulated that they held unclear expectations of her, which led to ambiguity in her own understanding of her role as a mother of grown children.

...it's almost an in between land and it's interesting, because one minute they'll come to me and they'll be like 'oh mum, brush my hair!' or 'mum, can I have twenty dollars for Tim Hortons?' or whatever, and then the next minute is, 'You don’t need to tell me that! I'm in the working world!' or 'Oh I don’t need any money, I have my own job' and that intersection is really...I don’t know who I am sometimes, so I just go with whatever. (Interview #1, p. 4)

She finds herself in a constant state of flux, shifting to the given needs and expectations of her children, becoming who they want her to be, in that particular moment in time. Not only do females struggle with challenges related to motherhood, they also struggle with issues surrounding ageing.

*Women Grappling with Ageing and the Body*

Interestingly, all six female participants articulated a personal awareness of their own ageing. Most of them associated ageing with negative implications. Some spoke of hopes for themselves as they continued to go through the ageing process. They provided very poignant examples of issues associated with ageing, their bodies, and their emotional reactions to these experiences. Very few positive comments were made
regarding ageing. However, Elizabeth did acknowledge that as she has gotten older, she has become more connected to her roots and her heritage, which has been a wonderful experience for her. Alice, on the other hand, has indicated that she is ignoring the physical ageing process, and has decided that attitude is what is important. She said, "...I stopped having birthdays like ten years ago! So [I’m] young at heart I guess!" (Interview #1, p. 8).

Negative reactions associated with age and ageing included fear, judgement, and resistance. Three participants felt fearful about ageing. They identified being “worried,” “scared” or “conflicted” about becoming older or reaching significant age milestones. Two individuals recognized their age as a potential obstacle or barrier, especially when it came to judgements or perceptions held by others regarding their appearance. Interestingly, these two individuals had opposite concerns. Cordelia felt that her young appearance and age was sometimes a barrier that she had to overcome, since people would form certain perceptions of her, perhaps viewing her as inexperienced questioning her credibility and knowledge. For Elizabeth, the reverse held true, as she identified experiencing judgement on account of her increased age. Ageing was a very real and emotional topic for Elizabeth during our interviews. She expressed,

I’m starting to identify myself, and this might make me cry...as getting old(er), older. And that’s really...it’s just a difficult change, because I have this conflict inside of me. I go faster and better than I did when I was twenty-five to thirty, but outside, I’m perceived by the world, as somebody who’s getting past middle age. People see me as ... [participant identifies her age] and I get it when they do. I’m sitting there thinking oh I just look like everybody else, I just look like I’m
twenty-five, I just look like you, but I don’t! And so their relationship with me is different, because the exterior has aged. (Interview #1, p. 7)

She indicated that ageing has been hard for her to accept. She has experienced a feeling of turmoil and resistance, stating, “…I’m not ready” (Interview #1, p. 8). She even felt angry at the thought of getting old. It was frustrating to her that the way society views her does not align with her own perceptions of herself, and that judgements were made based on her physical appearance. In her case, she even acknowledged that her own trepidation and preoccupation with ageing has been an obstacle for her.

A few of the women shared examples of specific instances in their lives, when they have been especially aware of their age or of the ageing process. Maria identified a period in her mid to late 30s, when she was cognizant of her biological clock. She recognized that she was getting older and knew that there was a window for having children that would only remain open for a limited time. Cordelia described a time when she was asked to deliver a presentation in front of an international audience. Preparing for the presentation, she was very conscious of her young age and wondered if she would be taken seriously, even questioning why she had been asked to give the presentation in the first place. Elizabeth described her experience in the graduate classroom, where she has often felt very cognizant of the young faces around her. She indicated that on one occasion, a classmate made a comment questioning why she would pursue graduate studies at her age. Although she knew this person did not mean to be insulting, it still hurt her feelings. She indicated that she makes an effort to be selective with her responses and conversations, to not come across as the mature, experienced person who has an answer for everything. She had been thinking about her age as a barrier until one day a professor
asked her to reconsider this view, and embrace it as a strength, which has enabled her to gain a wealth of life experiences and knowledge which she can share with her peers.

Two of the women linked ageing to health and body issues. Kathryn was one of these women and clearly indicated that ageing impacts her body, often limiting what she is able to physically do. She discussed reproductive health issues and procedures that she has undergone and indicated that ageing and body issues have influenced her decision making on different issues, which, as of late, have been focused on practicality, considering her ageing body and needs. Mia was also cognizant of ageing and its impacts on her body because of a physical disability that she was born with. She indicated that as her body ages, the level of pain that she experiences increases, which can be debilitating at times. These women also noted that as they age, their weight has tended to increase.

Kathryn commented that she has struggled with her weight for quite some time. Alice noted that the media impacts women with respect to ageing and body image. She described that the media dictates a constructed, unattainable image of "beauty" which can impact negatively on the self-esteem of young women.

Two of the participants expressed specific hopes for themselves and the way they desire to handle the ageing process. Maria indicated that above all, she does not want to be one of those ageing individuals who cannot embrace change. She desires to remain cognizant of her age, and realizes that age does affect one’s perceptions of the world and of others; however, she wants to continue being open-minded and to appreciate the importance of change. Elizabeth acknowledges, “...I know it's there, I know I can’t ignore it, but I’m not gonna let it stop me” (Interview #1, p. 8). She is striving to handle it with dignity, and to keep on living, rather than giving up. These women encountered a
host of conflicting expectations, experiences, and feelings associated with their gender.

Negotiating Multifaceted Roles and Identities within Complex Environmental Conditions

Participants used objects and metaphors to illustrate the daily negotiations of their roles and identities, and to highlight the challenges, tensions, and possibilities that they encountered.

*Exploring Multifaceted Identities and Roles in Graduate School*

Each participant brought an object to help her describe at length the multifaceted identities that she brings to graduate studies and the intricate ways that she negotiates these identities both within and outside of the university environment. Alice brought her course calendar from the year long educational exchange program that she participated in during her undergraduate studies. She noted many parallels between that educational experience, and her present experience as a Masters student. She described how both began with feelings of trepidation, but transitioned into periods of growth, change, and independence, helping her gain immense self-confidence.

A First Nations rattle best symbolized everything Cordelia brought with her to graduate school. She explained its meaning and how it connected to her interests, culture, and her human existence. She described her love of music which was captured by her choice of object. She also highlighted its association with her Haudenosaunee teachings, beliefs, language, traditions, and perspectives. Moreover, Cordelia likened the rattle to the image of a human being, with its external casing or “outer shell” representing her body, and the rattle’s many internal pieces representing her varied roles; collectively symbolic of her complex self. She stated, “...and although at times I am shaken, together
my roles and myself make beautiful music” (Interview #3, p. 1). Cordelia conveyed how her roles are inextricably tied to herself wherever she goes, and that she cannot separate them from who she is. As such, they influence everything she does as a graduate student.

Elizabeth shared the first essay that she wrote as a Masters student, explaining how it conveys who she is as a person, someone who expresses herself with candour and honesty. She identified graduate studies as “a second chance” (Interview #3, p. 2) to prove herself as a student. This first assignment demonstrated to Elizabeth that she can be a successful graduate student.

Kathryn identified a collection of coloured mathematics tiles as representing her multiple identities that she brings to graduate studies. She indicated “…it’s a set, which makes it one” (Interview #3, p. 1). She compared the collection to her identities, indicating that at first glance, they appear straightforward; however, they can be arranged in many groupings, similar to the vast number of ways that her roles and identities intersect or come together, which ultimately illustrates the complexity of the whole human being who negotiates multiple roles and identities over the course of a day. She further explained the set’s connection to graduate studies, speaking of her resourcefulness, versatility, and adaptability to diverse situations within graduate studies. She identified her ability to maximize the utility of her different characteristics by combining them in the most effective ways that each situation calls for.

Maria selected an apple as the object that represents the identities she brings to graduate studies. She described her fascination with the apple, wondering why this symbol is always connected with teachers. This has puzzled her for some time. But she also identified with the apple on many levels, both personally and professionally. She
described its seed-filled core as similar to her internal “core identity.” She believed that the internal core is the most important part of people, giving them passion for life, and their core values, and making up the essence of who they are. She identified the external skin of the apple, as similar to the professional roles and other roles that she plays, as she strives to portray the image of “perfection,” “healthiness,” and “attractiveness.” Maria went on to explain how apples can look fine on the outside, but can be bruised on the inside. She likened this phenomenon to people as well, and indicated that she enrolled in graduate studies to nurture her core, to stay current, and to be mentally stimulated. The apple encapsulates her complex self which she brings to graduate studies, and her passion for learning.

Mia selected her date book as an object that represented her multifaceted identities that she brings to graduate school. She stated:

My date book speaks to all my identities because it is the one item that helps me to navigate between all of them, without it I would be lost, in its pages one can find little clues that speak to all the people that I can be in a day.... (Interview #3, p. 2)

Mia explained that her date book provided her with a central place to denote deadlines, responsibilities, and activities from all the spheres of her life, making it possible for her to take part in graduate school. She identified that all of the skills that she makes use of when keeping a date book (i.e., organization, time management, and prioritization) are also essential skills that are needed in order to successfully navigate your way through graduate studies. Having recognized the identities that the participants bring with them, the next step involves understanding the complex negotiations of these
various identities and roles.

*Describing the Negotiation of Multifaceted Roles and Identities in Graduate School*

Participants identified a metaphor or simile that best described how they negotiated their identities and roles during graduate school, comparing their negotiations with other things, to capture this experience (see Figure 9 for details). They explained what it is like for them to negotiate all of these roles and identities while in graduate studies, often emphasizing that it is a very personal or individualized act, with points of intersection when their various identities and roles come together. Their descriptions illustrated the complexity of the self and the intricacies of juggling multiple demands and highlighted that the occurrences in one sphere (i.e., academic) can impact upon the roles and identities being negotiated in another sphere (i.e., family, work, etc.).

Alice identified her negotiation of roles and identities to be “a salad bar” of selections. She borrowed this metaphor from an article that she read on the topic of reflection. She explained that in a salad bar, each individual has the same options available to them, yet each person makes his or her own unique salad.

...I think that really defines grad studies too, because we all come to it with different backgrounds, different insights, experience and knowledge, and even if you and I sat in the same class, based on what we bring to it, and based on what we kinda see as important and applicable to ourselves, we’re going to take two totally different um...insights and experiences.... (Interview #3, p. 3)

Her understanding is that each student draws on his or her past experiences and knowledge to construct meaning in his or her own way that makes most sense to that particular person.
<table>
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<tr>
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<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>“an Italian juggler”</td>
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<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>“weather”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
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*Figure 9. Metaphors describing graduate students’ identity and role negotiations.*
Cordelia depicted the canoe paddle as her way of explaining the negotiation of her roles in graduate studies. She articulated:

Life's a canoe paddle...without it, your canoe will surely travel down stream; with it, you have the ability to paddle against the current...So I think that this metaphor is fitting for me because I'm an avid paddler, more important, I think it represents how I negotiate my identity in graduate studies. Sometimes the road is difficult, and the current pushes me down stream because of my multiple roles, however, when I have my paddle, and I paddle hard, I can go where I want to. Most often I feel like I'm paddling against the current, that I work hard to achieve something so precious to me, something that years ago, my people and First Nations people in general, were not expected to achieve. Although the going gets rough, paddling so hard and so strong, my persistence keeps me...keeps me going and so does the fact that there is a whole community of people behind me, who will help me when I'm struggling.... (Interview #3, p. 5)

It is clear that Cordelia has encountered obstacles in her path, but she strives to overcome them, and continues to persevere. Negotiating her roles proves to be challenging, yet she recognizes that knowledge and education represent freedom and empowerment for herself and her community.

Elizabeth felt that the Italian Juggler best personified her identity and role negotiations in graduate studies. She said:

The Italian Juggler is an entertainer, and the bottom line is that's what teachers do; we are performers, we engage people, and we are passionate performers. And when we are performing our subject, it is an invitation for people to join in with
us, to engage with us, and as far as the Italian juggling, we all love juggling because people are waiting to see when are you going to drop it. (Interview #3, p. 4)

She described the balancing act of negotiation as amusing to others who wonder if the person will succeed or fail. She conveyed that as teachers, negotiating multiple roles is inevitable. She went on to describe her complex professional, familial, and student related roles which she negotiates on a regular basis.

Kathryn identified “weather” as the metaphor that symbolized her identity and role negotiations. She emphasized that:

...weather is a complex system, like what we talked about before, you can pull things apart...you have you know lots of things that you can study, um, at lots of different levels, but ultimately, you really can’t predict where it’s going to go, and it’s like that with graduate studies too. As much as you look at your identities and you try to figure this out and that out and balance everything, you really don’t know where your learning is going to go, until...the only thing that you’re sure of is what you already know, but you’re never sure of what you’re going to know next (laughs)...it’s sorta like that with the weather, you know yesterday it was nice, but you know what? I am not so sure about this afternoon, and certainly not next week, or a month from now, you know I have some...I have a very general picture of where it’s going to go, but no specifics.... (Interview #3, pp. 8-9)

She suggests that negotiation is an intricate act and describes dissecting her roles, and her learning to look for trends. While Kathryn identified that you can make predictions, there is an element of uncertainty about both the future and the course that your roles and your
learning might take. She viewed there to be a pathway of possibilities. Although the short-term directions may be more evident, the long-term visions remain open to a range of possible outcomes.

Maria continued to use the same object of the apple to represent the negotiation of her multiple roles and identities. She explained that apples are authentic (each one is different). She was adamant that graduate studies has been instrumental in helping her negotiate her roles within all of her other spheres because in graduate studies she nurtures her "core," and in doing so, it also allows her to be the best that she can be for her students and their families.

Mia captures her identity and role negotiations as similar to "an actor saying their lines." She stated, "Each of my identities is a role that I perform and each has certain lines and characteristics that I must portray. My date book is sort of like a script that informs me of what lines come next" (Interview #3, p. 2). Her negotiations are carefully planned and orchestrated as she plays out what has been written for her in the contents of her date book. Yet, these negotiations were not always easy as she encountered obstacles along the way.

Ultimately, Cordelia, Kathryn, and Mia expressed that at different times, these identity and role negotiations served different purposes within the context of graduate studies. Kathryn indicated that during specific periods of the coursework phase, for her, the negotiation is predominantly about survival. She identified specific beginning, middle, and end points of the course as stages when survival becomes the predominant focus. She also described that negotiation involves finding your groove, and finding a way to work the course into all of the other things in your life that are happening at that
particular time. Alice indicated that her negotiations represented a progression, starting off as survival (her mere desire to make it through graduate studies) then, with the increased confidence she acquired, the negotiations moved into resistance as she ensured that her best interests were taken care of. Maria’s negotiations were largely driven to guarantee her own health and wellbeing; to survive by making certain that her needs were being met. She did not perceive the negotiation of her roles and identities to be about adaptation, rather, at times, it was about demonstrating resistance on multiple levels; resistance to peoples’ preconceptions of her, resistance to readings and beliefs that she disagreed with, and resistance to an elementary curriculum that she did not fully understand. Elizabeth identified both survival and adaptation as purposes for her ongoing identity and role negotiations within the university. She emphasized that survival and adaptation are important to her as a graduate student as well as a lecturer. She tried to find her place, although it is tricky because she is both a student and a lecturer. Her way to both survive and adapt was to ignore the politics and surround herself with positive people. Cordelia and Mia were adamant that their negotiations largely depended on the context of the situation. At times, their purpose was survival, while there would be other times when adaptation was the goal, and in other instances, the objective was resistance. These strategic negotiations were fundamental to their endurance through graduate studies, especially as they encountered barriers along the way.

Identifying Environmental Barriers that Impede the Negotiation of Identities and Roles

Participants encountered historical/societal, institutional, and personal barriers as they juggled their varied roles and identities. Some of the barriers they faced also crossed contexts.
**Historical/societal.** Cordelia identified “historical trauma” as a significant barrier for First Nations people, oftentimes preventing them from being heard by others and from taking control of their own lives. She indicated that at times, other people resist acknowledging her outlooks as they often depart from the mainstream view. Others fail to consider the “historical trauma” that has impacted First Nations people in negative ways. This has been frustrating for her. Cordelia felt that through education, she could better inform herself, and pass on knowledge to others, helping them to understand First Nations issues and perspectives. She was adamant that some people in her community have leaned on “historical trauma” as a crutch, taking on the role of victims. She felt that this has prevented them from setting goals and living productive lives.

Why are we using this as an excuse? Like let’s do something about it, like what are you going to do? Are you just going to sit here like a bump on a log and be another statistic like everyone wants you to be? Or like are you just going to go out there and make something of your life? (Interview #3, p. 12)

She advocated for taking action and ownership of one’s life and acknowledging the “historical trauma” that First Nations people experienced in the past, but not letting it impede one’s future existence. While this historical/societal barrier was prevalent only in Cordelia’s life, obstacles that crossed contexts were prevalent in all of the participants’ lives.

**Crossing contexts.** The six women described facing obstacles that crossed contexts in their lives including dealing with competing expectations and values, a changing world, attitudinal barriers, financial strain, and the limitations of time. These barriers. According to the women, many external factors complicate a person’s ability to
juggle numerous roles and identities at any given moment. Participants acknowledged the growing sources of expectations that influenced their lives including, but not limited to: society, family (spouses and children), friends, community, workplace (administrations, school boards, and parents), spiritual spheres, university (professors), and self-imposed expectations. At times these expectations were noted to constrain these women, while at other times, they encouraged them to reach their potential. Cordelia indicated that the expectations of others can be intimidating. Within the workplace, Maria expressed that people have already formed expectations of you based on your previous performance. She felt that it can be difficult to fulfill these expectations every time. However, as Alice stated, people in vulnerable positions, such as herself (i.e., in the midst of seeking full-time employment), feel pressure to meet or surpass these expectations, caring about others’ perceptions of them, and concerned about securing a steady position. Mia identified that she often felt a burden to achieve the expectations that others set for her. This was especially true in the university setting where she communicated that, “...other people expect not...not mediocrity from me, but something that shows potential” (Interview #3, p. 8). In her mind, this created very high standards that she had to live up to. Ultimately, Maria realized that individuals need to adapt to the many expectations that others have of them. She found herself continuously modifying her behaviour accordingly, but felt that it was unfeasible to forever be “in role.” Mia admitted that she was forced to juggle many sources of expectations, combined with her own perception of others’ expectations, as well as her own high expectations for herself. The negotiation of these diverse expectations is a barrier which crosses contexts from home life, school life, work life, and beyond. Contrasting values was perceived as another
barrier that spanned settings.

Kathryn and Maria emphasized the difficulties that arise when they come in contact with competing sets of values that may clash with their own value systems. It can result in frustration and a range of complex emotions for these women. Elizabeth and Mia shared this experience, indicating that while they valued motherhood, they perceived society to devalue this role, which aggravated them. Similarly, Maria believed that society places more worth on one’s professional role rather than their other roles. Mia perceived consumerist values as being promoted by society, resulting in a competitive mentality where people believe they must keep up with their neighbours, which is frustrating to her. Maria spoke of “school as organizations,” and expressed that they valued teamwork, compliance, and productivity. This was a source of tension for her because some of these values directly contradicted her own ideals. She coped with this obstacle by working on her graduate degree which gave her the opportunity to explore these issues with like-minded people, many of which share similar values. Mia expressed her consciousness of institutional values, such as the importance of being published. She tried to adhere to these values in order to succeed in the academic environment. It is clear that the imposition of value sets that differ from those of the participants’ are bound to complicate their identity and role negotiations.

Another barrier identified by the six graduate students was change. In some instances, changes represented possibilities and opportunities, while in other instances, changes represented threats, negative emotions and renegotiations of their previous understandings. Alice conveyed her thoughts about change and indicated that there are two types; those that she called “self-imposed” (or voluntary), versus those that she
identified as “externally imposed” (or forced). She said that responses to change differ according to the type of change she is dealing with. For her, the former evokes predominantly negative reactions (especially at the onset of the change), while the latter evokes more receptive or positive reactions. Dealing with change often involves pondering large questions and reexamining your beliefs.

Ultimately, Cordelia and Elizabeth felt that change is inevitable. Cordelia believed that the best course of action is to accept it, and get accustomed to it. Cordelia admits that new foci and initiatives are always emerging in education. Both Cordelia and Alice recognized that teaching and change go hand in hand, making flexibility and adaptability even more important for teachers. For example, Elizabeth indicated that teachers must adapt as society changes around them. She acknowledged that society has become more complex over the years and, as such, her roles as a teacher have become more diversified. She described this transformation as follows:

…but I now really understand that I have to have open channels to being a psychiatrist, a social worker, a mum, a big sister, um…as far as a teacher, I used to have maybe two ways of defining myself and you know, that was someone who conveyed knowledge and then somebody who was personally interested in children. Well now it’s far more diverse because of the times. So, when social issues changed, I also changed in my perception of my identities. (Interview #1, p. 3)

Although changes in roles and identities transpire, the teachers shared a predominant feeling, indicating that when change ensues, the core constructs of their educational philosophies usually remain the same; however, they revisit and revise them as needed.
Another obstacle that crossed contexts involved encountering challenging attitudes. Participants listed attitudinal barriers as interfering with their identity explorations and negotiations. Cordelia indicated that she has been confronted with challenges on account of peoples’ attitudes or their lack of knowledge about First Nations people. She expressed being very cognizant of her minority status, across all spheres in her life. Currently, she is the only First Nations person on staff at the school where she works, she is a minority in the graduate classroom, and she has presented at conferences to non-aboriginal audiences. Cordelia recognizes that these experiences have made her feel like an outsider at times. However, she turns them into positive encounters by recognizing that she has the opportunity to educate others and perhaps transform their attitudes and correct misconceptions that they might have held.

Kathryn was very connected to her spirituality. She acknowledged that others do not share her passion with respect to faith. This can present an attitudinal obstacle, especially in discussions with other people. Her method of dealing with this was to refer to more socially acceptable themes, which she felt encompassed dimensions of spirituality. She explained,

...and I believe...very strongly in...equality, and, and principals, and so I think friendship and learning...take into account, spiritual-ness, spirituality, but without some of the negative connotations...or the baggage that goes along with...but what faith are you? (Interview #2, p. 10)

Mia identified experiencing judgements from others who are not academically oriented. Although it did not stop her from pursuing graduate studies, she did express frustration at their disapproval or lack of understanding. Maria indicated that she faced
attitudinal challenges from others across educational settings (i.e., elementary schools and university). She described the negative feedback she received from a small group of graduate students as well as elementary school employees, on account of her accent and her unique name. She noted that she encountered a barrier in one of her classes, ultimately stunting her own communication on account of the uninviting climate created by some peers. She shared her thoughts with respect to both of these incidents, “…we have to respect each others’ names and each others’ accents and all that stuff. If you have an accent it doesn’t necessarily mean you are….you are stupid” (Maria, Interview #4, p. 17).

Multiple participants noted their own attitudes as barriers that create internal obstacles. Cordelia and Mia referred to instances where they have engaged in negative self-talk, questioned their competence, and feared being rejected. However, they remain passionate about learning and making a contribution and are working through these unconstructive thoughts. Elizabeth highlighted her negative beliefs regarding her age, and her concern over how she is perceived by others, which ultimately can impede her learning and her contributions in the graduate classroom. Kathryn indicated that sometimes her own attitudes and perceptions create roadblocks that she has to overcome. She stated, “…there can sometimes be an internal pressure…You know, like I am a bad person if I renegotiate my…time line?” (Interview #4, p. 28). On the other hand, Alice questioned her own capability to make a difference amidst external demands. Many of these self-induced states of questioning, negativity, and fear create added barriers that these women must face.

Another barrier that impeded five women across the many contexts in their lives
was that of financial constraints. Both Cordelia and Mia recognized that graduate students are continuously making financial sacrifices. Cordelia indicated that studying full-time may mean giving up a stable income and, perhaps, cutting back on expensive hobbies or activities. This has meant limiting the number of ski trips that she can take. On numerous occasions, Mia emphatically stated, “I’m broke.” Alice noted the financial constraints she experiences working as a supply teacher. Both she and Cordelia expressed dissatisfaction with being dependent upon their parents for some financial support. Even though Maria works full-time, she still stated, “I think teachers are not paid enough” (Interview #2, p. 8). Elizabeth acknowledged the financial struggle she has had over the years, trying to pay off debts incurred by her late husband, and maintain a house, pay student fees, while still attempting to live comfortably. She knows that financial constraints will continue long into her retirement years. Financial constraints are a major source of stress, impeding on basic survival, and, of course, complicating identity and role negotiations, as these participants are forced to make difficult decisions and cutbacks.

The final obstacle that crossed contexts was limited time. Within their conversations, all of the participants spoke of time. Many felt that it constrained the number of things that they can accomplish in a given day. Mia noted that multiple demands were continuously competing for her time, while Maria questioned the allocation of time spent in her various roles and wondered if it was adequate. Cordelia was conscious of the sacrificed time that was spent in long-distance commutes.

Maria commented on the need to find valuable uses of her time, which would give her direction and stimulation. For instance, she was already anticipating the completion
of her M.Ed. studies and wondered what subsequent activity she would pursue to occupy her time. However, despite referring to time throughout her discussions, she expressed a contradictory perspective to many of the other participants, indicating “Time is not a big issue. I always say, people say, ‘how do you balance your time?’ Time is not, it’s how you really balance your roles and how you stretch yourself in so many different ways” (Maria, Interview #2, p. 13). For her, it was more about creatively negotiating the demands, responsibilities, and roles; extending herself in novel ways.

*Encountering Institutional Barriers in Educational Settings*

Participants identified institutional barriers across educational settings, from their work environments to their learning environments (i.e., elementary schools, high schools, and universities). The four predominant challenges and tensions that they encountered included: the growing commercialization of education, the increased politics in education, the similarly isolating socialization processes that new teachers and graduate students face, and the numerous environmental barriers within higher education that impede on identity exploration.

*The growing commercialization of education.* Three of the participants commented that a business model is dominating our systems of education. Kathryn expressed frustration with school and board level decisions that focus on money matters rather than on the life and success of the student. She said, “It infuriates me that...money becomes the bottom line, when...it should be people...” (Interview #2, p. 19). She felt that it is impossible to put a dollar value on the empowerment and transformation of a child’s life and his or her future. She was adamantly opposed to making these important kinds of decisions by merely considering expenditures, cost-cutting solutions, and
financial implications. Maria briefly discussed the growing commercialization of education at the postsecondary level. She contrasted her university with a larger institution, and identified the bigger institution as more commercialized and less people-centered. However, two of the other participants might have disagreed with Maria’s perceptions. Elizabeth noted that from an instructor’s point of view, she is conscious of her students as customers and, as such, strives to offer high quality lectures that demonstrate her expertise and knowledge of the subject matter. Kathryn acknowledged this same sentiment, however, from the student’s perspective. Both she and Elizabeth noted that each graduate course costs money, and money is a motivator. Even if a student decides later on that the course does not particularly appeal to him or her, she felt that as a paying customer, the student might be compelled to attend and to listen, but might ultimately feel dissatisfied, as though they did not get their money’s worth. Contr astingly, both Kathryn and Elizabeth spoke of the profit-driven nature of the university, and how this desire to maximize revenues comes at a cost, which is the dehumanization of the student. Kathryn described an instance when she had not realized that the institution had switched its billing system and, as a result, she had accidentally missed a deadline for paying student fees. She recalled the unpleasant e-mail she received from the institution informing her that her unpaid bill would be sent to a collections agency. Kathryn could not believe that such drastic action would be taken over a small amount of money ($100). Similarly, Elizabeth indicated that the university perceives students as numbers rather than as individuals and described how it fails to make exceptions to policies for individual student cases. She noted her desire to take time off from graduate studies on account of health reasons, and how the institution did not appear to be willing to make an
exception to wave inactive term fees for her special situation. She found this frustrating and felt that the university should recognize her as a person first, before a consumer, and that it should show compassion for special circumstances, conveying the message that it genuinely cares about graduate students’ identities, as well as their health and well-being, more than their money. She wished she had received more support and encouragement to take a break from graduate studies. Kathryn had a similar perception of the institution, and noted that it would bring her a greater peace of mind if she knew that the university would embrace the idea of her taking a hiatus if she deemed it to be necessary. The increasing commercialization of education impacts on these teachers and graduate students in predominantly negative ways, making it difficult for them to successfully negotiate their multiple identities and roles. Another significant institutional barrier is the growing political landscape in education.

_The increased politics in education._ On numerous occasions, participants discussed politics within education, and the challenges that politics posed for them as teachers and as graduate students. It was a theme that all six participants referred to in direct and indirect ways. Alice noted that one cannot escape politics. Maria was very conscious of government and politics, and its influence on education, having come from a country ruled under a Communist Regime. She noted that in her country of origin, many people attempted to suppress her from achieving her goals, and perpetuated a feeling of hopelessness; however, she learned quickly to avoid listening to the negative messages, and to work hard to achieve her ambitions. Maria identified that organizations, “They just want followers. They don’t want thinkers” (Interview #2, p. 18). Kathryn noted that, generally, a large portion of the population is content with following. Maria is not one of
those individuals. This sometimes causes her to be labelled as an “outsider,” as she is always willing to speak her mind.

Maria described the increasing level of politics that are prevalent within the school where she works, and within the education system in general. For instance, she queries others, and questions the system and the curriculum that are presently in place. She refuses to be an obedient worker, who performs tasks without truly understanding why certain things are the way they are. However, she conveyed that people (i.e., co-workers, administrators, etc.) react negatively when she tries to interrogate these issues. She struggles to understand the educational system better, before she can accept the decisions that are being made. In order to do this, she asks the difficult questions, however, no one seems interested or prepared to answer them. She has been grappling with this as a teacher, working within the system, but ultimately recognizes that she cannot control or transform certain systems or organizations. Instead, she focuses on what she does have control over, which includes her own attitude and actions, and has decided that she will continue to search out answers to these questions on her own.

Maria also noted the politics that exist in reproducing systems of hierarchies within the school. She explained that kindergarten teachers are perceived to hold extremely low-level status, according to other teachers within her school. She has been frustrated with others’ perceptions of her role as “less significant” than theirs. Maria spoke about being excluded from a professional development workshop on account of the perception that Kindergarten teachers did not need that type of professional development, since they did not really do much in the way of “real” teaching. She talked about her infuriation with these types of mentalities. Maria indicated that although she has taught
other grades before, she has never been as connected to or as passionate about her identity as a kindergarten teacher, likely because she sees herself as an advocate, trying to fight against the “injustices” that she has experienced while teaching this grade level.

Maria has come to identify the educational institution as a “Big Brother,” increasingly political and with its own agenda. She expressed her desire to maintain a degree of personal privacy at work, deliberately withholding information about herself and parts of her identities and roles, as she feels it is in her best interest not to give out information that may compromise her position, pigeonhole her, threaten her job security, or be used against her later on. At times, she expressed feeling isolated, on account of her work role and on account of her inquisitive nature. She identified that one of the ways she has overcome this barrier has been to locate authors whom she can relate to, and connect with what they say. She expressed taking comfort in realizing that she is not alone in her experiences and feelings.

Three of the participants made direct references to specific governments or branches of governments and their negative impacts on the education systems at that time. Both Elizabeth and Maria referred to the challenges they encountered as teachers during the run of Mike Harris’ government. Maria spoke about the difficulty she had in finding a full-time position. “I graduated in the worst possible time when Mike Harris was on, and they froze all supply lists” (Interview #1, p. 4). This was frustrating for her, having gone through the process of recertification as a newly identified “Ontario” teacher, eager to resume work that she loved, and being unable to do so. Elizabeth identified this same period as a tumultuous one, although she was able to remain in touch with herself, staying secure in her beliefs about teaching and education. Cordelia
described inadequate funding as a major challenge that First Nations schools encounter. She outlined the predicament as follows “…because First Nations schools, their funding comes from Indian Affairs, we get like uh… a quarter of what regular school boards get per student to operate” (Interview #1, p. 3). She indicated that this leaves teachers grossly underpaid, schools under-resourced, and results in an unequal situation, where First Nations teachers are unable to adequately do their job.

Two participants identified politics within higher education as a barrier which impedes upon their identity and role negotiations. Mia indicated that she is conscious of the multiple demands placed on professors from the administration. As such, she often feels badly for interrupting them and taking up their time. The second issue related to politics involved systems of hierarchies, which Elizabeth had direct experience with. She noted that as a lecturer, she was treated differently by colleagues than tenure-track professors were. She was made to feel inferior, and others were sure to point out her place, occupying the lowest level of the hierarchy. Another strike held against her was that she did not have a doctoral degree. She conveyed that even though she had a wealth of professional experience and extensive educational background (including rich professional development), in the university setting, this knowledge and expertise was not valued in the same way that it was within the high school system. Being made to feel like an outsider has been difficult for Elizabeth to deal with, although she tries her best to avoid getting caught up in university politics. The politics in elementary education and university education are remarkably similar. Maria (as a kindergarten teacher) and Elizabeth (as a part-time lecturer) actually faced the same sorts of hardships, judgements, and labels on account of their perceived low-level status within the educational
institutions where they worked. Clearly, politics in education have impacted these educators and graduate students in adverse ways, and have made it challenging for them to negotiate their many roles and identities. Like politics, isolating initiation processes have created hardships for these participants.

_The socialization of new teachers and graduate students: An isolating experience._

Three participants reflected on overcoming obstacles with respect to the socialization process they experienced either as new teachers or as graduate students. Cordelia and Alice indicated the obstacles they experienced as new teachers. Cordelia, in particular, recalled her first year of teaching, where she was given an extremely difficult assignment, placed in one of the most challenging classes mid-year, with no time to prepare, no resources, and extremely low pay. She explained how she was hired on short notice to replace the previous teacher who could not handle the class, and left the teaching profession entirely, taking all of the long-range plans with her. She indicated that this class presented her with a host of challenges. As a novice, this first experience was all about surviving, and was definitely "trial by fire."

Alice was in the early years of her teaching career, and expressed her mounting frustration with the profession. She indicated that her initial "optimism" has faded, and growing "disillusionment" has set in. She is frustrated with the restrictions imposed upon teachers. Furthermore, Alice indicated that her idealistic notions have been replaced with awareness of the marked challenges that teachers face with respect to meeting the needs of children from diverse backgrounds, interacting with all types of parents (from those who are highly involved, to those who are uninvolved), being careful to make a good impression on administrators, and negotiating the multitude of curriculum expectations.
Mia spoke about the obstacles with respect to socialization that new graduate students may experience, especially those who are studying on a part-time basis, such as herself. She identified that students must take ownership of their own graduate school experience and actively seek out opportunities for socialization. Her perception was that socialization into the world of graduate studies would be more of a challenge for part-time students as they are removed from the university on a daily basis. She indicated that she was able to create these opportunities for herself, by applying to present at conferences, and applying for teaching assistantships; however, she did this based on her own interests and without guidance from others, but not right away. It was a gradual process. Mia found that once she got her foot in the door, more opportunities to get involved in the academic culture began presenting themselves to her. Despite the initial obstacles, she indicated that she has learned a great deal from these experiences, such as the importance of making connections and identifying your own learning style, as well as the value of watching other presenters and learning from them. In retrospect, she would have appreciated more encouragement from others to get involved and experience academia earlier on in her graduate studies program. Kathryn also indicated that attending conferences is a valuable experience. However, she believed the classroom to be the space where academic socialization occurs. She felt that by engaging in dialogue, reading scholarly articles, and writing term papers, she was being socialized into the world of academia. She briefly mentioned receiving encouragement to submit a manuscript for publication, which she followed through on; however, the manuscript was rejected. She expressed the need for more dialogue surrounding writing for specific audiences, and learning about the types of “forums” that exist, which students can
consider submitting papers to. She even recommended that a useful course assignment would involve preparing and sending a manuscript to second or third tier forums (perhaps magazines) as an introduction to the process involved in publishing a paper. A majority of the participants did not speak to these types of experiences, indicating that this kind of socialization was not a priority for them on account of different factors, such as age, and the negotiation of other demands and roles, including that of full-time and part-time employment.

*Environmental barriers within higher education.* All six participants identified various environmental barriers that they have encountered within graduate studies. These barriers fall into the following four categories: uninviting atmosphere, environmental deficiencies, programmatic constraints, and systemic barriers. Most of the participants commented on particular aspects of the institutional and classroom atmospheres which were uninviting, and had the potential to impede upon their learning and their identity explorations. Alice described being discouraged by multiple individuals within the institution from applying to the master’s program because of her lack of full-time teaching experience. She recalled these comments as uninviting and negative incidents, which caused her to question herself and her preparedness for graduate studies.

Five of the participants commented on barriers within the graduate classes. Cordelia and Kathryn indicated that when the size of the graduate class becomes very large, it presents challenges to students’ learning. Kathryn stated, “...the larger the class, the more difficult it is to feel that your individuality matters” (Interview #4, p. 27). Cordelia also acknowledged that some of the classrooms themselves have been uninviting, with their dark ambiance and their lack of windows, which are not conducive
to learning. Kathryn noted that at times there has been a disconnect between some professors' beliefs (philosophies) and their practices. For example, while they claim to support student-centred learning, their teaching style of lecturing in front of the class would indicate otherwise. She highlighted her own frustration as a learner when professors recognize that they are modeling bad practice; yet, they do not make an effort to change their approach. Kathryn understood that it is difficult to find a balance between transmission approaches and constructivist approaches, but felt that professors in education should be setting an example for their graduate students. Another uninviting practice she was subjected to in one of her courses was forced collaboration, which she felt was inauthentic and disingenuous. Learning and exploring her identities was difficult under these contrived conditions.

Alice noted an instance when she had a personality conflict with a professor that impeded her learning. She indicated that it eventually turned her off of a subject area that she had previously enjoyed. She expressed that while both parties attempted to work on their relationship, the situation did not improve. Maria and Elizabeth also recounted negative instances in particular classrooms. Maria's experience involved dealing with a professor who was very inflexible. According to her, this person did not value students' opinions and belittled them. Maria met with the individual privately and asked for clarity and feedback on a number of issues, which ultimately helped her cope with the situation. Elizabeth described a class environment where she said she was: "discounted," "embarrassed," "insulted," "demeaned," "bullied," "degraded," and "intimidated" by a professor. She said that she used this negative situation as a learning experience, realizing "what not to do" to inhibit students' learning. She noted that the situation opened her eyes
to some of the politics that transpire in higher education. Interestingly, both experiences were with temporary faculty. Kathryn and Elizabeth also expressed frustration when course readings were convoluted and challenging to make sense of.

Four of the participants identified environmental deficiencies which created barriers including lack of various kinds of knowledge and space. Cordelia expressed difficulty finding a mentor or supervisor that had extensive knowledge within her area of interest which meant that she was unable to pursue doctoral studies at that institution. Instead, she had to go elsewhere, to find a more appropriate supervisor. Cordelia also identified a lack of courses in the specific area that she intended to study.

...and so you know, that’s definitely been a hurdle because the things that I could have used the expertise in, you know, I’ve had to figure out for myself...or like go to my mom, or really like sit down and hash it out with my advisor....

(Interview #3, pp. 21-22)

Instead, she had to take courses in other areas and try to connect them to her research focus. She also expressed frustration with the Research Ethics Board and their lack of familiarity with First Nations protocol and First Nations ethics. She indicated how this has led to conflicts, as they had asked her to do something that did not align with First Nations ethical procedures.

Participants noted their own lack of knowledge as a barrier. Kathryn expressed lack of clarity over protocol for finding and selecting an advisor. This was worrisome to her. Multiple participants noted that they did not know what types of supports were accessible to them as graduate students. They had heard about counselling services, but beyond that, they knew very little. Cordelia also highlighted that she lacked knowledge of
other students' research interests within the faculty, and that it would be useful to share this information so that students could connect with each other based on shared interests, or to exchange resources. Along these lines, she indicated that it is challenging to keep in contact with students beyond the classroom because of a lack of a network that facilitates lasting connections. Finally, Mia indicated that barriers ensue when professors are not understanding of familial situations. This can cause conflict and strain for graduate students who have families. Alice indicated that in a particular course, she failed to receive timely feedback that was instrumental to subsequent course assignment. As a result, succeeding in the course became difficult.

Barriers surrounding space are also a growing concern, as expressed by both Cordelia and Mia. They emphasized the lack of space for lounging and for studying, which makes it difficult to be productive and also to relax on campus. Alice noted that noisy spaces are barriers to her learning. Mia also mentioned the limited available spots and limited hours of day care facilities, which creates a concern with finding accessible childcare that coincides with the late time of many of the evening classes. These notable deficiencies in different kinds of knowledge and space make it difficult for these graduate students to negotiate their identities and roles, and also meet their learning needs.

Programmatic constraints create additional environmental barriers for graduate students, as noted by four of the participants. Cordelia identified the navigational challenge that exists with respect to locating faculty members on campus. She said that she finds herself running all over campus to meet with different professors from the department who are located at opposite ends of the campus. Since the department no longer resides in the same location, she needs to factor in travel time when scheduling
meetings, just to go back and forth from one location to the other. Alice mentioned travel, but in another context. She noted that the time she spends commuting on the road is a barrier that prevents her from doing other things (i.e., studying). Mia mentioned that M.Ed. students can experience isolation when they have finished the coursework stage of their program, as the remainder of the work is done independently, with assistance from their advisor. Similarly, she emphasized that working on the thesis or project is an all-consuming task; yet, it is only credited as the equivalent of one or two courses, which does not reflect the amount of work that a student puts into it. She indicated that even though she is classified as a part-time student, it still feels like another full-time job.

Kathryn critiqued the M.Ed. grading system. She was frustrated when told that certain marks are not given out, and was angered that a professor had to make a case for giving her an extremely high grade. She felt that this practice does not make sense, and deters graduate students who feel as though exemplary grades are virtually unattainable. In her mind, this should not be the case and all grades, no matter how high they are, should be possible for students to obtain.

Multiple students recognized scheduling challenges that arise when courses get cancelled due to low enrolment, or when holidays do not align with other calendars in operation (i.e., March Break versus Reading Week). Mia, for instance, referred to the challenge in negotiating conflicting calendars. She indicated that universities have a February break, while her children have a March break, and that oftentimes, most professors will take these different schedules into consideration, however, sometimes it means having to come up with solutions on your own. Kathryn recognizes that some flexibility could be negotiated into courses allowing for students to take much needed
breaks according to their own schedules in their lives. Kathryn also noted the barrier that exists with respect to the duration of the courses. She wondered, what happens if a person does not learn optimally at that particular rate of speed?

Cordelia encountered an obstacle when she was not permitted to take courses within another department. It was very frustrating to her as the course would have aligned with her own research interests and needs. She also noted that there is a lack of support systems at the university’s other satellite campuses. She found one of them to be isolating and encountered barriers with respect to parking and crowdedness. The milieu had a negative impact on her and she has since opted not to study in this learning environment anymore. Clearly, these programmatic constraints restrict students from negotiating their identities, roles, and their learning.

A few participants listed various systemic barriers that impede their learning and identity negotiations. Maria perceived there to be road blocks in the realm of scholarly publishing. She commented that it is challenging to have a paper or book accepted for publication. She stated, “But it’s also, it’s not easy to publish, because they will publish only what other people want to hear” (Interview #2, p. 27). Therefore, she felt that if someone produces a piece that is deemed by those in positions of power as contrary to the desired message that they wish to market, or contrary to their perception of the popular opinion, then perhaps the piece may be rejected for publication.

The other participants mentioned systemic roadblocks that emerged when their various identities intersect. Kathryn articulated the challenges she experiences when trying to navigate the university’s e-mail system. She said it is unfamiliar, cumbersome, and difficult to remember her username. She indicated that the username does not reflect
students' changing identities (i.e., surname changes) and is not user-friendly. She also gave the example of the challenges she faces by being both an instructor and a student at the same university. She indicated that the institution tries to keep those two identities separate, even insisting that she use different e-mail accounts for each; however, she conveyed the message that separating identities is not easy to do in reality.

Three participants recognized communication barriers on campus. Cordelia expressed obstacles communicating with the Graduate Student Association regarding her health plan. She found that the Association was not as accessible or responsive as she had hoped. Maria noted that sometimes the university does not maximize their potential to reach all students, and ensure that they are connected. Alice noted that there can be barriers in communication between students and their advisors, especially if they are not meeting or corresponding on a regular basis.

Five participants also discussed personal barriers that they have encountered, including seasonal difficulties, as well as moments of tension which have added strain to the exploration and negotiation of their identities and roles. Cordelia referred to her love of summer, and her dislike for winter. She finds it challenging during winter months, especially when it is more difficult to be outdoors, and to engage in her common methods of relaxation, such as nature walks and canoeing. She identified the importance of hearing animals and being in natural light. She described her strategies for dealing with winter which included trying to find other outdoor activities that she can do. However, she expressed that the weather does not always cooperate and may force her to remain indoors.

Moments of tension have arisen for these participants when they have
encountered challenges that have made it difficult for them to negotiate their roles and identities within graduate school and beyond. Alice described the mental negotiation of her roles and identities that transpires in her mind, and the roadblock she encounters when speaking with others who may not understand or wish to hear about some of her identities and roles, and the tensions she encounters between them. Similarly, Mia indicated the tension that can be experienced in the graduate classroom if a majority of her classmates do not share the role of mother. In these instances, it becomes difficult to relate to each others’ experiences. When multiple demands collide, Mia experiences strain. She shared an example indicating that she was unable to take a course that interested her on account of the multiple commitments and time conflicts that arose. Moments of uneasiness also surfaced for Kathryn and Cordelia when the boundaries between their different roles became blurred. Both of them identified intersections between school and work. Cordelia also indicated overlap between what she does at school and what she does in her community; yet, she expressed challenges in negotiating some of her roles across contexts (i.e., on and off the reserve) because they are so different. This illustrates the complex nature of identity and role negotiations that these participants experience in their lives. Three of the participants indicated that these kinds of tensions can have negative effects. At times, Alice deals with “sleepless nights,” while Maria battles “tiredness” and susceptibility to “illness,” and Kathryn feels “internally conflicted.” Although there are impediments within the environment, there are also facilitators that enable graduate students’ identity and role negotiations.

Environmental Conditions that Facilitate the Negotiation of Identities and Roles

Participants identified conditions within and outside of the university that
facilitated the negotiation of their different identities and roles. First, they recognized the positive atmosphere within their Faculty, Department, and Program. Cordelia and Mia labelled them as invitational environments. Cordelia said they exhibited “openness,” which she acknowledged as necessary for graduate students to be successful. She also described them as “welcoming,” “friendly,” and “laid back.” Both Cordelia and Mia appreciated the “supportive rather than competitive” climate that they encountered. Cordelia indicated that there was always a willingness to help one another, and receptiveness, as classmates and professors, were eager to listen, learn from each other, and they valued personal experiences of others. Kathryn noted similar positive characteristics. Mia felt that students were made a priority, as professors would give them their undivided attention.

Kathryn recognized other optimal environmental conditions including professors’ genuine interests in meeting with their students off-campus and sharing in activities together. She explained that oftentimes in those instances discussions center around exchanging tips, and negotiation of roles or identities, enabling human connections to be made. Flexibility in assignments, due dates, and course options (i.e., Internship, Independent Study) were viewed favourably by Kathryn. All of these features of the environment were invitational and validated students multiple identities and roles.

Mia and Alice appreciated the diversity of the student body. They indicated that it brought richness to the classroom and to their learning experiences. Cordelia compared undergraduate studies to graduate studies, and said that one of the facilitators relates to size (i.e., size of graduate programs and size of graduate classes). She felt that in graduate school, it was easier to be heard, less intimidating, and she felt less of a number, and
more of an individual. Similarly, Maria valued the accessibility of the institution and the personal connection which it offered students. She indicated that when she calls the university, she is able to speak with real people rather than automated messages and recognized this to be a major advantage that she noted did not happen at another larger institution she had considered applying to. She found her current university to be very accessible throughout the entire application and inquiry process, which eased her concerns and facilitated her transition into graduate studies.

Cordelia and Mia acknowledged the benefits of providing graduate students with opportunities to network and make contacts. They recognized that this could be made possible in a variety of ways including face-to-face opportunities, such as conferences, graduate student associations, activities and workshops, or distance opportunities, such as the creation of on-line forums or communities. Mia also recognized the important role of professors who can facilitate group interactions and discussions. She welcomed professors who challenged her, encouraged reflection, and invited her to consider different perspectives, all of which allowed for new self-discoveries and identities to emerge.

Mia also highlighted two external environmental conditions which facilitated the exploration and negotiation of her multiple roles and identities. First, she mentioned that having an employer who is flexible and encouraging of professional development would assist this process. Second, a society that values learning and education and demonstrates this value to its citizens by supporting them in various ways (i.e., with financial assistance, childcare assistance, etc.) as they continue their education. The participants identified all of these internal and external environmental conditions as helping to ease
the identity and role negotiation process for graduate students. Institutions and graduate programs should assess their institutional environments on a regular basis, looking for ways to eliminate existing barriers, and ways to enhance inviting features which help graduate students negotiate their multiple roles and identities with greater ease.

Personal, Professional, and Educational Implications

The strategies outlined below have emerged from suggestions offered by the six participants in this study (including strategies that they use in their own lives, as well as their perceptions of strategies that might be useful for others). Originally, the research question was framed with the intent of identifying strategies that would help graduate students explore their identities inside and outside of the classroom; however, the suggestions that they offered were diverse and extended beyond exploration to include ways of negotiating, coping, and validating their identities and the identities of others.

Personal Strategies That Cross Contexts

Participants pinpointed countless approaches that they integrated into their daily living to help them explore, negotiate, cope with, and validate their identities and roles. The first set of strategies relates to their attitudes and skills.

Attitudes. Maria identified the need to maintain personal integrity, ensuring that individuals remain true to themselves, and act in accordance with their own beliefs about who they are. She felt that this consistency between one’s internal perceptions and external actions is essential to the successful negotiation of one’s multifaceted identities. Elizabeth noted the importance of keeping one’s “ego” in line, and being “humble.” Maria expressed the value of having patience and a positive attitude. Four participants spoke about the benefits of practicing gratitude everyday, expressing thanks for their
lives, opportunities, families, amenities, and good fortune. Three participants indicated that humour has helped them through many situations. Maria and Elizabeth recognized the need for flexibility and openness which enables successful navigation across multiple roles. Maria also lists motivation as central in helping people feel connected to and positive about the roles that they take on.

Another strategy that spanned contexts was to focus on what you can control, which enabled participants to feel like they were taking ownership of their lives. Cordelia recognized the control she had over her routines, actions, decisions, goal setting, and the realization of her goals. Both Kathryn and Alice identified having control over their reactions. Elizabeth felt that she could ensure that she had a clear understanding of her “obligations” across settings. Kathryn also saw herself as in control of her time management, work ethic, and herself.

**Skills.** Some of the skills that Elizabeth deemed helpful included active listening and open communication. Four participants highlighted the need for organization across their roles. Kathryn stated that separating big tasks into smaller more manageable units, which a person can more realistically accomplish within a given day, prevents the individual from feeling overwhelmed. She said “at a certain point you get past the critical mass where I have, oh! I have less to do than I’ve already done so…” (Interview #2, p. 7).

*Maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual health.* Identity and role negotiations were facilitated by ensuring that participants remained physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy. Elizabeth maintained physical health by obtaining plenty of rest, drinking an abundance of water, avoiding junk food, and eating healthy snacks when
doing school work. Mia also noted that adequate sleep was critical to her successfully negotiating her daily life. During stressful times, participants credited certain activities as helping them reduce their stress levels and achieve a state of relaxation. Cordelia stayed mentally healthy (or "sane") by maintaining a close relationship with nature, which includes being outdoors and boating. Elizabeth indicated that storytelling helped her to maintain her sanity. She also recognized the value in trying something new and teaching yourself a novel skill. Moreover, she has found gardening outdoors and working with her hands to be very therapeutic in her own life. Four of the participants indicated how much they appreciated their pets and how they have been wonderful sources of support (especially when it comes to relieving their stress). Three participants expressed that music played an important role in their lives, oftentimes helping them achieve a state of relaxation. Elizabeth identified the benefits of yoga and meditation to her own mental functioning and peace of mind. She also described her strategy of living in the moment as helping her to concentrate on being present and alert, and letting go of past or future concerns.

A couple of the participants described their need to experience a complete state of relaxation, involving lounging and activities that did not require any thinking. Maria noted that these kinds of activities included "watching movies," "eating junk food," going for a walk, and playing. She and Alice also stated that sometimes they felt the need to "do nothing." Elizabeth indicated professional and personal trips as helping her gain some much needed down time to regroup from a chaotic home life. She described her trips out East as her way of leaving behind the stresses associated with the fast-paced Ontarian lifestyle. Journaling also helped Elizabeth explore her self and her thoughts.
Engaging in self-reflection was essential to Maria, helping her think about her own roles and identities in different ways. The quiet time commuting in her car provided Alice with the opportunity to mentally work through issues that had been weighing on her mind. Maria noted that reading was both relaxing and mentally stimulating for her, giving her enjoyment as well as enabling her to make connections between the stories and her own experiences.

A number of participants mentioned the importance of spiritual wholeness and fulfillment in their lives. Three specifically referenced their religious faith or their sense of spirituality as an important part of who they are. Mia acknowledged following Buddhist faith, Kathryn acknowledged being Christian, and Elizabeth acknowledged her integration of both Buddhism and Catholicism. Elizabeth’s faith and spirituality helped her remain calm, providing her with guidance and direction in her life. She indicated that one of her strategies is to think of good intentions at the start of each day, to orient herself on a positive path. Kathryn indicated that one of her main priorities is keeping a strong “relationship with God.” She recognized this enriching relationship as grounding her and nurturing her spirit. She did express a strong desire to bridge her spiritual role with some of her other roles across the contexts in her life. She felt that doing so might provide her with more contentment. With their spiritual needs fulfilled, these women felt that they are better able to live satisfied lives and optimally negotiate some of their identities and roles.

Balance and harmony. Participants also discussed strategies for maintaining faith and harmony in their lives that were not affiliated with religion. Cordelia spoke about her need for balance and harmony, which she learned from the teachings of her Haudenosaunee culture. She felt that these teachings were spiritual in nature; however,
they were not necessarily the same as religion. Maria conveyed her own strategy, her quest for harmony, and her need to maintain a state of equilibrium in her life, wanting everything to be balanced. Likewise, Elizabeth desired for all of her roles and identities to be in a state of balance. She achieved this, in part, by keeping in regular contact with her support systems and her family, which ultimately nurtures her soul and provides her with emotional fulfillment. Similarly, she surrounds herself with optimistic and encouraging individuals, recognizes her own abilities and, like Mia, maintains faith in people and in humanity.

*Prioritization.* Another strategy that all of the participants made use of in their daily lives was prioritization. Three of the participants talked about the importance of prioritizing. Two of them noted that part of this strategy involved the ability to make quick decisions when necessary, which they were able to do by knowing what was most important to them. The other individual indicated that it meant realizing her limits and knowing when to say no, so that she was guided by her priorities and could avoid over extending herself. Four of the women indicated that they compartmentalize their different roles, tasks, or even identities. This was a strategy that helped Kathryn to stay productive, as she redirected her concentration to the task of most importance. Alice described the compartmentalizing as follows: “...I’ve tended to drop one aspect of my life for another” (Interview #1, p. 5). She explained how the aspect most frequently dropped tended to be her role as a student, especially when work or home demands arose. She stated that with respect to her student role, “I kind of put that one aside conveniently” (Interview #2, p. 15). This tended to be a coping strategy that she employed as a way of managing the most pressing demands. Maria and Elizabeth also identified
compartmentalizing their multiple roles, and then drawing on them when needed. Although Elizabeth and others attempted to separate multiple roles and even different dimensions of themselves, they experienced identity and roles intersections, illustrating that they rarely exist in discrete and neat packages that separate effortlessly. This adds complexity to their lives.

Refocusing. Maria described how at times she feels bad knowing that one role has been put aside in place of another. Her way of resolving this is to refocus on the previously neglected role for an extended period of time.

I will say, okay, I'm gonna concentrate only on my school work, and I will put everything aside until I gain that internal strength that I feel that I can juggle with my identities again on a daily basis. But, you know, in the long run I was thinking, okay if I concentrate this week on this, and then next week on this, and like in a month, I will accomplish the same amount of work.... (Interview #1, p.14)

Critical questioning. Another strategy that Maria utilized in her daily life was the critical questioning of external sources of information. She identified being conscious of media constructions, and questioning what the “truth” is and whether media images are accurate. Alice noted a similar outlook, recognizing that oftentimes the media presents distorted images. By carefully scrutinizing these sources of information, the women are able to question their accuracy, search for alternatives, and live their daily lives feeling more empowered by being guided by their internal voice, rather than by external messages or images that they are presented with.
Supportive Networks

All of the participants spoke about the importance of having supportive networks (or support systems) in their lives. The support systems (comprised of individuals, groups, and communities) were acknowledged to be integral in helping them negotiate their roles and identities, offering: support, encouragement, advice, assistance, comfort, a listening ear, compassion, and validation of their identities, efforts, and existence. Maria noted that everyone needs the support of others, people who are there for you. Similarly, Elizabeth expressed the peace of mind that you have, in knowing there are people in your life whom you can rely on, who will make you a priority, offer you their undivided attention when needed, and whom you can call on, knowing that they will come right over. Alice indicated that supportive people lift you up when you are feeling down, and highlight your strengths and accomplishments when all you can see are your weaknesses. Alice articulated that we need supportive networks to keep us grounded in reality, and to help us see a balanced view of ourselves. Participants’ supportive networks included: family, friends, co-workers, community, support groups, mentors, advisors, professors, and peers.

Families. All of the participants were adamant in acknowledging their families (parents, spouses, or children) as integral support systems. Five specifically referred to their parents as vital in helping them explore and negotiate their different roles and identities. Alice spoke of the financial support that her parents provide her, which has been vital to her survival. She expressed her indebtedness to them for everything they have done, especially the way that they have eased her worries regarding her own financial instability, by allowing her to continue living at home.
Elizabeth and Cordelia spoke of the holistic assistance that their families have provided, including both financial and emotional support. Elizabeth's stepfather (whom she recognizes for all intents and purposes as her "father") has been by her side through many difficult times.

He's not my real dad. He rescued me from an alcoholic father and took very good care of me, paid all my way through university, loves me to death; when my husband died, he put my uh life back together. (Interview #2, p. 3)

She talked about how important he is to her, how she has relied on him, and he has always come through for her. Cordelia noted that her family, in general, has been amazing in encouraging her. However, she recognized her mother as her biggest source of support in all the spheres of her life. She felt that without her mother's support, she would not be where she is today. Cordelia referred to her mother as her "unofficial mentor."

Mia and Cordelia also indicated how valuable it was to have parents who had previously gone through the experience of being graduate students. Being able to talk openly about their challenges and successes with their parents and knowing that there existed a shared level of understanding was extremely helpful to them. Mia and Maria expressed that their parents were role models from whom they learned important lessons. Mia indicated that her mother taught her to maintain a positive attitude in challenging situations, and to always look at those kinds of situations as opportunities for growth and learning. Maria recognized that her father taught her how to be "unselfish," and how to help others, which is something that she hopes to instil in her own children. These lessons have guided them throughout their lives and throughout graduate studies.
All three of the married participants acknowledged their spouses as huge sources of support in their lives. They felt that having an encouraging spouse was vital to the negotiation of their roles. These women indicated that their husbands offered different kinds of support. Kathryn indicated that her husband provided nonacademic support. His comical nature lightened situations, which helped her relieve stress. Mia said that her husband offered her academic support and encouragement which has been very helpful. Maria expressed the general ongoing support of her husband as integral to her ability to remain grounded and to successfully juggle her multiple roles and identities.

Elizabeth recognized her daughter as supportive in understanding the graduate school experience. With her shared identity of “graduate student,” Elizabeth’s daughter has helped her to master graduate student protocol, to deliver better presentations, and to become familiar with specific computer software. She has also provided encouragement and even proofread some of her work. Elizabeth identified that her daughter has also offered her support through difficult familial moments that they have shared.

Friends. Five of the participants listed friends as a significant source of encouragement. Maria and Elizabeth mentioned that they drew on their extensive network of friends who offer social and emotional support. Mia recognized a few close friends as instrumental in offering unconditional love, caring, and emotional support. They engage in meaningful conversations, are always truthful, listen attentively, and acknowledge her experiences. Similarly, Cordelia identified her close friend a major source of support, since they have shared similar life experiences (i.e., educational, research, and personal). This common bond has enabled them to collaborate, share information and frustrations with each other, and intimately discuss matters that they both
can relate to. Alice identified the value of having honest friends that push her to think in new ways.

I really believe that my best friends are the ones that make me think. So I tend to gravitate to those people. People that just you know, accept you as you are is great! Because you want that to some extent, but I love the challenge. (Interview #1, p. 4)

She spoke of the importance of having friends that are not afraid to question you, probe your thinking, or, ultimately, challenge what you say. These kinds of friends help her to grow. Clearly, friends offered multifaceted support which enabled these participants to explore and negotiate their roles and identities more easily.

_Coworkers._ Four of the participants mentioned the helpfulness of collegial support. Mia noted that the people she works with have graciously negotiated schedules and traded shifts to allow her to fulfill various responsibilities as a graduate student and as a mother. Kathryn said that colleagues at work have helped her to solve problems and contemplate ideas. Maria indicated that one or two close coworkers have become confidants that she can confide in and openly share her concerns and frustrations with. And Elizabeth was adamant that her administrator at work has been a huge source of encouragement, validating her efforts and indicating how integral she is to the staff and to the school. Support within the occupational sphere helps these individuals negotiate their other responsibilities, and also facilitates a more pleasant working environment, knowing that there are people at work who respect and assist you when needed.

_Community._ Cordelia spoke at length of the extensive support system that she has within her community. She acknowledged both her language community and larger First
Nations community as the reason why she is pursuing graduate studies. She indicated that her community guides her decisions, motivates her, and is there for her. Some community members even converse with her to inquire about her studies. This extensive support network has been instrumental in helping Cordelia negotiate her roles, not only over the course of graduate studies, but throughout her time on the reserve.

Elizabeth is part of a support group that meets regularly. She says that this community is really important to her, and has helped her to grow as a person.

And um...in that support group, we try to practice um everyday to be the best people we can be, and to heal wounds that we have, and to look after others...

I don’t know where I’d be without this wonderful group that I belong to. Um...I think this is really **hugely, hugely** part of my identity. (Interview #2, p. 5)

She recognized this community of people as being there for her, in the same way that she is there for them.

*Mentors and advisors.* Maria mentioned that a useful strategy is to seek out individuals who can serve as mentors in your life. Most of the participants spoke of mentors and advisors whom they have called upon for assistance. Elizabeth spoke of her mentor, an older intelligent friend, who has been there for her, especially through a very challenging period in her life. Her mentor offers her continuous support and friendship and has helped her tremendously over the years. She also spoke of her spiritual advisor as a guiding person.

Four students pinpointed their graduate advisors as key people, instrumental to their success in graduate studies thus far, encouraging them along the way, and believing in their abilities. Mia described her advisor as always in her corner.
[She] is like that...older wise sister person that you have that's just...she can do everything, and so can you, you know what I mean? You just put your head to it and you do it, and you don’t take crap from people and...you’re worth it, and all those sort of cheerleading qualities. (Interview #4, p. 20)

Similarly, Alice acknowledged the continued feedback, encouragement, and praise from her advisor as motivating her and helping her feel confident in her work.

**Professors.** In addition to advisors, other professors have served as supportive networks, helping these individuals in a variety of ways. Elizabeth spoke of a course instructor who validated the diverse experiences that she has had, and helped her to view her age as an asset, rather than a limitation. She said that this professor has enabled her to recognize her own strengths, and has helped her to gain new insights and to consider issues from different perspectives. Elizabeth also acknowledged that there have been other professors throughout graduate studies who have supported her and encouraged her. Mia described her entire thesis committee as vital to facilitating her positive experience in graduate school. She indicated that each of them has helped her in their own way, facilitating connections and networking, offering guidance with publishing, or facilitating confidence building. She noted that their diverse skill sets and characteristics complement each other, creating a dynamic supportive team.

**Peers.** Two of the participants indicated that fellow peers were valuable sources of support. Mia advises other graduate students to seek out peers whose identities align with yours, perhaps connect with an existing network or form a new one. She also recommends to “…socialize more with other students, so you don’t feel so alone…” (Interview #4, p. 1). Alice agreed with this and indicated that you can learn from your
peers by working together. Mia stated that speaking informally with classmates allows for a casual exchange of useful information. She acknowledged that certainly this type of dialogue is helpful as you navigate your way through the program. In addition to personal strategies for everyday negotiating, there are also student-related strategies for negotiating identities in academic settings.

Education Related Strategies

All of the participants described at length countless education related strategies that they and other graduate students can utilize to facilitate identity and role explorations and negotiations in the classroom, at home, and in society.

*For oneself within the classroom.* Within the classroom, there are a host of strategies that graduate students can employ. Mia noted the importance of “…selecting courses that compliment their different identities” (Interview #4, p. 1). Likewise, Cordelia and Elizabeth highlighted the value of selecting an area of research that is linked to your identities, something that you will remain enthusiastic about for a long time. Mia suggested that graduate students should draw on their lived experiences in the classroom. She continuously sought out ways to relate course concepts and reading material to herself, her own life, and her diverse experiences. Similarly, Alice indicated that she tried to get the most out of her courses and assignments, by tweaking them to fit her needs, and finding ways to make them meaningful and relevant for her. Alice also noted that she attempted to take ownership of her work, making decisions with a sound knowledge of her own learning style and working style. Maria described the importance of being proactive. She felt that being confident enough to put yourself out there, being willing to ask questions, and being persistent in searching for a compatible faculty member helped
her in graduate studies. Alice found it beneficial to seek out “feedback” from a variety of sources, to inform her own thinking and understanding of issues. Likewise, Cordelia encourages others to make a conscious effort to interact with different students each week. She advised that it is to your advantage; as you meet new people, you are able to learn more, and hear new perspectives. Maria and Mia indicated that there are benefits to taking courses in other areas that deviate from topics you would typically study, as you are able to make new associations. Maria indicated that she attempts to surround herself with like-minded people. Mia tries to engage in positive self-talk, thinking of encouraging good thoughts, and believing in herself. She finds this strategy helpful, especially amidst stressful times.

Elizabeth stated that knowing her limitations is necessary. She is not afraid to admit when something is beyond her understanding, stating, “…I have no problem admitting like I couldn’t read that document! That made no sense to me whatsoever” (Elizabeth, Interview #4, p. 6). Alice indicated that graduate students, such as her, should not be afraid to ask for assistance from others when needed. Finally, in the classroom Cordelia suggested that it is imperative for students to make themselves heard, to have a voice in discussions and debates, and to not sit on the sidelines remaining uninvolved. She was adamant that graduate students must take an active approach in communicating with others (about themselves, their backgrounds, their identities and perspectives). She acknowledged that this is especially important for individuals of minority status, as the majority of people might have questions and misconceptions, which makes it their responsibility to inform others around them. Cordelia expressed that this is a crucial intersection between being a student and an educator, knowing that they have a duty to
teach others, and, therefore, they need to be “willing to share” this kind of information with others.

For your fellow peers. The participants also identified strategies that they utilized in the graduate classroom which validated the identities and roles of their fellow peers. Elizabeth indicated that she made a conscious effort to recognize classmates and professors as human beings, getting to know them, making connections with them, and striking up conversations.

And I also try to...to personalize where I’m at...If I’m in my graduate class, I make sure I say to people, ‘Hi, how are you? And how’s your week been?’ And recognize them as humans...I’ll do the same to the teachers and they seem to appreciate that.... (Interview #4, p. 3)

She proceeded to describe her effort to find ways to learn from her peers and to validate their expertise. One strategy she used involved finding ways to integrate new ideas and knowledge (from her peers) into her own life and share the ways that she has done that with them. This approach confirms to her classmates that their insights, experiences, and knowledge are valuable to others. Another strategy that Mia advocates for is to encourage self-reflection in your peers through selective question posing.

She makes an effort to probe her peers’ thinking and understanding by asking thoughtful questions. Finally, it is important to assist other students in juggling their roles and identities whenever possible. Kathryn shared an example of a strategy that she uses to do this:

...like for me, I always try to volunteer to do a project um...around the time that
most people are writing report cards, because I don’t have to do report cards, so that’s a good time. You know, you guys are going to be off doing that. That’s a good time for me to present, which is usually mid November.... (Interview #4, p. 32)

She is considerate in accommodating other students’ schedules to make their lives easier.

*For oneself at home.* Elizabeth and Kathryn identified strategies that they employed at home. The first was to create a “practical,” “aesthetically pleasing” work environment that is “organized” according to their own likes and needs. Elizabeth noted the importance of having a “comfortable chair” that is adjusted properly for one’s body. She also talked about the need to be “disciplined” and to have a realistic daily schedule to guide her actions and facilitate the completion of her school work. She acknowledged that she is most productive when she works for short durations and takes frequent breaks removing herself from her studying space. She also gives herself incentives and rewards for working hard (i.e., break) so that studying does not become laborious or unappealing. Also in her repertoire of strategies, is to take a day of the weekend off for herself. Similarly, Mia suggested that to avoid feeling overwhelmed, she finds it useful to take mental breaks and have conversations with others centered on topics that are nonschool related.

*For communities.* Participants identified a few global strategies that they could use to help larger communities understand and appreciate the complexity of their identities and roles. First, Cordelia suggested that at times it might be crucial to provide people in the broader university community with all of the necessary contextual details about your identities and roles to help them be better informed, and make the most
appropriate decisions. Second, Cordelia recognized the need for educating all people about diverse identities. She identified numerous ways to facilitate this type of education including: speaking up within the workplace setting, taking on leadership roles to deliver workshops in different environments (i.e., universities, work, and schools), acknowledging that no question is off limits, and being a guest speaker at different events. Elizabeth also recognized that all questions deserve to be asked. Third, Cordelia noted that it is important to give back to others. She stated that graduate students must remember the struggles that they encountered, as well as the help that they received along the way, and they should be willing to assist and support those people that proceed them in their quest for learning. In addition to student-centered strategies, there are also a host of strategies that professors can employ that are sure to validate their students’ identities.

For professors. Participants identified many useful strategies that professors can implement to help M.Ed. students with their identity negotiations and explorations. Maria had multiple suggestions for strategies that professors could employ prior to the commencement of their courses. She suggested that it would be beneficial to expand descriptions of the courses listed in the graduate calendar (and found on-line) in order to provide students with a fuller overview of what the course is about. She proposed adding past students’ comments and feedback about the course (this could be done on-line), indicating that students’ perspectives would resonate with other students who might be considering taking the course. She noted that students’ contact information could be provided to others so that they may speak about the specific courses upon request. Maria also recommended that professors consider asking students for input into the structure, design, assignments, and grading of the course. She felt it would be useful if professors
asked students what their expectations of the course are, as well as what they hope to learn, and then gear the course around this information. She indicated that professors could obtain students’ e-mails prior to the course’s commencement and collect informal feedback which could then be integrated into the design and delivery of the course.

The participants also detailed some strategies that professors could use within the graduate classroom. First, they recognized a series of attributes that professors should embody. Mia and Elizabeth indicated that professor should be “open and inviting,” “collaborative,” “democratic,” “respectful,” “supportive,” and “sincerely excited” about their courses. According to Maria, it is the professor’s responsibility to set the invitational tone and firm expectations or rules surrounding a “code of behaviour” for the classroom, and convey that students need to help create the inviting atmosphere for each other. Mia recommended that professors treat students as “colleagues” recognizing them as “fellow learners” who are merely at a different stage in their learning journey. She advises them to remember their experiences as master’s students to help facilitate this working relationship. Elizabeth encourages professors to celebrate their students’ accomplishments and their insightful offerings in class.

A classroom approach that Elizabeth recognized as helpful involves the professor’s selective posing of questions, with knowledge of his or her student audience and their experiences. Mia reminds professors to be inclusive in classroom discussions, encouraging students to bring in their personal backgrounds to the forefront and examine their identities in conversations with others. Cordelia said that it was wonderful when her professors engaged in storytelling, as it allowed students to connect to them more, seeing them as human beings, rather than experts. Similarly, Alice said she enjoyed the open
forum for discussion in one of her classes, where as a group they discussed any questions, or “concerns” that they had regarding the course, program, and global issues. Elizabeth also indicated the relevance of this strategy.

Cordelia encourages professors to facilitate dialogue or tasks that centre around exchanging information about students’ backgrounds (personal, professional, and academic), extending beyond the first day of class. Kathryn enjoys it when professors genuinely “encourage” students to consider different identities in heartfelt ways. Mia and Cordelia are grateful when professors show real interest in students, recognizing them as human beings. They feel that this is something their professors already do. Mia and Cordelia note that they enjoy it when professors push students to “think differently,” to deviate from the familiar, and to explore alternative theories and perspectives. Mia recognizes that it helps when professors ask many thought provoking questions. Elizabeth appreciates balanced instructions that are structured, yet flexible. Kathryn encourages professors to ensure that there is a coherent connection in the course between theory and practice; also, between what they are teaching and how they teach. She also suggests that professors consider having students form “heterogeneous groupings” so that they can explore topics based on their shared perspectives, positions, and common identities.

Other strategies noted by participants involve recommendations for course curriculum, assignments, and assessment approaches. With respect to curriculum, Elizabeth indicated that it should be applicable, include global perspectives, stimulate thinking in new ways, encourage students to make self-discoveries, and facilitate contemplation about the future. Kathryn hopes that professors can provide students with legitimate opportunities to connect the readings and course topics to their own
experiences, circumstances, and outlooks. Likewise, Mia suggests choosing course materials that highlight multiple perspectives. Kathryn and Elizabeth advocate that professors choose comprehensible readings that are valuable for their students.

Mia, Cordelia, and Elizabeth recommend that professors offer students choice and flexibility with respect to assignments, so that students can tailor them to fit with their own interests and identities. Elizabeth notes that practical assignments are preferred. Cordelia encouraged professors to facilitate personal presentations or the sharing of students’ work, so that others can learn from their peers. She noted that these exchanges spark engagement, interest, and genuine enthusiasm. Mia recognized the merit of assignments that enable students to rework a single paper multiple times (which allows for continuous editing and revising of their work), with students being assessed on each revision. She felt that this would allow graduate students to experience the developmental process of writing, and would enable them to perfect APA format, and receive feedback from multiple sources, on multiple occasions. She acknowledged that these kinds of assignments are common within other programs. Similarly, Alice appreciated it when large assignments are broken down into smaller parts. She felt that sustained engagement on a single topic is useful for “scaffolding” students’ learning.

The participants also highlighted some useful activities that professors could have their students engage in. Kathryn, for instance, noted that program planning was a valuable exercise conducted early on in the coursework stage. She indicated that it helped her to set a realistic rate of progression through the program. A very useful class assignment for Alice involved interviewing a graduate student who was finished or nearly finished the program. She found this assignment meaningful and gained incredible insight
from the activity, identifying commonality in the student experience. Multiple participants urged professors to engage students in reflection either through formal or informal assignments as it facilitates recognition of students’ growth and learning, and the remarkable progress that they have made within their courses. Elizabeth noted that some of these kinds of activities (i.e., life-mapping) were already being utilized in classes on reflective practice or narrative inquiry. She indicated that activities which allow students to engage in self-exploration are very powerful and worthy of facilitation on the professor’s part.

With respect to assessment, Alice advised professors not to grade participation as it is extremely “subjective,” and the professor does not know how much the student actually thinks about the material and engages with it (inside and outside of class). Alice felt that engaging with the material is the space where students are exploring and negotiating their identities. She articulated that it is very personal and is often done in the mind or by asking questions, and grappling with issues that students may be too reluctant to bring to the table for discussion. Maria explained that when it comes to assessment and evaluation, giving some control over to students would allow them to feel a sense of ownership in the course. She also suggested that professors should consider incorporating multiple forms of assessments (i.e., peer, self, and professor assessment) into the course.

The remainder of the strategies proposed by participants involved professors’ interactions with students outside the graduate classroom, as well as within the context of student advisement. Elizabeth encouraged professors to be accessible to students after class. Mia indicated that she appreciated when professors keep the students’ best interests in mind, and are willing to direct them to other faculty members for advisement in
instances when they recognize that a better fit may exist elsewhere. Mia urges professors to provide their graduate students with more encouragement to get involved and experience academic socialization.

Cordelia noted that there should be a willingness on the part of potential advisors to learn about new research areas that might deviate from their own knowledge base, and show a willingness to embrace being in a position where students may have more knowledge of a particular area than the professor does. In this situation, she encourages professors to recognize themselves as learners, and the students as “experts,” especially when the student’s area of research directly relates to their own culture or identity. She proposes that professors be able to handle this role reversal which may deviate from advisement experiences that they have had in the past. Cordelia also hopes that advisors will assist and defend their graduate students whenever possible, advocating on their behalf, especially when it comes to informing others about their unique circumstances, identities, and research interests. This is something that her advisor did. Mia proposes that there should be an open flow (or sharing) of information between the advisor and the student, with the advisor taking time to inform the student of opportunities to get involved, and attend conferences or workshops. Besides strategies for professors, there exist strategies for the Program as well.

*For the Master of Education program.* Participants shared a wealth of prospective strategies that their Master of Education Program could adopt to facilitate graduate students’ identity and role explorations and negotiations. Kathryn emphasized that the Program must know their own values, and embody them on a daily basis. Both she and Maria noted that the Program must consider if students and their complex identities fit
into their value system. In the event that it does fit into their values, these participants suggested that the Program must conceive of a way to show its graduate students that their identities genuinely do matter. Maria noted that these values should be positioned up front, emphasized to the public and to others within the institution. She even suggested that the Program could appoint student role models as spokespeople who best personify the values that the Program holds dear.

Maria proposed that the Program expand the information that is collected at time of admissions to include data related to learning styles inventories, surveys of students’ interests, requests for more lengthy letters of intent, identification of prospective students’ strengths and weaknesses, their expectations of the program, and their motivations for pursuing the degree. She felt that not only would it help students to think about themselves, their identities, and their aspirations right from the beginning of the program, but it would give the Department incredible insight into the needs of the particular incoming students, possibly assisting them with the setting of their own program objectives. She also noted that the Department would immediately be able to capitalize on students’ skills and expertise to benefit the Faculty as they would know which students might be good candidates for specific RA and TA positions. She thought that collecting this information would also help the program be proactive in terms of anticipating what kind of support services students would require based on their demographics and self-identified needs. She noted that this preliminary information could be utilized to set up student support groups or working groups based on their shared interests within and across streams.

Both Maria and Mia proposed the creation of mentorship programs for graduate
students within the program. Mia thought it would be beneficial to pair recent graduates with incoming students who share similar roles or identities, as experienced students could offer guidance and answer questions. Maria identified the possibility for two types of Mentorship programs, one similar to Mia’s vision, and another to help support International students within the program and provide them with support if they desired to remain in the country. She felt that pairing students based on their shared research interests or shared motivations for pursuing the degree would be most helpful. She also recognized that it is less intimidating to talk to a fellow student rather than a professor. She even thought that confidentiality agreements could be drawn up, to ensure that information shared between them would remain confidential. She thought that this would be extremely helpful to new students as they navigate their way through the program.

Maria suggested that the Department facilitate more opportunities for students to socialize with professors, getting to know them and their areas of research. She thought that increased events for networking with the professors would be helpful to graduate students who may only have a handful of different professors as their course instructors and may miss out on connecting with other individuals who share similar research interests. She proposed that professors could lead informal workshops, seminars, or talks on interesting topics, such as leadership in education or politics in education, that were discussion oriented, rather than research driven (centered around presenting their own research). She felt that these talks would enable graduate students to see various teaching and lecturing styles, identify professors’ interests and passions, stimulate discussion on hot topics, and perhaps give students ideas for their own research work.

Cordelia recommended that students, such as herself (who were unable to take the
Advanced Writing Seminar), would benefit from more information and workshops related to the process involved in getting published, showing students how to adapt a paper that they have written in one of their classes into a publishable manuscript. She indicated that more guidance from faculty would be most helpful. Kathryn and Cordelia praised events which bring students together to share information about the program (i.e., Campus Day). Maria suggested that the Department consider increasing the kinds of opportunities that encourage student involvement within the program, especially within evening hours that coincide with part-time students’ work schedules. She noted that these could be volunteer experiences, or opportunities to mentor other students.

Cordelia advocated for the Department to consider offering M.Ed. programs within different First Nations communities. She said that the Department will have to travel to these communities and advertise within various First Nations communities in the province. She thought that conceivably interested First Nations people might travel to each others’ communities to take courses. She thought that if the Department makes themselves and their program more accessible, there would be less barriers between the institution and these communities (i.e., less distance for prospective students to travel, less travelling expenses for students and more support networks within their home regions).

Participants also proposed strategies for facilitating communication. One person suggested that a large section of the Newsletter feature student-centred information related to opportunities for academic socialization which could list Teaching Assistantships, Research Assistantship, and upcoming conferences that students can consider attending or submitting proposals for. Cordelia suggested creating a database on
the Program's website where graduate students could network with each other. She thought it would be extremely helpful if interested students could voluntarily post their research interests, special qualifications, and e-mail. She noted that it would offer a way for students to stay connected, share resources, and find others with similar interests with whom they might collaborate.

...as people meet others during their course work and each individual has different experience and expertise it would be nice to have a student database available for students, this is especially important in the teaching profession as the curriculum is diverse and requires teachers to have access to a wide variety of information and topic it would be nice to be able to call upon individuals that can provide the support necessary... (Interview #4, p. 4)

The graduate student participants also identified strategies relating to human and material resources that would facilitate their identity and role negotiations. Three participants mentioned the need for an administrative assistant that knows students personally, remembers their names, is welcoming, accessible, and informative. They recognized that the Program's own Administrative Assistant is amazing and is all of these things that they have suggested. Mia felt that the program should provide increased office space for graduate students, to facilitate their need to work and study.

The participants also made a series of recommendations related to courses within their program. Maria advises the Department to consider mandating that at least half of the spring/summer courses must be taught by senior persons (i.e., permanent full-time tenure track professors at the university) in order to ensure "high quality" course delivery and successful experiences for students. Alice suggested that the Department increase the
course offerings at satellite campus locations; however, her recommendation contradicts with Cordelia's experience and subsequent decision to resist attending classes at the other campuses.

Mia proposed expanding the bank of courses that are offered on topics, such as "invitational education" and "diversity in education." Cordelia advocated for courses on language acquisition. Maria advised adding courses on identity theory and the exploration of identity issues. Cordelia also suggested that it would be useful to pool the intake courses or incoming students each year and create a few courses generated around their common interests. She indicated that the courses would be guaranteed to run with sufficient numbers since students themselves would identify their need for the courses. She identified that this information could even become a part of the application process, so that professors could have the summer months to design the necessary courses each year.

Most (if not all) of the participants mentioned the value of keeping class sizes small. Kathryn urges the Department to consider the validity and merit of alternative forms of assessment, noting that it would be worthy to consider ways of expanding professors' and students' understandings of assessment possibilities. Alice hopes that the Department can abolish one of the handouts that they distribute to new students each year, distinguishing graduate level scholarship from undergraduate work. As a new student, she found this handout to be extremely intimidating, feeling burdened by it, and pressured by the perceived high expectations, which she thought were setting her up for failure.

Finally, Kathryn advises the Department to consider an all course route as a viable
and serious option for program completion. She feels that some students would desire this pathway and it would be beneficial for their learning. Although she does not put herself into this category of students, she did speak of a friend who completed an all course route in an M.Ed. program at another institution and this friend reported that it provided her with the organization and framework she needed especially on account of her other roles and responsibilities. More strategies exist, including ones directed towards the Faculty.

*For the Faculty of Education.* Three of the participants offered suggestions which are valuable for the Faculty of Education. Cordelia proposed,

...why don’t they have an education show on the university station? They had an education show on our community radio station that talked about things that impact education within the community ...and you know you would be surprised if the university did that on a radio station, how many parents would tune in.

(Interview #4, p. 3)

Perhaps this project could be sponsored by the Faculty of Education. Students (graduate, preservice, and undergraduate) could work together to plan and deliver this type of program. They could interview professors in the Faculty, prominent people within the field, and other students to weigh in on important educational issues. As Cordelia suggested, this type of program would probably have a broad audience. She recognized that it might also facilitate university-community relations, enhancing accessibility of the university, and bringing multiple groups together (i.e., university personnel, with influential individuals in education, with students of all age groups, and parents as well) to discuss a shared topic, important to all stakeholders; education.

Both Maria and Elizabeth made another recommendation for the Faculty of
Education which involves improving the “screening” process that occurs when potential professorial candidates are considered for permanent or temporary positions within the Faculty. They noted that it is essential to carefully examine not only their “credentials,” but also to observe their interpersonal skills, teaching skills, and communication skills and to solicit feedback from others (including former graduate students) regarding their level of competence, their interactions with others, and their professional conduct inside and outside of the classroom. There also exist a couple of recommendations for the university’s administration.

For administrators. Mia suggested that administrators should provide professors with increased autonomy in course delivery and ensure that professors have more flexibility (leeway) in their work roles, enabling them to devote increased time to meeting graduate students’ needs. She indicated that there needs to be a reduction of the pressure and stress that is placed upon professors from the top levels. She also thought that by hiring an increased number of professors, their workload could be distributed in a way that would allow professors to have increased time to spend with students. Finally, the last category of strategies is for the university itself.

For the university. All of the participants offered suggestions for ways that the university could assist graduate students in exploring and negotiating their identities and roles within the institution. Mia and Maria recommended that the university facilitate opportunities for student interaction, by assisting with the organization of social activities on campus, and encouraging students to establish clubs. Mia also advised that the university could foster an “inviting environment” by having diverse students represented in the displays across campus. She also suggested having graduate student notice boards
or message boards across the university so that graduate students could interact with each other and with other university personnel. She felt that the university could show graduate students that they are valued by ensuring that there is adequate meeting and working space available to them on campus. Furthermore, Mia indicated the need for a drop-in babysitting service on campus. She thought that this service should be run by the university, offering flexible hours of operation corresponding to the needs of graduate students (and other students). This type of service would definitely help a number of female graduate students negotiate their student and parenting roles more successfully.

Cordelia proposed other strategies that the university could adopt to facilitate graduate students’ identity explorations. For starters, she thought that it could expand its program offerings in the areas of “Aboriginal Studies,” “Cultural Studies,” and other areas that focus on studying human beings from other cultures, learning about their different perspectives, backgrounds, as well as their political, religious, and educational systems. She recognized the need for the diversification of the university’s faculty and noted one example of the lack of First Nations representation in the professoriate. She indicated that there is a disconnect and lack of authenticity when non-aboriginal individuals teach Aboriginal Studies courses. Cordelia also invites the university to consider offering conferences for students on themes, such as “Culture and Identity” or “The Grey Areas of Teaching,” that are accessible to all students, recognize their own identities, and explore how identities are being researched. She also felt that these types of themes do not have clearly defined boarders; ultimately allowing for a wealth of personally appealing topics to be explored in creative ways.

Mia noted that the Registrar’s Office needs to build increased “flexibility” into
course timetables, ensuring that course offerings have diverse and accessible start times for all students. She also thought that the M.Ed. program needs to offer the same course at least once per term. Alice noted that the university should continue to expand the online resources offered through its library as this helps graduate students access databases and other important information quickly and without having to make a special trip to the campus. Alice recommended that the university Book Store should ensure that all books arrive prior to the start date of graduate courses and enough copies are purchased, so that students are not left without course texts. Alice also noted that the GSA or specific graduate programs should consider holding off campus social events for students who frequent the university’s other satellite locations. Kathryn indicated that socials are beneficial for some students in the program, primarily those who are studying full-time. Maria suggested that the university could offer increased career counselling for graduate students, perhaps even notifying them of pertinent employment opportunities both within and outside of the university.

Cordelia also recommended that the university’s Research Ethics Board (REB) reach out and make community partnerships, especially within First Nations Communities. She explained that they must maintain open dialogue with them and attempt to develop an understanding of what is perceived to be ethical and unethical from their perspective. She did warn that this partnership building would be a very slow and challenging process, as the REB would encounter hesitation from outside communities, however, building relationships on the foundation of respect and “trust” would be a first step. She further advised,

...so they need to have someone who is able to go into these communities, who is
a First Nations person themselves...who, who...has worked in...it's almost as if they need an ambassador or something, someone who is, is...fairly well known across the First Nations...community, or Turtle Island, so people say, oh...okay, like this is a reputable place.... (Interview #4, p. 4)

Cordilia expressed that the REB needs to have sound knowledge of ethical protocol and practices across the many "First Nations communities."

...the university can explore ways of better understanding the unique identity of students... as with First Nations students, we often refer to the pan Indian perspective and our unique culture and traditions are not understood. Perhaps advisory people from different communities could be asked to assist the Aboriginal Research Advisory Council to ensure that all different First Nations are represented... and so...like it happens all the time, and so, if, if people, if they don't recognize that Iroquois people did this, and Ojibwa people believe this, and then the Cree people did this, and even within, in West Coast you have your Nuu'chah'nulth, your Salish, your Tlingit, it's very...very diverse, and people don't recognize that. And especially when REB was concerned, they have this advisory council that doesn't know what is happening in all these different First Nation communities. (Interview #4, p. 2)

Elizabeth and Kathryn emphasized that the university must put human beings first and make exceptions to policies for students' unique circumstances. Kathryn wondered who makes judgement calls regarding the types of circumstances that are deemed to be extenuating? Or what timelines for program completion are deemed fair based on different circumstances? These women felt that their own personal health and wellbeing
must take priority and they hoped that universities would show compassion and accommodate students' unique situations. Finally, Elizabeth stated, “we need to be heard.” She thought that the university should help ensure that graduate students have a voice within all levels of the institution, an ability to be heard by administration, by faculty, and by various boards. Armed with these extensive strategies, key stakeholders must recognize their merits and look for ways to incorporate them into the daily practices and climate of the institution, to help facilitate female graduate students’ explorations and negotiations of their complex roles and multifaceted identities.

The Process of Identity and Role Negotiation for Female Graduate Students

Figure 10 is a mapping that captures the essence of the phenomenon of identity and role negotiation for five female graduate students in this study as they understood it through their lived experiences. It highlights some commonalities in the process that align with the themes previously presented. At the heart or center is a female’s context transcendent identity (values, beliefs, characteristics) present as she navigates a host of roles (and associated identities) within three predominant spheres in her life (home, school, and work). At certain moments and spaces within a given period, these spheres overlap and these women experience role and or identity intersections that can be natural (bringing clarity) or unnatural (bringing confusion).

Depending on the context they were in, the process of identity and role negotiation looked differently based on: a) the critical incidents they experienced (which informed their sense of self in new ways); b) the barriers they encountered (societal, educational, financial, attitudinal etc.); c) cognitive and physical processes they experienced (thinking, reflecting, comparing, learning); and d) the support systems and
Figure 10. Mapping the process of identity and role negotiation for five female graduate students.
strategies that they drew on (environmental, societal, human, financial educational, etc.).

All the while, these five women negotiated on internal and external levels (within their minds and within society), grappling with competing and contradictory demands, expectations, and assumptions. Ultimately this created a fluid process, blurred boundaries, as well as a state of flux and change.

Figure 11 is a mapping that captures the essence of the phenomenon of identity and role negotiation for Cordelia, a Haudenosaunee female graduate student in this study as understood through her lived experiences. In her case, it is necessary to acknowledge the added complexity that is brought to her negotiations with the integration of a fourth sphere, that of community. She articulated that at the core of her decisions and actions, is her community. Her roles in community are central to her understanding of herself, her purpose, and her identity. The other participants did not speak to community in the same way.
Identity and Role Negotiation for a Female Haudenosaunee Graduate Student

Figure 11. Mapping the process of identity and role negotiation for a Haudenosaunee female graduate student.
Chapter Four presented the results of this investigation into six female Master of Education Students’ multifaceted identities and roles, which were organized around five emerging themes. The first theme documented participants’ understandings of key concepts, such as identities, roles, and intersecting identities. It also described participants’ living self maps. The second theme explored the notion of lifelong learning and transformative pathways which included particular critical incidents which changed participants’ understanding of themselves and their identities. The third theme described gender issues as perceived by the six females including some of the internal and external tensions that they negotiated as women, mothers, and professionals. The fourth theme identified the challenges, tensions, and possibilities noted by the participants as they negotiated their multifaceted roles and identities within complex environmental conditions. The fifth theme described personal, professional, and educational implications by way of recommending strategies that would support female graduate students as they both explore and negotiate their identities. In all, these five themes illustrated the complex nature of identity and the intricate ways in which female graduate students’ identities are interwoven into everything that they do.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study sought to make a contribution to the knowledge in this field by: defining identity according to its graduate student participants, clarifying the debate regarding identity as a singular or multifaceted construct, comparing and contrasting the needs and barriers found in the literature with those expressed by the participants, and offering concrete strategies for key stakeholders in higher education. The phenomenological design of this investigation intended to recognize and validate participants’ experiences with their identity and role negotiations. The data collection strategies employed included: four to five detailed semistructured interviews, three take-home activities, interview notes, and researcher reflections. The analytic strategies included: “Looking for themes” (Smith, 1995, pp. 19-20), “The Listening Guide Method” [listening for plot, contrapuntal voices, and constructing I-Poems] (Gilligan et al., 2003), and A “Constant Comparison Method” (Dye et al., 2000, p. 1). The five emergent themes were: Participants’ Understandings of Key Terms; Life-long Learning and Transformative Pathways; Gender Issues; Challenges, Tensions and Possibilities of Identity and Role Negotiations in Complex Environments; as well as Personal, Professional, and Educational Implications. Chapter Five begins by offering a discussion and conclusion that explores some of my realizations related to the complexity of identity, and the interconnectedness of lifelong learning and transformation across the participants’ lives. Next, the major findings and contributions are acknowledged and connected to the existing literature in a way that answers each of the three research questions which framed this investigation. Afterwards, implications for practice, theory, and research are considered. Lastly, a final word is offered.
Discussion and Conclusions

On the whole, the findings in this investigation paralleled much of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and, subsequently, extended a majority of this literature by adding more detailed information which documents students' particular experiences, beliefs, understandings, and emotions with respect to their identities. Ultimately, I realized that this investigation had one central reoccurring theme (or process) which adequately captured the complexity of identity as evident in the lives of the participants; that is, their continuous negotiation of internal and external worlds in tandem and the bidirectional influences of these spheres on each other and on participants' understandings of their identities, which parallels Gardner's (1983) conceptualization of how a person's "sense of self" is derived. Participants acknowledged this process of negotiating internal realms (such as one's thoughts, self-perceptions, etc.) alongside external realms (such as societal demands, expectations of others, etc.) as: instrumental to the process of identity development, a part of their experiences related to intersecting identities (intersections occurred within their minds, as well as externally, in their environments), as a dimension of their motivations for pursuing graduate degrees (internal or personal motivations, as well as external motivations related to pursing the degree for other people), predominant in the types of barriers participants encountered in their environments (i.e., internal and external barriers), and, finally, interwoven throughout their identification of strategies (i.e., personal strategies, and strategies for others). This continuous complex process which required the women to reconcile many contradicting sources of information seemed to affect them in many complicated ways.

With the many expectations (external and internal), the complex roles they negotiate and
the competing messages that the individuals were bombarded with, it is not surprising that these six women have felt guilt and conflictedness.

The theme of life-long learning and transformative pathways was also central in the findings of this investigation. It is not surprising that the notion of learning throughout one’s entire life span emerged here. These individuals have been and continue to be students, and also have worked in the field of education. Clearly, the idea of life-long learning has been interwoven into their values and into their identities as teachers, students, and human beings. Their student related roles and concerns were primarily the same no matter what stage of the program they were in.

The six women interviewed identified some of the same motivations for pursuing graduate studies, as noted in Younes and Asay’s (1998) study; however, there were some notable differences as well. Their participants expressed primarily personal reasons for pursuing graduate degrees, while the women in this investigation acknowledged both internal and external motivations. External motivations included, but are not limited to, proving oneself to others and helping the community. Maria’s motivations contradicted some of the reasons expressed by other participants (from both studies), as she made it clear that career advancement and salary increases were not a part of her rationale for becoming a graduate student. I found the idea of “Academe as me” to be quite interesting. The power of the word addiction, used to describe one participant’s infatuation with school captivated my attention. It was not something that I had come across in the literature. However, upon careful consideration, it could be linked to an individual’s desire to receive recognition and validation from others, especially from society. This validation is likely to come from professional or academic roles as opposed
to familial roles. Participants' understandings of identity development paralleled those of Shaffer et al. (2002) recognizing the importance of dimensions like one's biology, genetics, personality, environment, early years (parenting approaches), culture, and experiences, all of which interact in concert, contributing to identity development.

Kunnen & Klein-Wassink (2003) had indicated that, "Despite increasing evidence that identity changes in adulthood do take place, there is little knowledge about what the process of change looks like" (p. 347). This study has shed light on some of the procedures and events involved in adult identity changes. Through the exploration of transformative pathways and critical incidents that these women have experienced in their lives, more in-depth knowledge has been gained to illustrate how identities change in adulthood. The preliminary results indicate that this process of change is highly complex (and different for each person). Sometimes, it has been a gradual process of change, while other times it has been an immediate instance of change. For these participants, change has involved cognitive awareness in the form of revelations regarding a needed sense of purpose or direction in one's life, recognition of one's newfound growth or potential, or the realization of one's own transformation. The process has included: the replacement of previous views of themselves with new ones, self-discoveries, clarity, changes in behaviour, exploring and acknowledging the impact of childhood events, attitudinal insights, the defining of priorities, and the use of different strategies to assist them through the process. These findings confirmed that adults' identities oftentimes do emerge transformed as a result of critical incidents in their lives. I also discovered that participants were able to recognize some changes in their perceptions of themselves since the commencement of their studies (i.e., increased self-confidence,
new images of themselves in leadership positions, such as teaching assistants, and familial changes, such as the growth of their children, which led to new understandings of their roles and identities as mothers).

*The First Research Question*

Three research questions were the driving force behind this investigation, the first of which asked, "How do M.Ed. students theoretically, conceptually, and personally define identities and intersecting identities?" I quickly learned that participants lacked theoretical knowledge of identity. When I questioned them about their previous knowledge of identity theories, research, or researchers, most participants claimed they were unfamiliar with this literature. While one or two people indicated that at one point they had likely encountered some theoretical information on identity, none of them attempted to provide any specific details, although they did make reference to other theories when explaining their experiences (i.e., Flow Theory, Complexity Theory, Critical Theory, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory).

The participants had many interesting and diverse insights to share regarding the concept of identity. I had not expected the word “identity” to conjure up negative impressions (of secret identities, identity theft, rigidity, and fear) for two of the participants. Interestingly, my first general searches for information on the internet about “identity” led me to identity theft articles and warnings. These two participants’ first thoughts about the concept of identity differed markedly from their personal understandings of it.

Together, these women noted that identity involved “a sum of many things.” They also suggested that a person’s “self-perceptions” and “beliefs” were important in deriving
one’s identity, and that on a broader level, identity involved thinking about “a larger plan” or vision of oneself, regarding his or her potential purpose or significant contribution to society. Ultimately, most participants acknowledged the intricacies of “internal and external dimensions” of identity, and some felt that one of the objectives was to “achieve balance” in relationships and personal stability. These ideas expand upon the dictionary definition of the concept of identity, and bring together separate definitions of identity, into a more integrated understanding of the construct. The participants’ characterizations offer a more complex picture than was offered in the literature that I read, integrating notions of philosophy and future-orientations (i.e., Garrett, 1998), with notions of stability (i.e., Blanshard, 1991; Garrett, 1998), “core beliefs” (Stewart, 2002; Waterman, 1985), a sense of purpose (Waterman), an emphasis on relationships (Stewart, 2002; Waterman, 1985) as well as an amalgamation of internal and external sources (i.e., Erikson, 1963; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). This conceptual understanding helps to illustrate the bidirectionality of multiple interactive systems (the simultaneous influence and negotiation of internal and external spheres) involved.

Inevitably, participants had different views regarding the state of identity. So, too, did numerous researchers. Participants corroborated both views of the debate; that identity is a multifaceted construct, largely “context dependent” (Ropers-Huilman, 1997; Schachter, 2005) and that identity is a singular construct, one that is “context-transcendent” (Blanshard, 1991; Garrett, 1998; Stewart, 2002). Interestingly, however, the literature that I read referred to these two concepts in isolation. Researchers did not indicate that these two concepts of identity can co-exist, both across human beings (depending on their own beliefs and definitions) and also within a single individual (who
may recognize him/herself to have a core identity (core values, beliefs, etc.) that guide him or her, but also multifaceted identities that a person takes on depending on one’s given context, environment, and role. This is something that Maria highlighted as being possible and that other participants supported indirectly as feasible through their responses. It offers a major contribution to the field of identity research, hopefully recognizing that from here on in, it is inappropriate to continue the debate as to whether a person has one core identity, or dynamic multifaceted identities. Instead, we should be thinking about the realistic possibility that both exist in tandem. As Maria noted, the answer depends on each individual, how they understand their own identity, and as Alice suggested, how “broadly or narrowly” they define the concept. Many researchers seem to view the two concepts as mutually exclusive; however, other people, such as Maria, do not. These latter individuals may even recognize the potential for a bidirectional relationship between one’s core identity and their multifaceted identities.

Participants’ definitions of intersecting identities matched very closely with Ropers-Huilman’s (1997) conceptualization of this process. For instance, Alice’s explanation of intersections and overlapping of different facets of self, which aligns with Ropers-Huilman’s description of “borderless maps” and “…identities [that] are multiple, yet enmeshed with each other…” (pp. 332-333). Both perceived identity intersections to be as layering, overlapping, chaotic and confusing, and oftentimes presenting challenges. However, participants’ understandings were even more diverse, and illustrated the potential of two different kinds of experiences with intersections, ones that were “natural” and largely positive, and others as “unnatural” and largely confusing. This idea is new to the literature that I have read, and illustrates the potential diversity of
identity intersections and accounts for the contrasting experiences and emotions encountered by participants, such as Cordelia and Elizabeth (who had moments of clarity and confusion, respectively, during instances when their identities intersected).

I noticed that their definitions were enriched when they added their personal experiences to explain the terms. Actually, there was often tremendous overlap between participants’ formal definitions of the concepts and their personal understandings or explorations of these terms. Clearly, conceptual and personal understandings were entangled. Not only did their personal experiences inform their conceptual understandings, they also helped to inform my understanding of the concepts and visualize the theories in action.

It was relatively easy for the participants and for me to explore our personal understandings of the key concepts in this study. I noticed participants’ personal understandings of identity as extraordinarily holistic. Maria’s living self map reminded me of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, both visually and conceptually similar, capturing the interrelationships that exist between the interconnected systems which operate in tandem and have bidirectional relationships with one another. Cordelia’s understanding of identity was also holistic. She talked about the self as her “mind, body, spirit sense.” I later realized that all three of these parts of the self were represented on Kathryn’s identity map (i.e., her cognitive role as a learner), her body (i.e., linked to her gender identity as a woman), and her spirit (i.e., her spiritual identity and strong faith). Later, participants noted specific strategies for exploring and negotiating their different identities that aligned with each of these spheres of the self. To me, this signifies that all three of these spheres are significant to one’s identity or
identities. Perhaps all three domains inform peoples’ understandings of who they are. This was a powerful discovery for me and explained why participants noted such strategies related to maintaining rich spiritual lives, nurturing their minds and relaxing, as well as taking good care of their physical bodies.

I found it exciting that despite the diversity of the maps, there were still notable commonalities including: participants’ attempts to be the best individuals that they could be across the varied contexts of their lives, their desire to help and care for others, their focus on maintaining relationships (i.e., Stewart, 2002), their search to belong and find their place (Shaffer et al., 2002), their belief that balance is important, and their realizations that having a guiding sense of purpose was fundamental to them.

The women selected rich and diverse objects to represent their identities that they bring with them to graduate studies and talked about powerful metaphors and similes capturing how they personally negotiate their different identities in the university milieu. Five of these similes and metaphors were action oriented (i.e., acting, weather systems, juggling, paddling, and making a salad). To me, this represented the continuous action involved in negotiating identities, and the diversity of experiences that exist. Even though the apple itself was not action-oriented, it represented the action involved in negotiating between internal spheres (i.e., one’s core, beliefs, and expectations), and external spheres (how one appears to others, and the multiple demands and expectations from outside sources).

The Second Research Question

The second key question driving this investigation asked, “What environmental conditions either facilitate or impede the exploration of graduate students’ multiple and
intersecting identities within the institution?" The environmental facilitators listed by participants were often opposite to the barriers that they identified. For them, optimal environmental conditions within the institution included: an inviting atmosphere, the positive attributes of professors (such as care, openness, and flexibility), diversity in the student body, and opportunities for networking. Some of these positive environmental conditions coincided with the needs of graduate women as identified by Wiest (1999) (i.e., to combat "social and intellectual isolation," and to enhance "professional development"). They also mentioned two external facilitators including flexible employers and a society that values education. I had not thought of environmental conditions outside of the university that would help students explore and negotiate their identities. Nor were these kinds of conditions mentioned in the literature that I reviewed. It shows that integrated systems must operate in concert to assist graduate students with their identity explorations and negotiations.

The participants listed a host of environmental conditions that impeded upon their identity explorations and negotiations. They offered their holistic understanding, not limiting their discussions of the impeding conditions strictly to the university, but broadening their views to acknowledge barriers across historical/societal domains, cross-contextual realms, institutional lines, and personal spheres. Much of the literature that I reviewed focused solely on institutional barriers within higher education, which meant that the recognition of other kinds of barriers was new information to me, including the barrier of "historical trauma" as a challenge facing First Nations people, and barriers crossing contexts, such as competing expectations and values, attitudinal barriers, financial strain, and the limitations of time. Some of the noted institutional barriers
mentioned by participants were also identified in the literature, especially surrounding educational reform, the increased politics in education, and systems of hierarchies that are in place. Change in education in terms of curricular reform and changes in government create challenges for teachers (O'Sullivan, 1999; Winter & McEachern, 2001); however, Elizabeth, (a veteran educator who has taught amidst such changes) noted that she was able to stay true to her beliefs, unwavering in her conviction and commitment to her role as an educator. She did not experience the “identity confusion” that some teachers do (Sears & Marshall, 2000). In my opinion, the reason for this was her clear prioritization, the fact that she put her identity as “mother” and “teacher” above all else. This internal drive and sense of self with respect to these two roles guided her through external chaos and change. Mia found herself on the periphery of the academic socialization process, but for very different reasons than minority students noted in Mogadime’s (2002) study with Black female graduate students. Mia felt that her student status (part-time) prevented her from being on campus regularly, often missing out or being unaware of academic socialization opportunities. Participants went on to identify numerous environmental barriers within higher education (i.e., uninviting atmosphere, environmental deficiencies, programmatic constraints, and systemic barriers) that impede identity exploration. Cordelia confirmed what others (i.e., Fleras & Elliot, 2002; Mogadime, 2002; 2003; Trower, 2003) noted regarding the absence of diversity in the composition of university faculty. She specifically noted the lack of First Nations representation, which proved to be a significant obstacle for her in terms of finding advisement and expertise in her area of research. With respect to the literature, this was a problem common to female and minority students (Fay, 1988/89; Mogadime, 2002; Wiest, 1999). Interestingly, many of
the barriers mentioned by other researchers which are typically encountered by female students and students of minority status, were not noted among the participants (i.e., irrelevant or hidden curricula, Mogadime, 2002, 2003, gendering of the institution, Barata et al., 2005, and the low level status of graduate students, Fay, 1988/89). Perhaps these barriers were not mentioned by the participants because these female students worked in professions and studied in a faculty where women comprised the majority of the population (both in terms of the education profession as a whole, the student demographic studying education, and the professorial demographics teaching education courses at a particular university).

The Third Research Question

The third integral question of the investigation asked, “What strategies support student identity exploration within and outside of the graduate classroom?” Kathryn pushed my thinking as she questioned the relevance of identifying strategies. Firstly, she indicated that strategies or approaches which she uses for exploring and negotiating her various identities and roles are highly individualized. Although she acknowledged that she could share approaches that have worked for her, she was adamant that she could not dictate to or assume what would work for other people. Secondly, Kathryn wondered whether this topic is perceived to be important by the university. She continued to question the merit of the activity and whether strategy development is of any concern to others. “...at the end of the day, does it matter what...identities I have? And it certainly impacts, but does it matter to anybody but me?” (Kathryn, Interview #4, p. 1).

Kathryn’s critical questioning persisted. “...like you gave me the task and so I did it...and then it was like, and when it came to thinking of strategies it was like...so what’s
the purpose?...” (Interview #4, p. 2). She forced me to contemplate the value of this exercise in my own mind, and to articulate my beliefs clearly. I included the third research question in this study because I believed that identifying some basic strategies for key stakeholders within the institution would serve as a valuable starting point, beginning a much needed discussion surrounding supports that can be put in place to facilitate the ongoing exploration and negotiation of graduate students’ complex roles and identities.

Kathryn helped me pinpoint another reason for exploring identity issues; they are integral in fostering a cohesive sense of community, where individualities are valued and respected, which facilitates cooperation, mutual understanding, and support. She argues that it must be embedded within the organization’s values, within professor’s values and within student’s values, a genuine interest in each other, our identities, and in fostering a close community of learners.

...but the professor would have to care about it, and if they care, and then they would have to...spend some time...investigating ok...how do you build community?...Lets just not talk about building community but **how** do you build the community? (laughs)...And why do you build community?... (Interview #4, p. 5)

She recognized this as an area for improvement, provided that all parties genuinely value it as important, and are willing to take the necessary steps to achieve it. She stated, “...I think anybody’s learning is enhanced in a community...” (Interview #4, p. 8).

In the end, I was excited by the wealth of strategies that participants shared. They detailed personal strategies that crossed contexts and included universal approaches of
positive attitudes and useful skills that help them explore and negotiate their identities across situations. Many of the participants compartmentalized their identities, roles, and tasks. A similar strategy was noted in Schachter’s (2005) case study, however, likely for different reasons (i.e., task and time management versus inability to amalgamate multiple identities together). The participants talked about prioritization. I wonder if this strategy is our quest for simplicity, amidst chaos and complexity. Another approach employed by one of the participants was the demonstration of increased flexibility. It seems as though this flexibility in adapting to given demands and roles was a coping strategy that Mia used out of necessity to deal with the variable environment. Harland & Plangger (2004) noted doctoral students using this strategy as well.

I was surprised that four participants recognized their pets as helpful in reducing their stress levels and providing them with comfort. Some participants also noted the strategy of “doing nothing” or “vegging out.” Perhaps this physical and mental state of idleness helps them decompress from their busy lives. Maybe engaging in an “opposite, but equal reaction” to “busyness” helps participants to create internal balance or quietness within the mind.

Initially, I was surprised at the prevalence of faith or spiritually based strategies that were recognized as extremely important to multiple participants; however, these results were consistent with Stewart’s (2002) findings, where participants’ faith identities were integral to their daily living, and also with women interviewed in The Grassroots Women’s Collective (1999) who acknowledged the importance of their spirituality. I speculate that faith and spirituality was so integral to some of the participants in this study because it offers a set of rules and morals for living, and facilitates a positive way
of being in the world, helps people achieve calmness, and, through their beliefs, they can feel comforted through difficult periods in their lives and hope that their spirit or soul may continue to exist after their death.

Participants recognized supportive networks as integral to their ability to explore and negotiate their identities, which shows me that we are all interconnected with each other, needing encouragement and assistance throughout our lives. The women illustrated that support comes in many forms including emotional, financial, academic, and spiritual assistance. Some of their sentiments mirrored existing research on the importance of role models, mentors, and advisors (i.e., Bruce, 1995; Spillett, & Moisiewicz, 2004; Wiest, 1999). Mia recognized her advisor as a "cheerleader" and Alice noted the useful feedback as well as praise she receives from her advisor, which parallels the comments made by Spillett and Moisiewicz (2004) who described the multiple roles that advisors play. Participants also listed a host of education-related strategies for themselves, professors, their program, administrators, and their university. Many aligned with the institutionally-based strategies that were the predominant foci in the literature. For instance, common strategies recommended: student-facilitated discussion groups and clubs (Barata et al., 2005), diversification of faculty (Mogadime, 2002), changes in assessment strategies (Eisner, 1999), and the use of critical questioning (McLaren, 2003).

However, the six participants in this investigation described many new strategies that were much more holistic than ones that were documented in the literature. I believe that this holistic or global perspective emerged both from my detailed line of questioning, but more so from their personal investment in the topic. Interestingly, most of the strategies from the literature involved identifying what others could do for graduate
students; whereas, the participants in this study also talked a great deal about what they could do for themselves and what they could do for others, which offered a more balanced perspective of strategies, and showed that taking ownership and playing an active role in their learning is fundamental. It might be that their strategies were so global because they recognized the common thread; that we are all "human." This is a sentiment that was mentioned on multiple occasions. It was clear that maintaining a human focus within organizations or institutions was important to multiple participants. They conveyed their complexities and "vulnerabilities," desiring to be treated as humans rather than as numbers. Perhaps by giving comprehensive strategies, they were validating their own complex selves. While they were aware of the hierarchies and power relationships that exist within institutions, I believe that they looked at strategies as a way of beginning to break down some of these systems by recognizing that we are all similar, despite our different "positions," and "roles." Ultimately, the participants and the literature noted that we need to be heard and have voice (Gilligan, 1982; The Grassroots Women’s Collective, 1999; Prasad, 2005).

**Implications for Practice**

The findings from this study have numerous implications for practice. There is a need to add literature on identity into school curricula at all levels. It is important for adolescents who are wrestling with questions about who they are, and it is equally essential for teachers to be aware of these theories and stages of identity development in order to know how to best help their students through the process. Moreover, teachers should be informed in this regard, so that they can be thinking in meaningful ways about their own identities which become part of their classroom
practices. I recommend that an identity theory course be a standard requirement for all university students, especially those who are studying to become educators.

As Cordelia described her induction into teaching, and her first full-time position, a major question arose in my mind: Why do we have this tendency in education to initiate our new teachers into the profession by giving them the most challenging teaching assignments and watching on the sidelines as they struggle during their first year? This method of professional socialization just does not make sense. Why do experienced teachers pull the seniority rank to secure their place in the less-challenging classes, while the beginning teachers are left to struggle and fail? It is no wonder that so many novice teachers leave the profession within the first few years. Should we not be supporting and mentoring our new teachers, and doing whatever we can to ease their entry into the classroom? Ultimately, is this not a much better method of socialization that is likely to have a more positive impact on teachers and students alike? An implication for practice involves rethinking the way we support, mentor, and welcome our new teachers into the profession. No matter what level (i.e., primary, secondary, or postsecondary), or what system (private, public, catholic, reserve, or immersion), we must assist and guide our new teachers in a way that encourages, validates, and supports them rather than isolates and discourages them from continuing to work as educators.

With respect to higher education, we now recognize that there are concrete strategies that can facilitate graduate students' identity negotiations and explorations at all levels (both within and outside of the university milieu). Armed with this knowledge, it is up to all of the stakeholders in higher education to act accordingly, to take the suggestions of students seriously, and make a coordinated and concerted effort to review
and expand the specialized supports that need to be in place for our graduate students, and to look for ways that they can remove environmental barriers and create an inviting atmosphere which celebrates the unique identities of students. It is my hope that this research will help graduate students realize that they need to take ownership of their learning, teach others about their complex identities, and encourage others to explore their own identities. Professors should reflect on their own identities, the identities of their students, and reexamine their own teaching practices in light of the recommendations made. My own opinion is that professors should integrate more of the types of activities that have been a part of this research study into their own courses (i.e., identity or life-mapping, recognizing critical incidences, describing metaphors that symbolize students’ experiences, explaining their own personal philosophies of education, and associating objects with their various identities and roles). First, professors should try these activities for themselves. I think that these kinds of tasks are especially valuable for educators, who must be aware of themselves and their identities in and out of their classrooms.

Pagano (1991) suggested incorporating storytelling techniques into the classroom, while creating a secure, comfortable, and open environment for the discussion of identity-related issues. Storytelling techniques, along with the facilitation of student-driven curricula emerging from personal inquiry, were perceived to be effective in supporting identity exploration and fostering personal relationships (Pagano).

Professors can observe the teaching style of exemplary “role models,” such as Marlee Kline (Buss, 2004), who are able to support positive methods of identity exploration within their classrooms by ensuring that courses are relevant, by engaging in
critical discussion, by examining multiple and marginalized identities, and by valuing everyone's knowledge. Buss highlighted the useful teaching practice of bringing "intersecting identities" to the forefront of the classroom, in order to engage in dialogue with students, surrounding entrenched power relations, gender roles, as well as stereotypes, and ways to combat these social issues. Professors should also be aware of the involved roles of students, just as students should be cognizant of the expectations that professors have of them. Moreover, programs should also get to know the students that they serve, and look for ways to meet their needs.

Initially, participants found it difficult to offer recommendations for administrators. Cordelia, for instance, noted that she never sees the administration (with the exception of the front-lines administrative assistants). From her comments, I would surmise that one of the strategies for administrators would be to increase their presence and visibility to graduate students. I think that this could be done informally (through hallway interactions) or perhaps more formally with regular meet-and-greets, wine and cheese social events, public talks or lectures, visits to the Graduate Student Association Board Meetings, or open microphone forums where students could facilitate dialogues with administrators on key issues of importance to them.

Participants also mentioned strategies surrounding the hiring of professors. My recommendation is that graduate students must be an active part of the hiring process, and have representation on the SEARCH committees, being able to contribute their insights into selecting the most appropriate person for the position. I also recommend that Centers for Teaching Learning and Educational Technologies offer specific workshops to all professors giving them teaching strategies that will help to accommodate a wide
variety of perspectives and identities in their classrooms. I thought that Cordelia’s database strategy (a network for students to connect with each other, sharing their resources and expertise) was an incredible suggestion. She alluded to this as a program specific initiative, which she believed would be extremely useful to educators who could ask their colleagues for support or resources related to areas or topics that they are unfamiliar with. However, my suggestion is that this could eventually become a university-wide or even inter-institutional network connecting all interested graduate students across the campus with each other. The database could have a search function (similar to a directory) where students could search for their peers according to their names or according to their research foci and could foster interdisciplinary graduate research teams.

Furthermore, institutional reform requires a reconceptualization of assessment and evaluation practices, which include rather than exclude students’ multiple identities. For instance, Eisner (1999) emphasized the need for transforming:

the criteria that institutions of higher education employ in making admissions decisions... We need to have admissions criteria that are considerably more flexible and open-ended and that do not continue to privilege a narrow range of competencies that are fundamentally reflective of social class advantages. (p. 660)

Adopting this practice, would allow for a more diverse student population. Eisner also advocated for nontraditional methods of assessment. He stated,

Performance assessment affords us, in principle, an opportunity to develop ways of revealing the distinctive features of individual students. It affords us an opportunity to secure information about learning that can help improve the quality
Thus, revising assessment approaches becomes necessary in order to preserve and respect graduate students' identities. Likewise, Case (1999) supported the use of “authentic assessments” with his graduate students. He believed it allows them to demonstrate their ongoing growth as learners. They are given opportunities to revise their work, to engage in multiple types of assessment, to receive constructive feedback, and, ultimately, to take ownership of their learning. Baker (2006) also underscored students’ need for ongoing “feedback.”

I think that there needs to be collaboration between all of the key stakeholders in higher education. They should meet yearly for collaborative retreats. I suggest that they make use of the “KNOW/DO/BE Bridge Framework” (Drake & Burns, 2004, pp. 31-50), used in “integrated” approaches to curriculum in elementary and secondary education. Here, university administration, graduate programs, professors, graduate and undergraduate students can come together to identify values, goals, actions, and knowledge that are common to organization and that should guide them throughout their interactions with each other. For instance, a program could use this type of planning to think of what graduate students should be able to “Know, Do, and Be,” while graduate students could use this exercise to think about what their professors should be able to “Know, Do, and Be,” and professors as well as administrators could engage in the task to identify what the other group should be able to “Know, Do, and Be.” This type of retreat would help acknowledge expectations, recognize commonalities, establish priorities, and ensure all key stakeholders are operating from with shared core values in mind.

Ultimately, I believe that a university-wide task force or committee on identity issues
should be formed to review and make recommendations for improving existing policies, curricula, and climates to help graduate students (and, ultimately, all students as well as university employees) explore and negotiate their multiple roles and identities with greater ease.

Implications for Theory

This study has confirmed, refuted, and extended various elements of identity theory. It offers a more integrated perspective regarding the common features of identity. It has shown that adult participants have achieved “loving personal relationships” with others, a goal that adolescents strive for as they seek to explore and understand their own identities (Erikson, 1963). The findings illustrate that “identity and role confusions” are not just predominant in adolescence, as Erikson suggested, but actually can continue to occur in later adulthood. The investigation also adds to the theoretical basis, by suggesting that it is possible for both a singular static identity and dynamic multifaceted identities to exist in tandem, both within and between individuals. Ultimately, key terms that were previously ambiguous have become clearer through the provision of participants’ personal examples which continue to highlight the complexity of their own negotiations with these constructs in their daily lives. For instance, participants’ encounters with identity intersections have been understood to be more complex and diverse than I had imagined. A novel contribution has been the emergence of two different kinds of experiences, ones that form natural or logical intersections, often handled with ease and facilitate selfdiscovery and others that result in disjointed or colliding intersections, that create challenges and tensions which individuals must wrestle with. As per Stewart’s (2002) recommendations, I attempted to “intentionally” study
multifaceted identities, from multiple positions, taking into account personal, professional, academic stances, as well as consideration for cultural, societal, and ideological factors, showing that they operate in tandem, informing participants’ identities, sense of themselves, and their multiple roles in complicated ways.

Likewise, this study has also supported and made contributions to feminist and women’s development theories. I drew on a methodological approach that was consistent with those utilized by feminist researchers (Prasad, 2005), integrating multiple data collection instruments, involving intense reflection on the part of the participants and on the part of the researcher, thinking about the ways that gender influenced participants’ experiences with their identities, and looking at our shared identities as “graduate students” as a way to bridge the distance between myself and my participants.

I found it interesting that Kathryn was the only one who mentioned gender as a role. Perhaps she is more conscious of it, she feels its influences more readily, or she has engaged in a deeper reflection on gender-related issues, either in the past or in preparation for this activity. I realized that although the word gender identity or woman did not appear explicitly on most participants’ identity maps, it really was interwoven throughout their discussions in direct and indirect ways (with references to themselves as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, girlfriends, etc.), adding a complexity to their understandings of themselves, as well as their identity and role negotiations, as heard in their contrapuntal voices of confusion and clarity, guilt and perfection, as well as frustration and hope. I had not anticipated that thoughts of ageing would be prevalent among women in their late 20s, through to their late 50s.

I am reminded of a quote which I referenced earlier by Carol Gilligan (1982),
however, now in the concluding stages of this investigation, I realize the powerful way it summarizes the conflicting experiences and tensions that many women (including the participants in this study) face on a regular basis:

As the events of women’s lives and of history intersect with their feelings and thoughts, a concern with individual survival comes to be branded as ‘selfish’ and to be counterposed to the ‘responsibility’ of a life lived in relationships. And in turn, responsibility becomes, in its conventional interpretation, confused with a responsiveness to others that impedes a recognition of self. (p. 127)

Mia expressed her fondness for education, and recognized that at the university, she was identified as an individual, rather than being identified as a mother. Her statement alludes to the idea that perhaps society tends to recognize and validate degrees, credentials, and education, and devalue the work, commitment, and effort involved in being a mother. Recognizing academe as a part of oneself may be a move towards gaining validation from the rest of the world, validation that mothers so often do not receive.

Gilligan (1982) and Hall’s (1990) ideas about the value of education, and recognition of the opportunities it affords women, paralleled the statements expressed by participants in this study. Gilligan’s (1982) findings related to the fundamental way that females recognize their own identities in terms of the “relationships” they have with other people, became evident among participants’ statements, and thoughts about themselves as mothers, wives, teachers, and productive members of society.

The women in this investigation identified a host of needs, most of which were in
harmony with those listed in the research. They described educational needs that were consistent with Knowles' (1975) conceptualization of the adult learner, as desiring to find ways to connect learning to one's extensive lived experiences, and appreciating autonomy. Much of the literature (Bruce, 1995; Hockey, 1994; Wiest, 1999; Younes & Asay, 1998) focused predominantly on graduate students' academic related needs (i.e., respect, financial assistance, and networking or ways to combat isolation), which participants also shared. Kathryn mentioned the need for safety, but not in the physical sense (as was mentioned by Wiest, 1999). She referred to her need for a safe learning environment. Besides Gilligan (1982), much of the literature did not talk specifically about gender-related needs that participants in this study identified as important to them, including: "love," "validation," and "reliable child care."

This study has also advanced the field of Aboriginal studies, more specifically, research on Haudenosaunee women, their identities and roles. Locating existing journal articles in this area proved to be difficult for someone, such as myself (a non-Aboriginal person). I speculate that there could be numerous reasons for this. Perhaps I was not using appropriate key words when conducting database searches or perhaps this information is not readily accessible through mainstream channels, such as educational journals. On the other hand, the possibility exists that little has been written and published in this area. Understanding the way in which community is integral in shaping a Haudenosaunee person's identity and roles is a fascinating area that requires further research. Cordelia's powerful voice stands strong in this document, indicating to the rest of the world that more research in this field is urgently needed.
Implications for Further Research

While the methodological approach to this investigation was detailed and rigorous, a future study could extend the methods of data collection employed to include classroom observations, which would allow for a first hand examination of environmental barriers and facilitators which impact on students’ identity explorations. This type of fieldwork could augment interviews and allow researchers to draw on interactions, dialogue, teaching approaches, and other observations related to the environment which may help them to understand power, identity negotiation, and supportive strategies in new ways. Document analysis could also be utilized, drawing on course syllabi, faculty handbooks, and university policies to understand how identity issues are identified and addressed within the institution.

Participant samples could also be diversified in numerous ways. I am interested in expanding this research in order to conduct a comparative gender analysis that would allow for the inclusion of both male and female M.Ed. students. Participants could be matched on numerous criteria (i.e., age, marital status, number of children, motivations for pursuing graduate studies, student status, program stage, etc.) and the theoretical approach could be extended to draw upon masculinity theory and feminist theory. I wonder whether male and female students have the same sorts of needs. Would the same level of family centeredness be exhibited? Do men and women strive for balance in the same way? Do they encounter similar societal prescriptions? How are their identity intersections similar or different? Do they face the same kinds of internal and external pressures? Do they juggle family, work, school in the same sorts of ways? A comparative study would enable me to identify whether the strategies that help female graduate
students explore and negotiate their identities would likewise be relevant for males.

Although the participants in this study gave specific strategies geared to one program within one faculty at a single university, I think that most of their suggestions would likely be applicable to many programs and faculties. To address one of the limitation of this study, notably the issue of generalizability, and to test my hypothesis, a future study could compare the identities, needs, and strategies of graduate students across programs and faculties. Similarly, the sample could be broadened to compare master’s students, doctoral students, and new professors, to identify the similarities and differences in the definitions, identity negotiations, and strategies across individuals who are at different stages of their academic pursuits and careers. Furthermore, a study that balanced the number of full-time and part-time students would be able to more accurately gage their similarities and differences. I would have liked to gain more insight into the process of academic socialization in higher education; however, a majority of the participants did not speak to these types of experiences, indicating that this kind of socialization was not a priority for them. Perhaps a future study could focus around participants who desire to pursue careers in academia. They may be better able to speak to their experiences with academic socialization. Also, one of the questions that I pondered, shortly after reading a study by Ropers-Huilman (1997), still remains unanswered. I wondered, “How do professors’ particular understandings of themselves impact upon their students’ awareness of identity issues and their own engagement in identity exploration?” This question could be the focus of a future investigation which observed and interviewed professors and their students.

Furthermore, additional kinds of intersections could be studied, such as the
intersection of being a graduate student and also being a lecturer or instructor at the same university. This was the particular experience for two of the participants in this study, and I believe that there are a host of additional issues and obstacles that beg further research and illustrate the challenges and tensions that individuals experience when they are both students and employees within the same university. I wonder what kinds of strategies, resources, and policies could be put in place to protect individuals who are in these situations? Also, I am curious to learn more about the overt and subtle tensions and challenges that part-time instructors and lecturers encounter within the institution.

Another area for future research is to explore specific stages, the sequence of steps, and emotions involved in the changes to identity that transpire during adulthood and a categorization of the reasons why these changes occur. It would be useful to conduct longitudinal studies with participants to research change as participants recognize it to be occurring (in the moment), rather than relying on retrospective remembering. It would also be interesting to study change with respect to core or internal identity, and external identities.

Lastly, Maria noted that identity development is a slow process. Mia also agreed and indicated that there is a biological component to identity development. She seemed to suggest that there was a link between identity development and human development. This potential connection warrants further exploration. Do stages of maturation correspond with stages of identity development? (i.e., do people in certain stages of development have certain identities)? Is there a connection between the development of moral reasoning and the development of identity? If there is this connection between moral reasoning and identity development, then perhaps it might facilitate a connection between
certain kinds of behaviours (i.e., egocentricity and inflexibility, versus open-mindedness to new perspectives and change) and peoples’ beliefs about their own identities at that time (i.e., their identity as static and singular or dynamic and multifaceted).

Final Word

There is no doubt that human identities are complex. Some people do not think about their roles and identities in conscious ways, as evident by Maria’s statement: “...nobody ever asked me about my identity before.... People kind of underestimate that part of their life” (Interview #4, p. 1). Be in tune with who you are, what you value, what you believe in, and what your goals are. Take time to reflect and explore your roles and identities in new ways, and think about how you can support and encourage others to do the same.
References


Appendix A

Brock University Research Ethics Board Letter

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified.

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of November 2, 2006 to September 1, 2007 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board’s next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. The study may now proceed.

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form Continuing Review/Final Report is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.
Appendix B

Interview Guide #1

Identification of a Pseudonym

- As part of the ethics protocol, I must refer to each of the participants and their responses by pseudonym (fake name). What pseudonym (a name other than your own) would you like to be called?

Purpose of Interview

- The title of this study is “Exploring Female Graduate Students’ Multifaceted and Intersecting Identities In a Complex Educational Milieu.” This first interview will focus on collecting demographic information and exploring your understanding of key concepts such as: identity, the negotiation of identities, and intersecting identities.

Opening Questions (providing some demographical information)

- I’m going to start off by asking you to tell me a little bit about yourself.

- Follow-up demographical information:

  1) Age: _____
  2) ____ Part time student   ____ Full-time student
  3) Degree Stream: _____ Curriculum Studies _____ Teaching and Learning
                 _____ Integrated Studies _____ Organizational Administration
  4) Year of study in the Master of Education Program: _____
  5) Current stage within the program: _____ Coursework (# of courses completed)
                _____ Project/Thesis Proposal
                _____ Project/Thesis
                _____ Thesis Defence
                _____ Completed (awaiting Convocation)
  6) Previous educational history: Degree(s) _____________________________________________
                Major(s) _____________________________________________
  7) Occupation: _____________________________
  8) Marital Status: ____ Single   ____ Married   ____ Divorced   ____ Widow
  9) Number of children: _______
 10) Ages of children: _____________________________
 11) Type of Family Structure: ____ two-parent    ____ single-parent
                ____ step-parent    ____ other

- Do you have any hobbies or special interests?
• Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about yourself, that you haven’t yet touched upon?

Defining Key Terms and Providing Personal Examples

• When you hear the term “identity,” what words, concepts or images come to mind?

• How would you define the term “identity”? (i.e., Provide your definition of this term).

• What does “identity” personally mean to you? (i.e., What is your personal understanding of identity?)

• How do identities develop or form? (i.e., What factors influence or shape identity development?)

• Do you believe that identity is a singular construct? (i.e., a person develops one central/core identity?) or Do you believe that identity is a multifaceted construct? (i.e., a person develops many different identities?) Explain.

• How would you define “the negotiation of identities?”

• Does “negotiating identities” have any significance to you in your own life? Explain.

• How would you define the concept of “intersecting identities”? (or identities intersecting).

• Does “intersecting identities” have any significance to you in your own life? Explain.

• Define the concept of a “role.”

• Is a “role” different than an “identity?” Explain.

• What are some of your different roles?

• How would you describe yourself?

• If you could only use one or two words to describe yourself, what would they be?

• Do you see yourself as having one identity or multiple identities?
• Describe that central identity, or Describe some of those different identities.

• What are some of your student-related identities?

• Is there anything you would like to contribute that I failed to ask you?

Post-Interview Activity

• I have a post-interview activity that I would like you to complete and bring with you to the second interview. (Post-Interview Activity #1). Review instructions with participant and give them a copy of the instructions.

Conclusion

• Thank you so much for your participation in the first interview. I will e-mail a copy of this interview transcript within a few days. At that time, we can set up a second interview time. Thanks again, and I look forward to our second interview.
Appendix C

Interview Guide #2

* Note that this is a rough itinerary or guideline of the questions that will be asked in the second semi-structured interview. The following list is somewhat flexible in nature and comments made by the participants during the first round of interviews may offer opportunities to slightly deviate from this list of questions. *

Review of Important Information

- In our last interview you identified _____________ as a pseudonym. Remember that your real name will not be associated with any information that you provide. All of your responses will be kept confidential. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to answer any question that you feel is invasive or inappropriate. You have the right to withdraw at anytime. If you have any questions throughout our interview or anytime afterwards, please feel free to ask. This interview is going to be audiotaped so that I can accurately document your responses. A copy of the transcript will be available to you for your review. Do I have your permission to turn on the tape-recorder?

Purpose of Interview

- The title of this study is “Exploring Female Graduate Students’ Multifaceted and Intersecting Identities In a Complex Educational Milieu.” This second interview will focus on exploring your identities through the use of situational examples of your identity negotiations and your unique needs.

Identity Map

- We ended our first interview session by introducing a take-home task. I asked you to create an identity map (a visual representation of your understandings of your identities). Were you able to complete this activity?

- If participant answers “yes” to the previous question, follow up with: Did you bring it with you today? Could you describe your identity map to me? If the participant answers “no” to the previous question, ask them: What might your identity map have looked like?

- Ask them a series of follow-up questions related to their identity map such as:

- How are your identities categorized (or grouped)? (i.e., personal, professional, academic, etc.)

- How many identities did you depict?
• Refer to Reflection Questions (Post-Interview Activity # 1).

• Could you rank these identities in order of their salience (importance to you)? Or are they all of equal importance to you?

• (If participant ranked their identities) Talk about the identity that is most important to you. (i.e., why is this identity the most important one to you?). What feelings do you experience when thinking about this specific identity of yours?

• Based on your perception, how would you rank these identities in order of their salience within society? (i.e., valued the most or perceived as most important in society to valued the least, or perceived as least important in society).

• Why do you feel that society values the identity of _____________ the most? How do you feel about that?

• How do you juggle the family and the work sphere? How does this impact upon your identities? How do you cope with any tensions that arise between them?

• Why did you choose this particular form (i.e., graph, list, picture, flow-chart, illustration etc.) to represent your different identities?

• Walk me through your thought process while you were creating the identity map. (i.e., What did you think about as you were constructing it? How did you decide on which identities to include/exclude?)

• What does your identity map say about you?

• Did you learn anything about yourself from this activity?

• Can you think of any other identities that you have, which you didn’t depict on your identity map? Why were they not included?

• Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your identity map?

Elaboration Questions From First Interview

• In our last interview we defined some key terms.

• Has your understanding of identity changed in any way since the last time we spoke? If yes, how so?

• Is the process of identity development universal or culturally specific?
• Last time, we talked about the negotiation of identities. Describe a recent situation when you had to juggle/negotiate some of your various identities. What specifically did you do to negotiate your identities? What strategies did you use to negotiate your identities in this situation? What feelings did you experience while negotiating these identities?

• In general, what do you do to negotiate your identities? (i.e., what strategies do you use to negotiate your identities?) Which strategies are most successful? (i.e., which strategies do you find most helpful to you?)

• What feelings do you typically experience when negotiating your identities?

• What are some positive things that you do when negotiating your identities? What are some negative things that you do when negotiating your identities?

• How does the process of negotiating identities inform your perception of yourself?

• What is the process of negotiating identities like for someone living in Canada? Why?

• Last time, we talked about intersecting identities. Describe a personal example illustrating the ways that your identities intersected. What happened? What did you do? How did you feel? What was the outcome of the situation? Was this a positive or negative experience for you and why? What did you learn from the situation?

• Last time you identified some of your student-related identities. Can you talk more about these? (i.e., which one is most important to you? Why? Which one of these identities do you devote the most time to? How does that make you feel? Which one do you perceive as being the most valued by the institution? Why?)

• What is your personal philosophy of education?

• In general, do your personal philosophies change or remain the same?

• Do you perceive there to be any gender differences in men’s and women’s identities and or their self-descriptions?

• What are your professional identities, roles and responsibilities?

New Questions

• Define authenticity.

• Can someone ever be truly authentic?
• How do you present yourself to others?
• Are teachers' identities impacted by changes in education (i.e., curricular reform)? Give personal examples.

• What are some of the sources of expectations that influence you?

• What do you have control over in your life?

• Are you able to derive a consolidated sense of self? (i.e., integrate your identities)? How do you do this?

• How do you deal with or cope with change?

• Have you ever experienced identity loss? Describe the situation. What did you do? How did you feel?

• Have you ever experienced role confusion? Describe the situation. What did you do? How did you feel?

• How do experiences of change impact upon one's identity?

• Have you experienced any changes in your identities since having started graduate studies? Give some examples.

• Would identities, roles and concerns of graduate students differ according to the specific stages of their degree that they are currently at? (i.e., coursework/proposal/project/thesis). Can you give any personal examples?

• Do you try to balance your identities? If so, how do you attempt to do this?

• Do you ever think about who you are? (or your identities)? How often? In what ways?

• Has there ever been a situation in your life when you've considered yourself to be in the minority? Describe. Has there ever been a time when you've considered yourself to be in the minority, while working on your Masters degree? Describe.

• Considering your different identities, what are some of your needs as an individual? (i.e., academic, social, emotional, physical etc.)

• Do you have any unique needs as a graduate student? Explain.

• Do you have any unique needs as a female graduate student? Explain

• Do you have any unique needs as a Master of Education student? Explain.
• Do you think that graduate students and undergraduate students differ in terms of their needs? Explain.

• Do you think that graduate students and post-graduate students differ in terms of their needs? Explain.

• Is there anything you would like to contribute that I failed to ask you?

Post-Interview Activity

• I have a post-interview activity that I would like you to complete and bring with you to the third interview. (Post-Interview Activity #2). Review instructions with participant and give them a copy of the instructions.

Conclusion

• Thank you so much for your participation in the second interview. I will e-mail a copy of this interview transcript within a few days. At that time, we can set up a third interview time. Thanks again, and I look forward to our third interview.
Appendix D

Interview Guide #3

* Note that this is a rough itinerary or guideline of the questions that will be asked in the third semi-structured interview. The following list is somewhat flexible in nature and comments made by the participants during the second round of interviews may offer opportunities to slightly deviate from this list of questions. *

Review of Important Information

- In the first interview you identified ______________ as a pseudonym. Remember that your real name will not be associated with any information that you provide. All of your responses will be kept confidential. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to answer any question that you feel is invasive or inappropriate. You have the right to withdraw at anytime. If you have any questions throughout our interview or anytime afterwards, please feel free to ask. This interview is going to be audiotaped so that I can accurately document your responses. A copy of the transcript will be available to you for your review. Do I have your permission to turn on the tape-recorder?

Purpose of Interview

- The title of this study is “Exploring Female Graduate Students’ Multifaceted and Intersecting Identities In a Complex Educational Milieu.” This third interview will focus on exploring a deeper understanding of the ways that your identities may intersect and environmental factors, which support or impede the exploration of identities.

Show and Tell

- We ended our second interview session by introducing a take-home task. I asked you to bring in an object that tells a story about your identities that you bring to graduate studies. Were you able to complete this activity?

- If participant answers “yes” to the previous question, follow up with: Did you bring the object with you today? If the participant answers “no” to the previous question, ask them: What object would you have brought in?

- What was your motivation for pursuing a Master of Education degree?

- Ask them a series of follow-up questions related to take-home activity such as:

- Refer to Reflection Questions (Post-Interview Activity # 2).
• Would you mind reading your paragraph describing the object’s personal meaning and significance?

• What strategies do you use for negotiating this particular identity (which the object represents)?

• In what ways do you negotiate your multiple intersecting identities within the complex milieu of the institution?

• What purpose do these negotiations serve? (i.e., survival, adaptation, resistance)

• Were you able to identify a metaphor that best describes the way that you negotiate your identities during graduate school?

• If yes, what metaphor did you come up with? If no, what metaphor could you come up with?

• Why did you choose this metaphor? (i.e., talk about this metaphor and how it makes you feel).

• Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your object, or your metaphor? (i.e., did you learn anything about yourself?)

Elaboration Questions From Second Interview

• Have you ever questioned your identities or looked at yourself in a new/different way? Describe the context and what that was like.

• How would you describe the atmosphere at this university? (i.e., the institutional climate)

• In our last interview we talked about needs. Describe your most important needs as an: A) individual, B) a learner, C) graduate student, D) a Master of Education student, E) a female. Why are these needs most important to you?

• In what ways are the Graduate Education Department (and the M.Ed. program) successfully meeting your needs?

• What could the Graduate Education Department (and the M.Ed. program) do to better meet your needs?

• In previous interviews we have talked about identity intersections. Describe a time during graduate school when your identities intersected. What identities intersected? What was this experience like and why? (i.e., positive, negative)
• In our last interview we talked about identities affiliated with being a student. What challenges (or barriers) do you face as a graduate student?

• Do you have any unique needs as a full-time/part-time student?
• Do you think that part-time and full-time M.Ed. students have the same needs and challenges or different needs and challenges? Explain.

• Previously we talked about experiences when you’ve been in the minority. Can you think of any specific strategies that can be used to help students of minority status negotiate their identities while pursuing higher education?

New Questions

• Are you familiar with any identity theorists or researchers? Which ones? In what context were you introduced to them? (personal interest, professional reading etc.)

• What are some of the challenges that you face? (i.e. when pursing an M.Ed. degree, i.e. in higher education classrooms, i.e. as a female graduate student

• Have you experienced any notable transitions while in the program? (program-specific or other). Can you talk about what these experiences were like for you? Did you use any strategies to ease the transitions?

• What environmental factors impede (or inhibit) the exploration of graduate students’ identities A) within the classroom B) within the university C) outside of the university?

• What environmental factors support the exploration of graduate students’ identities A) within the classroom B) within the university C) outside of the university?

• Have you experienced any barriers while pursuing your M.Ed. degree that you perceived to be related to your heritage or cultural or ethnic background?

• Have you ever felt alone/lonely/isolated while pursuing graduate studies? (Younes & Asay). Describe the situation. Were there any strategies that you used to help you through this time?

• Is there anything you would like to contribute that I failed to ask you?

Post-Interview Activity

• I have a post-interview activity that I would like you to complete and bring with you to the fourth interview. (Post-Interview Activity #3). Review instructions with participant and give them a copy of the instructions.
Conclusion

- Thank you so much for your participation in the third interview. I will e-mail a copy of this interview transcript within a few days. At that time, we can set up a fourth interview time. Thanks again, and I look forward to our fourth and final interview.
Appendix E

Interview Guide # 4

* Note that this is a rough itinerary or guideline of the questions that will be asked in fourth semi-structured interview. The following list is somewhat flexible in nature and comments made by the participants during the third round of interviews may offer opportunities to slightly deviate from this list of questions. *

Review of Important Information

- In the first interview you identified ____________ as a pseudonym. Remember that your real name will not be associated with any information that you provide. All of your responses will be kept confidential. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to answer any question that you feel is invasive or inappropriate. You have the right to withdraw at anytime. If you have any questions throughout our interview or anytime afterwards, please feel free to ask. This interview is going to be audio taped so that I can accurately document your responses. A copy of the transcript will be available to you for your review. Do I have your permission to turn on the tape-recorder?

Purpose of Interview

- The fourth and final semi-structured interview will focus on solution seeking or the identification of strategies that support student identity exploration.

Strategy Development

- We ended our third interview session by introducing a take-home task. I asked you to write a list of strategies that would support student identity exploration both within and outside of the graduate classroom. Were you able to complete this activity?

- If participant answers “yes” to the previous question, follow up with: Did you bring the completed activity with you today? If the participant answers “no” to the previous question, give them a few minutes to brainstorm some strategies.

- Ask them a series of follow-up questions related to take-home activity such as:

- Refer to Reflection Questions (Post-Interview Activity # 3).

Elaboration From Third Interview

- In our last interview we talked about needs. Describe your most important needs as: A) an individual, B) a learner, C) a graduate student, D) a Master of Education student, E) a female. Why are these needs most important to you? And what can
be done to meet those specific needs (on the part of university, the program, yourself, professors, society etc.)

- During our last interview we talked about environmental factors that influence graduate students’ identity explorations. Describe a time in graduate studies when you encountered a barrier (or roadblock) within classroom or within the university. What was the barrier? How did it impact upon the ways that you explored or negotiated your identities? What strategies did you use to overcome the obstacle? What strategies did other people involved employ? Was the experience positive or negative? How did this situation make you feel? Could anything have been done differently (i.e., by yourself, by your professor, by the institution etc.).

- Describe a time in graduate studies (either within the classroom or within the university) when you encountered an environment that supported the negotiation or exploration of your identities. When was this occasion? What factors made the environment a positive one? How did the environment impact upon the ways that you explored or negotiated your identities? What strategies did you (or anyone else involved) employ to facilitate student identity exploration or negotiation? How did this situation make you feel?

- In our last interview we began to talk about strategy development. What strategies is the university currently implementing to help you with identity exploration/negotiation?

- “Do university-based supports exist in helping students like yourself negotiate your intersecting identities? If so, how did you become aware of these supports? Have you ever made use of them? Did you find them helpful? (How so?) Do you have any suggestions on how to improve and unify institutional support structures for graduate students?”

- What strategies could the university employ to better facilitate the exploration / negotiation of your identities?

- What is the single most important strategy for: a) students  b) professors c) administrators d) the university  that would help support the exploration and negotiation of graduate students identities within the institution?

- Could you speak to your experiences in the M.Ed. program with respect to course contents/ curriculum? (i.e., relevance, inclusiveness towards your identities). Do you have any recommendations for this area?

- Could you speak to your experiences in the M.Ed. program with respect to evaluation/assessment practices (i.e., relevance, fairness, inclusiveness towards your identities). Do you have any recommendations for this area?
Could you speak to your experiences in the M.Ed. program with respect to “the socialization process” into the world of Academia? (i.e., preparation for PhD studies, conferences, publishing, T.Aing, R.A.ing etc. Do you have any recommendations for this area?

New Questions

- How do you define success? Would you consider yourself to be successful in higher education? What factors have contributed to your success/lack of success in graduate school?

- What factors enable certain students to be successful in graduate studies? While others are unsuccessful?

- How do you draw upon your multifaceted identities in the graduate studies environment?

- How do you encourage others (fellow peers, professors etc.) to draw upon their identities?

- What can students themselves do to facilitate the exploration and negotiation of their identities?

- Describe your personality.

- What personal qualities and or skills are most significant in helping you overcome environmental barriers?

- What support systems do you have to help you as you negotiate your identities during graduate school? (i.e., individuals, agencies, groups, spaces etc.)

- Of these support systems, which one is the most important to you? Why? Describe the ways that this support system helps you as you negotiate and explore your identities.

- Have you had a mentor while pursuing graduate studies? Can you tell me about this mentor? (i.e. qualities, type of support, what you have learned from them and why you choose this person to mentor you?)

- What are your short-term and long-term goals for yourself?

- What is your personal vision for yourself in the future? Are you thinking of continuing with your studies after you complete your Masters? If so, what type of education might you pursue?
• Is there anything you would like to contribute that I failed to ask you?

Conclusion

• Thank you so much for your participation in all of the interviews. Here is a Letter of Appreciation, thanking you for your participation. I will e-mail a copy of this last interview transcript within a few days. Please remember that you can contact me at any time if you have any questions or concerns about my research project. I will send you a brief executive summary of my research and the results via e-mail sometime this summer. Thanks again for your co-operation and participation and for helping to make this research project a success!
Appendix F-1

Take-Home Tasks

November 2006 – September 2007

Title of Study: Exploring Female Graduate Students’ Multifaceted and Intersecting Identities In a Complex Educational Milieu

Principal Investigator: Christina Skorobohacz, Master of Education Student, Graduate and Undergraduate Studies Department, Faculty of Education, Brock University

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Alice Schutz, Assistant Professor and Thesis Advisor, Graduate and Undergraduate Studies Department, Faculty of Education, Brock University

Post-Interview Activity #1

Activity: Identity Mapping

Instructions: Create a visual representation or identity map of your various identities. This visual representation can take any form that is personally relevant to you (i.e., flow chart, diagram, picture etc.).

Reflection Questions: What do each of these identities mean to you? What characteristics do you exhibit when you take on these identities? Which of these identities do you bring with you to graduate studies? Which characteristics from these identities do you bring with you to graduate studies?

Purpose: After having discussed definitions of identities, this activity will allow you to think about identities in a more personal way, reflecting on your identities that you take on each day in the different spheres of your life. We will use this activity as a starting point for discussion in the second interview.

* Please complete this activity after the first interview and bring it with you to our second interview session. *

Please be aware that if you need someone to talk to about your feelings, support can be easily accessed. Within the university you can contact Brock’s Student Development Centre for personal counselling via their website at http://www.brocku.ca/sdc/counselling/ or phone (905) 688-5550 ext. 3240 or contact Campus Ministries through their website at http://www.brocku.ca/campusministries/
Appendix F-2

Take-Home Tasks

November 2006 – September 2007

Title of Study: Exploring Female Graduate Students’ Multifaceted and Intersecting Identities In a Complex Educational Milieu

Principal Investigator: Christina Skorobohacz, Master of Education Student, Graduate and Undergraduate Studies Department, Faculty of Education, Brock University

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Alice Schutz, Assistant Professor and Thesis Advisor, Graduate and Undergraduate Studies Department, Faculty of Education, Brock University

Post-Interview Activity #2

Activity: Show and Tell

Instructions: Find and bring in an item or object that tells a story about your identities that you bring to graduate studies. Think about how this item or object describes one or some of your identities. Write a paragraph describing its personal meaning and significance to the identities that you negotiate during graduate school. Next, identify a metaphor that best describes the way that you negotiate your identities during graduate school.

Reflection Questions: What object did you choose? What story does this object tell about you? Why did you choose this object? What characteristics do you bring with you from this identity into graduate school? Does this identity ever intersect with some of your other identities? Explain and provide an example. How do your own intersecting identities influence your experiences as a graduate student?

Purpose: After having discussed the topic of identities and intersecting identities in the previous interviews, this activity will allow you to reflect upon your understanding of the way that some of your identities come to influence your experiences as a graduate student and how you negotiate some of these identities during graduate school. We will use this activity as a starting point for discussion in the third interview.

* Please complete this activity after the second interview and bring it with you to our third interview session. *

Please be aware that if you need someone to talk to about your feelings, support can be easily accessed. Within the university you can contact Brock’s Student Development Centre for personal counselling via their website at http://www.brocku.ca/sdc/counselling/ or phone (905) 688-5550 ext. 3240 or contact Campus Ministries through their website at http://www.brocku.ca/ campusministries/
Appendix F-3

Take-Home Tasks

November 2006 – September 2007

**Title of Study:** Exploring Female Graduate Students’ Multifaceted and Intersecting Identities In a Complex Educational Milieu

**Principal Investigator:** Christina Skorobohacz, Master of Education Student, Graduate and Undergraduate Studies Department, Faculty of Education, Brock University

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Alice Schutz, Assistant Professor and Thesis Advisor, Graduate and Undergraduate Studies Department, Faculty of Education, Brock University

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**Post-Interview Activity #3**

**Activity: Strategy Development**

**Instructions:** Write a list of strategies that would support student identity exploration both within and outside of the graduate classroom. Consider strategies from multiple perspectives (i.e. strategies for: students, professors, administrators, the university, society etc.).

**Reflection Questions:** What strategies do you presently use to support the exploration of your identities in graduate school? What other strategies would help graduate students negotiate their identities and explore their identities? (consider strategies within the classroom, and strategies beyond the classroom context). What strategies could professors employ to assist their graduate students with identity exploration and negotiation? What strategies could administrators and other university personnel employ to help graduate students with identity exploration and negotiation?

**Purpose:** After talking about the identities that you negotiate during graduate studies, and identifying some of the environmental barriers that impede student identity exploration, it becomes important to be a part of the solution seeking process. This activity will enable you to identify potential strategies that can help to support students as they explore their multifaceted and intersecting identities. We will use this activity as a starting point for discussion in the fourth interview.

* Please complete this activity after the third interview and bring it with you to our final interview session.*

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Please be aware that if you need someone to talk to about your feelings, support can be easily accessed. Within the university you can contact Brock’s Student Development Centre for personal counselling via their website at http://www.brocku.ca/sdc/counselling/ or phone (905) 688-5550 ext. 3240 or contact Campus Ministries through their website at http://www.brocku.ca/ campusministries/
Appendix G

Pre-Interview Script

November 2006 – September 2007

The purpose of the interview that you are about to participate in is to explore Master of Education students’ understandings of their identities, the ways that their identities intersect, how they negotiate these intricate identities within the complex educational milieu of graduate studies and the specific ways in which their identities are either legitimized or discounted within the institution. Through the use of semi-structured interviews with participants such as yourself, you will be asked to reflect on your varied identities (such as your personal, professional and academic identities) and to recall situations surrounding the exploration and negotiation of your various identity roles.

We are going to be discussing themes such as:
- Various definitions and ways of understanding identities
- Your categorizations of various identities
- Your strategies for negotiating your various identities
- Your understandings of the ways that your identities intersect
- Your specific needs (i.e., academic, social, emotional, physical etc.) as a female graduate student learner
- Environmental factors that facilitate and impede the exploration of your multiple and intersecting identities
- Strategies that support the exploration of your identities both within and outside of the graduate classroom

The interview will be audiotaped, so that our conversation can later be transcribed accurately to capture your ideas, insights and opinions. As a result of these methods, your anonymity cannot be maintained; however, I assure you that everything you say will be kept confidential and I will refer to any of your responses by the pseudonym, which you have selected. A few days after each interview, I will send you a copy of the transcript, so that you can confirm its accuracy and clarify any information. Please feel free to answer as honestly and openly as possible. If you feel uncomfortable answering a particular question, feel free to indicate that you would like to skip to the next question. If you are unsure of a question, please ask me for clarification. Also, remember that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and that you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Please be aware that if you need someone to talk to about your feelings, support can be easily accessed. Within the university you can contact Brock’s Student Development Centre for personal counselling via their website at http://www.brocku.ca/sdc/counselling/ or phone (905) 688-5550 ext. 3240 or contact Campus Ministries through their website at http://www.brocku.ca/ campusministries/.
Please answer yes if you meet all three of the criteria for participation in this study:
✓ female
✓ currently enrolled in the Master of Education program at Brock for the 2006-2007 school year
✓ Canadian Citizen
• If participant answers yes, continue on.
• If participant answers no, then terminate the interview process and thank the participant for her interest in the study.

Do I have your permission to record everything and to proceed with the interview?

• If participant answers yes, proceed to Interview Script #1 (Appendix C).
• If participant answers no, then terminate the interview process and thank the participant for her interest in the study.