Negotiating a Gendered Neo-Calvinist Pillar:

Immigrant Loss, Transformation, and Lifelong Learning

Cathy (Kempenaar) VanderVliet (B.A., M.Ed.)

Department of Educational Studies

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Faculty of Education, Brock University

St. Catharines, Ontario

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Abstract

Employing a critical feminist perspective, I conducted a sociocultural analysis of the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist women who immigrated to Canada shortly after World War II. The purpose of the research was a critique of the institutional ruling relations (schooling, religion, family, workplace) that shaped and influenced the trajectory of these women’s lifelong learning. More specifically, the inquiry included an interrogation of their Canadian schooling experience, in the context of an immigrant family life, their pillarized Dutch culture, and Calvinist religiosity. In choosing a life history methodology, the scope of the research broadened where one’s life story was juxtaposed to a theory of context. Applying this methodology, I critically analyzed structures, operations, and contestations of power in lifelong learning institutions through an exploration of the multiple contexts that shaped the lives of immigrant women. It is within that relationship that the critical feminist was possible. The life histories were not a description of the mainstream but rather were positioned to dialectically interrogate the meaning and significance of the past as it influenced the present and future. Applying a dialectic method to the participants’ life histories, 7 tensions were raised that made visible ruling relations relevant to the participants’ everyday experiences and brought awareness to the underlying contextual and ideological assumptions related to their trajectory of lifelong learning. Employing a critical feminist perspective, I examined how 3 neo-Calvinist immigrant women interpreted and negotiated the ambiguity created by cultural contradictions experienced in a Canadian context. As a researcher who herself has been shaped by this specific immigrant experience, a key attribute of life history methodology was its capacity for the researcher self to be visible in the research.
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To everything there is a season
A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them. (Ecclesiastes 3: 1&5)

“It is said that the close study of stones will reveal traces of fire suffered thousands of years ago” (Griffin, 1992, p. 9).
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Loss, mourning, the longing for memory, the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it, the fear of observing too coldly or too distractedly or too raggedly, the rage of cowardice, the insight that is always arriving late, as defiant hindsight, a sense of utter uselessness of writing anything and yet the burning desire to write something, are the stopping places along the way. At the end of the voyage, if you are lucky, you catch a glimpse of a lighthouse, and you are grateful. Life, after all, is bountiful. (Behar, 1996, p. 3)

Ruth Behar (1996), in A Vulnerable Observer, affectively speaks of her entry into her research project—an apt description that conveys the profound uncertainty, trepidation, and desire one has when stepping into the social complexity of trying to understand how the cultural, historical, and political “play out” in a trajectory of lifelong learning. My life history research study is not about my life per se, but everything about it is personally compelling and resonates with my own experiences and trajectory of lifelong learning. Like hooks (2009), in Belonging: a culture of place, I find mirrored in my Dutch neo-Calvinist genealogy, the attributes of care and commitment, deeply inscribed in a life of learning: “two seeds…essential to any effort to create love” (p. 228).

Behar asserts that the exploration of the researcher’s self takes place indirectly through the mediation of writing and researching about another. As a second (or one and a half) generation immigrant to Canada, I have come to realize that my life has always situated me as a migrant and a learner in a strange world with its unique institutional systems,

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1 Neo-Calvinism: a form of Calvinism initiated by the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1937-1920) (Mouw, 2011).
2 Van Arragon Hutten (2001) uses this term for children who came with their immigrant parents. While I was born in Canada, perhaps because I am the oldest child in an immigrant family I find myself more closely identifying with the generation of children who were born in Holland but came to Canada at a young age.
power relations, rites of passage, and gatekeepers; a migrant whose lifelong learning has been propagated by a desire for citizenship—a care and commitment to belong. Adrienne Clarkson (2014) explores how a sense of belonging is a necessary mediation between an individual and society; she argues, “A society…is an act of communal imagination…belonging is the outcome of that imaginative act” (p. 27).

The first chapter begins with an introduction to the critical feminist life history research study I conducted for my dissertation. In light of a sociocultural critique, I discuss and explain the use of the term “ruling relation.” This is followed with a background for a research problem situated in a Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant enclave. Positioned as an insider, I delineate aspects of my own life history related to lifelong learning as a foreshadow to the participants’ life histories and as an introduction to a Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant culture. The chapter concludes with a rationale for the study and a summary of the research purpose and questions. A descriptive overview of the remainder of the document is presented.

A Life History Study

Employing a critical feminist theoretical framework, the purpose of my life history research was to present an analysis of the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist women who immigrated to Canada shortly after World War II. In the study, I took the stance that women learn throughout their lives (lifelong) in multiple connected daily contexts (formal, informal, non-formal, incidental). In particular, I conducted a sociocultural critique of the institutional ruling relations (schooling, religious, family, vocation) that shape the trajectory of these women’s lifelong learning. Smith (2005) argues that an analysis of ruling relations begins by locating a standpoint that provides the guiding perspective from which that institutional order can be explored. Applying a
feminist perspective, I took up a woman’s standpoint as a place to begin locating the knower in her body, in a lived world, in the material actuality of her experience (Smith, 1999). By examining the intersection of formal schooling and the actuality of lifelong lived experience for women immigrants to Canada, the research is dialectically predisposed to disclose and mediate the contradictions that are an outcome of cultural (political, social, historical) difference. While formal schooling experiences were integral throughout the discussions held in the interviews, a life history methodology encompasses the fullness, breadth, and longitude of lifelong learning as an historical materialism and thus incorporates a broader consideration and context of ruling relations. In choosing a life history methodology, the scope of the research is expanded—where one’s life story is juxtaposed with a theory of context (historical, political, cultural). It is within this relationship that the critical is possible. Life history is not meant to be a description of the mainstream, but rather positioned to interrogate the meaning and significance of the participants’ pasts as it influences the present and the future. As a researcher who herself has been shaped by this specific immigrant experience, a key attribute of life history methodology is its capacity for the researcher’s self to be visible in the research context and to co-construct meaning into how society is structured, how women’s learning occurs, and how these women make sense of their lives.

**Ruling Relations**

“The powerful combination of peer pressure and rational rules... can create a new iron cage with bars that are almost invisible to the workers” (Ashmos & Nathan, 2002, p. 199).

In lifelong learning I assume that negotiation of meaning is dynamic; an embodied structural process where knowledge construction is unique to each knower and subject to experience in a particular time and place (Davis 2004). Each knower is
compelled to contextually construe the world in his or her own way, while being consistent with whom he or she has been (Wheatley, 2006). Davis points out that even though the negotiation of meaning is a unique process, these personal interpretations are at the same time subject to contextual constraints or forces of physical and relational experience so that the individual is not free to construct any world but is “compelled to construe a reality that fits with the context or circumstance” (p. 121). Marx argues this further by saying, it is not the consciousness of human beings that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness (Tong, 2014). Arguably, gendered thinking too is an outcome of how one is compelled by relational forces to construe a reality that fits within a particular context. Smith (1999, 2005), using the term ruling relations, explains that these forces are forms of consciousness that organize our everyday lives and are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people and places. Capra (2002) adds that these relations are created with a purpose and embody meaning that emerges from a network of communications among individuals and are continually reinforced by these networks. As such, they are also humanly fabricated mental frameworks which presuppose an institutional context of action, but they are not absolute, and the extent to which they are perceived as an external persuasive force depends on how they are interpreted and translated in time and space.

Coining the term ruling relations, Smith (1999, 2005) explains that they are an extraordinary yet ordinary complex that are textually mediated and connect us across time and space.

It [world of relations] has an ordinary existence for us, the ordinary existence that the means, objects, and practices of our coordinated work creates. It has a kind of
thickness, a solidity, a taken-for-grantedness, for us that is surprising when we consider its primarily textual ground. There properties are created as we participate with others in the work that orients to and actively accomplishes the features of reality. (Smith, 1999, p. 50)

Smith (1999), drawing on Marx, underlines that it is extraordinary that the social comes into being “only as the doings of actual people under definite material conditions” (p. 25) and while our own powers contribute to the construct of ruling relations, they stand over our lives. Ruling relations settle into people’s unconsciousness to generate a shared understanding that the workings of society have a natural logic (Jubas & Jubas, 2006). As relations become deeply inscribed in one’s everyday life one does not even think of it as a world of relations and ourselves as its practitioners (Smith, 1999, 2005) and yet in moments of discrepancy or resistance, we become critically and emotionally aware of the forces that act on and constrain personal agency and decision making. While Smith is clear to say that ruling relations do not refer to modes of domination but rather as a distinctive and complex mode of organizing society, Jubas and Jubas point out that ruling relations determine what society pays attention to at the detriment of those who might be oppressed or marginalized in that system.

Taber (2010) also asserts that ruling relations interact with people’s everyday lives in “complex interconnecting ways” (p. 10), not a one-way relationship where some have agency and others passively accept being dominated. By exploring interactions, she points out that “we can see that people in various parts of the system have various amounts of power; but some have easier access to affect ruling relations” (p. 10). Ruling relations are not just about who has power; “they are about how people implicated in a
system or institution perceive certain concepts” (Taber, 2010, p. 10) and how perceptions related to power position people within the system.

Smith (1999, 2005) asserts that to inquire about ruling relations, one must begin with the actualities of lived experience. The intent is to “discover the social as it comes into view from an experiencing of life that is not already defined within the ruling relations” (Smith, 1999, p. 74). Exploring ruling relations begins with some issue, distinction, or problem for real people that are situated in their relationship to the learning institution. For immigrant women, the negotiation of cultural distinctions warrants an issue which has not already been defined within the institution and can be explicated by the researcher such that the intersection creates a dialectic relation (thesis/antithesis) that raises ruling relations of the institution of learning (Smith, 2005). Smith asserts that ruling relations, which operate invisibly or without critique—a natural logic—can be made tangible by examining issues of difference or contradiction that intersect the institution in the actuality of people’s experience within that institution.

**Background (the Problem)**

Influenced by the findings of my previous research (VanderVliet, 2011), where I examined epistemic assumptions concerning the implementation of school curriculum, I was drawn to new questions that surfaced concerning the influence and power of systemic structures (ruling relations) that were inherent in an institutional framework in which individuals were situated to negotiate learning. Specifically, rethinking my own epistemic convictions, I began to think about the trajectory of my own lifelong learning. How did my various experiences of formal (school), informal, and non-formal (religious, cultural, family) education shape the decisions and direction of my life? Kincheloe (2010)
points out that in a positivist or traditional epistemic perspective where the emphasis is not the production of knowledge but the learning of that which has already been defined as knowledge, the tension concerning various ruling relations (political, historical, cultural) has not been a germane issue. Shifting the epistemic lens to presuppose an internal dynamic of constructing knowledge (as opposed to absorbing or transferring external knowledge “out there”) changes the relevance of relations in such a way as to implicate the influence and power it exerts on the process of negotiating meaning and knowledge construction. Bannerji (2015) points out that in its traditional iteration, “the autonomy of knowledge, in its transcendent or objective status, is itself an ideology which conceals the actuality of social organization and relations and the situated nature of knowledge” (p. 166). She argues that an inquiry of lifelong learning begins where knowledge starts, “from the life activities of embodied, conscious socio-historical subjects as they produce and reproduce themselves” (p. 165). In other words, an inquiry set into the material reality of people’s lives—their life lived in determined time and space—is where the transformation of lifelong learning takes place.

The questions that I raised were evoked from a critical perspective; it was a personal reflection where in the actuality of my own experience, I observed the distinction and contradiction that for some, education was not a robust, equitable, or democratic learning experience. As conveyed by Foucault (1995), instead of an educational place of inquiry, exploration, growth, and learning, the opportunity to learn could become constrained and prison-like and a place with little autonomy—where one was redundantly obligated to serve the prescribed time. Foucault (1995) points out the image of Bentham’s metaphoric panopticon where education is framed by a hierarchical
disciplinary place, where the learners only perceive that they are systemically being monitored and disciplined and unable to access their own agency and natural propensity to inquire. Joanne Martin (2002), in *Organizational Culture*, argues the most common cultural response to this problem/peculiarity is reflected by an *integration* perspective: everyone moving together in collaboration (and benevolently) to make the espoused theory work and thus an attempt to enfold the peculiar or resistant learner. This is in contrast to a *differentiated* perspective, where the attention shifts to an interrogation and critique of how and why the espoused social framework produces resistance.

Contributing to an institutional illusion, all of this happens within seemingly stable structures and relations and amongst learners who appear to flourish and succeed. As Grace (2013) points out, the propensity is to personalize the distinction—there is a deficiency in these individuals that causes such resistance, anxiety, and failure to thrive. McLaren (2015) argues that it is a perpetuated myth to believe that our educational system is the “great equalizer” (p. 114) of society and that every learner reaps the academic rewards of his or her own individual initiative. It seems as if, socially and politically, there appears to be a benevolent will and rhetoric for democratic inclusion but so often the reform outcomes are seemingly paralyzed to affect any change to make learning a more accessible and equal possibility.

To situate a sociocultural critique, I was motivated by Thayer-Bacon’s (2006) comparative cultural research that studied immigrant students in American classrooms juxtaposed with students who attended school in their original home countries. I was also disrupted by my own recent experiences working with immigrant families in a clinical health education setting. Like Thayer-Bacon, I found that cultural newcomers
(immigrants to Canada) reported and expressed feelings of confusion, subtraction, and loss of their values as they negotiated and grappled with the meaning of a new culture while they lived the redundancies of their own. It became apparent that in the process of negotiating meaning, they straddled two spheres; they negotiated and juggled the power asymmetry of two worlds, two cultures, and two languages. In one particular moment, conducting a workshop in a Sikh gurdwara, I was impressed by the leader who was welcoming me as a Canadian outsider and explaining some of the cultural and religious distinctions he must have interpreted I was experiencing. What I wanted to say in that moment was that being in that space “warmly” resonated with my own experience of being different than my Canadian neighbour. I found myself reflecting on my own immigrant experience and even though my cultural background was quite different from these immigrants, surprisingly the stories and tensions resonated with my own memories and feelings. I was struck by my own sense of duplicity (a Canadian culture and a homelace\(^3\) culture) and what that had meant in my efforts to negotiate meaning as a learner in places like school. The struggle/resistance to invisibly make sense of and find meaning for the alien learning experiences in which I was subjected, demanded deep cognitive negotiation. Strangely, until that moment, I had never actualized the exceptionality of that experience nor had I reflected on how this affected the trajectory of my lifelong learning.

Kilbourn (2006) asserts that research problems are usually “constructed out of a complex interplay among one’s own thinking about an issue, one’s own experience, and

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\(^3\) Gouthro (2005) explains that a person defines her homelace based upon personal lived experience, her family, and cultural background. The homelace may be inclusive of a larger cultural setting than just an individual residence. I argue here that in my experience as a Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant in Canada, the homelace included my family home and a religiosity and defined “church” community.
one’s understanding of the research literature” (p. 539). As a graduate student, I questioned—with a career in teaching, an established home, and motherhood—why would I choose to pursue further formal education in the trajectory of my lifelong learning? This was a perplexing question, a decision made with little practical discernment. As a lifelong learner, it was as if I were being led towards it, that I was “walking on water” (L’Engle, 1980; Ortberg, 2001); it was an aesthetic where for a brief moment one’s breath is taken away, and where one is compelled with all their heart to find it again. I recognized this as an engagement of autonomy—an essential element of lifelong learning (VanderVliet, 2011).

Gouthro (2005) asserts that women often enter into education wanting to attain a sense of autonomy and to develop a sense of identity that is not determined by the redundancies represented in their relationships with others (e.g., church, family). There is a certain ambivalence or resistance, she says, for someone whose gendered identity is rooted in established relationships and where engagement in formal learning presents a risk of making a painful choice between maintaining connectedness to a point of reference or an educational transformation that might be incompatible. Tara Westover (2018) in her memoir, Educated, raises this very point when she realizes that in engaging her autonomy for lifelong learning she has simultaneously made her relationship with her parents/family untenable. In accessing autonomy, identity transformation in lifelong learning creates a certain sense of alienation. As Westover explains, “I couldn’t reconcile [that] world with mine so I separated them” (p. 174). Taylor (2017) also points out, in a trajectory of learning, there is trepidation of changing one’s way of life which has been defined by one’s religious and familial allegiances; fundamental commitments, highly
valued relationships, and one’s self-worth. When one sees themselves as peculiar (Dutch neo-Calvinist woman), there is a perceived amount of risk in learning—a praxis of courage.

As a student, teacher, and academic in Canadian schools, my Dutch ethnicity has remained mostly invisible to the public sphere. Here, it appears as if I have become fully assimilated to a new culture and citizenship. In private however, the genealogy of my Dutch heritage has in many ways predestined the choices and trajectory of my lifelong learning. Being the “other” in school, I felt (and still feel) the cultural distinctions of immigration. I have strategized/normalized ways to be invisible because from a positivist perspective, I believed being different in a dominant culture made me less—made me deficient. Shan (2015) argues that the sociocultural differences between Canadians and immigrants coming into Canada are most often associated with deficiency and thus immigrant stories of experience have most often been suppressed to minimize a sense of vulnerability. Shan concludes that institutions focus on transmitting knowledge and skills necessary for a Canadian context but are not constructed to the immigrants’ own point of reference—their culture, epistemological views, and life experiences. Experiencing a paradigmatic shift (constructivist, critical feminist) in my academic work provided me with a new lens from which to view my life, my identity, my experience, relationships, and work in school. A raised awareness has also given me a confidence that instead of deficiency, the stories of immigrant women bear crucial knowledge about the ruling relations that shape their trajectories of lifelong learning.

Reflecting that my life story would have significant connection to the research, I chose to employ a life history methodology where the intersubjective realm of being and
meaning places the qualitative researcher squarely in the research frame (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Taber (2012) points out that the self can be used as an entry point into research that explores experiences that lead to a sociocultural analysis. By employing a life history methodology, I was able to collaborate with the participants and co-create an intersubjective understanding of the phenomenon of lifelong learning. As a context to their stories, I begin with a brief overview of my own personal life history.

**Personal Life History: A Brief Overview**

“We retell our stories… our stories, remake the past. This is inevitable. Moreover, it is good” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 85).

Taber (2018) contemplates that our life histories begin long before we are born. My parents grew up in the Netherlands during an historical chaotic time. Occupied by Germany in the Second World War, as children, they remember the disruption and fear German soldiers wielded over their lives. They knew resistance, violence, death, hunger, and silence. After the war, my mother recalls the church *fieldman*\(^4\) coming into her home in Friesland\(^5\), sitting at the dining table, relaying propaganda stories about Canada and how in this moment her father and older brothers were carried along in a wave that had so many leaving their country. In the early 1950s, as teenagers, my parents immigrated to southern Alberta with their parents and siblings. Both came from working class/farming families and both were deeply embedded in the Netherlands’s neo-Calvinist social/faith pillar\(^6\) (Koyzis, 2003; Post, 1989; Schryer, 1998; van Dijk, 2001). Both had completed

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\(^4\) Fieldman: men who were employed by the Christian Reformed Church (centred in Grand Rapids, Michigan) to assist with immigration to Canada. They provided settlement services (homes, employment) and often met new immigrants upon arrival in Canada.

\(^5\) Friesland: a province in the Netherlands

\(^6\) Post (1989) defines pillars as: “blochs of societal organizations and forms of social life based on *Weltanschauung* [worldview] which have the same legal status. They exist within a larger democratic
their basic school education during the precariousness of wartime. Unlike her oldest sister who was needed on the farm, my mother attended and completed *huishoudschool*\(^7\) just before leaving for Canada. My father began working for a local butcher but encouraged by his teacher, he continued business education at night school before immigrating to Canada. After disembarking from ships in Quebec City and Halifax, they took the long trip by train across Canada, where they arrived at the farms of their Canadian sponsors. As conveyed in VanderMey (1983), these immigrant families were immediately thrust into the chaos and negotiation of substandard, unclean housing and limited resources, a far cry from the fieldman’s descriptions of “milk and honey” (Teeuwsen, 2016; van Dijk, 2001; VanderMey, 1983). Feeling deceived by the Dutch government and particularly the Christian Reformed Church (CRC)\(^8\), which marketed immigration to Canada, my mother’s father (my *pake*) always conveyed that he regretted emigrating from the Netherlands, but returning was never a viable option. In a resistant protest, my grandfather refused to attend church for a number of years and also wrote a number of oppositional articles that he sent back to the Netherlands for publication in Dutch newspapers. Likewise, my father’s parents had been persuaded to come to Canada by their oldest sons—saying if the boys decided to venture to Canada, the whole family would go with them.

Arriving at the ages of 17 and 16, neither of my parents went to school in Canada. They immediately went to work (initially as farm labourers in sugar beet fields) to

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\(7\) *Huishoudschool*: a 2-year program for girls to teach household management and child care. Considered an educational option for the children of working class origins

support their families with much needed income. The CRC, which had begun to be established in Canada by a first wave of Dutch settlers after World War I, grew quickly and provided significant social, spiritual, and economic support to the Dutch neo-Calvinist newcomer (Van Arragon Hutten, 2001; J. VanderVliet, 1994). On weekends, my father’s family, who had a car, provided transportation for newcomers to attend the newly established CRC church. This is how my parents met. In 1957, they married and moved to another established Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant enclave in southern Ontario where my father’s family had relocated earlier. This was where I was born and lived my life until leaving for university in 1977. When I was quite young, most of my mother’s family also moved to Ontario so I grew up knowing a large extended family.

I was the first-born child of my immigrant parents (six children would follow) and while English was a focused language in our household, Dutch and Frisian were regularly spoken by the adults in the Dutch neo-Calvinist enclave in which we lived and socialized. At home our family identified as neo-Calvinists and like other like-minded immigrant families that we knew, each day included educative/devotional routines around Bible knowledge and meditation. Each meal was begun together with prayer and ended with Bible reading and prayer. Church was central to our lives; as a family we attended one or two services on a Sunday (conducted in both the English and Dutch languages) and during the week, attended the various societies, classes, and clubs (e.g., Men’s and Ladies Societies, Catechism classes, Calvinette girls club, Cadet boys club, vacation Bible school, Young Peoples) that were an integral learning and social aspect of church

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9 Ganzervoort (1988), Schryer (1998), and Van Arragon Hutten (2001) explain that Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant children, older than 12 or 13, did not go to school but worked to support the family income. 10 A provincial dialect in the province of Friesland. Today, Frisian is an official language in the Netherlands.
life (Schryer, 1998; Teeuwsen, 2016). Although my mother attended the various activities when she could (she did not have driver’s licence and depended on my father for transportation), my father took on leadership roles in the church and was a member of the Evangelism committee, a Catechism teacher, and a Cadet counsellor. Over time my father’s relationship to the church began to erode as he came under discipline for his participation, outside the church, in the local hockey organization and a community square dance club. He was removed from his leadership and teaching positions and he never quite got over the indignation of that. In response, he became even more involved with secular (Canadian) community organizations and events. Through all of this, I interpreted that my mother remained silent.

At the age of 6, I began my formal Canadian schooling in a one-room school house with 30 other students. I attended a public school—my parents made the decision not to send me and my siblings to an independent Calvinist Christian school\textsuperscript{11} even though there was always an underlying cultural expectation and obligation to do so for members of the CRC (Teeuwsen, 2016). I believe there were several reasons why they chose to support public education: (a) it was accessible; after an intense dispute with another CRC church, the Christian school had been built a significant distance from the smaller congregation; (b) the financial burden; (c) my father’s resistant perspective about church; and (d) my parent’s overriding commitment to assimilate into their new country.

My memory of the one-room school house was of a middle-aged strict woman/teacher who managed the curriculum for a multi-grade classroom (Grades 1, 2, 5, 6) while at the

\textsuperscript{11} Calvinist Christian schools were established by parents of the Christian Reformed Church as an independent alternative to a Canadian public school system. Teeuwsen (2016) examines the historical and ideological foundations in \textit{Understanding the Intersection of Reformed Faith and Dutch Immigrant Culture in Ontario Independent Christian Schools: Principals’ Experiences and Perspectives}. 
same time negotiating the oil stove for heat, the hand pump for water, and an outhouse for washroom facilities. I did not like school; I cried every day, and I frustrated my teacher who finally resorted to threatening me with her strap. I found school confusing and I had difficulty communicating my anxiety and my unhappiness. I negotiated strategies to avoid my teacher’s disapproval and punishment. Eventually it was decided that I was not ready for a full day of school and that I would be permitted to walk home during the afternoon recess. This was the beginning of a life of two spheres, one in which I had been born, and one where I experienced a deep sense of dislocation. Negotiating Grade 1 was the beginning of knowing difference, of feeling tension, and confronting my Canadian neighbour. It was the first grade readers, with stories of an idyllic Canadian way of life, that captured my imagination of what it must be like to not be different and how I wanted to live and be like the characters in the book. This would be a sentiment throughout my formative schooling years—a sentiment that would never really ring true.

After my experience in a one-room schoolhouse, my second year was spent on a long bus ride to a newly built modern consolidated school12; a school with running water and flush toilets. For the most part, I no longer cried although I was fearful of my teacher who I perceived as an older stern woman. My younger brother joined me in a split Grade 1 and 2 class and I remember feeling a sense of responsibility toward him—a sense of protecting him. Over the next 7 years, I gradually developed success as a student and learned that I was a good athlete. While much of curriculum content of school was never discussed at home, there were some areas of learning where I experienced a connection with the homeplace. For example, my mother taught me at a very young age to sew, knit,

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12 In the 1960s Ontario saw the transition of the one room schoolhouse model to larger consolidated schools (Osborne, 2001).
embroider, and crochet. This became connected to my home economics class. As a family we were all an integral part of planting, maintaining, harvesting, and preserving a large vegetable garden. This learning became relevant and connected to science. Classes in Bible studies were given by local pastors (United, Presbyterian) providing a Canadian (alternative) view of what we were learning in the homeplace/church. In a home where there were few books, it was in the school library where I developed a love for reading and gained my own sense of agency to find and collect treasured reading material. While the church had its own selective library (of which I read most of the books available to me), on my own, I accessed a local public library and began a lifetime of learning outside of a neo-Calvinist framework.

I always interpreted my Canadian schoolmates as smarter and more popular but I perceived that I could achieve the expected institutional outcomes if I worked hard, took ownership, and persevered. A significant memory of this time was when my friends would come to school once a year in their Brownie and Guide uniforms to celebrate their participation in the organization. I was not allowed to join but went instead to a parallel church club called Calvinettes. On this one day, this was a distinction I could not make invisible and in spite of the reality that I enjoyed Calvinettes, I felt a sense of “vague shame” (Van Arragon Hutten, 2001, p. 217) for not being able to wear a uniform that said I belonged.

I spent 5 years in high school where I forged positive relationships with my teachers and contributed significantly to the extracurricular life of the school. In doing this I was able to find meaning and connection to my life in school when I knew that my ability to interact socially and have friendships with my peers was always constrained by
an ideological disconnect. I worked part time as a healthcare aide at a local nursing home, worked in summer recreation programs as an instructor and supervisor, worked with children and adults with disabilities in a health institution and was very involved with my Young People’s group in church.

After Grade 13, I moved away from home to an Ontario public university to pursue a program in nursing but struggled to authentically engage in the day-to-day actuality of school. I found that, unlike home where there were clear distinctions between a public and private life, university meant a much closer interaction with my Canadian peers and instructors. This created an increased anxiety and tension as I negotiated new ways of seemingly trying to belong while at the same time knowing difference. I did not adjust well to the large lecture style classes and the “distant profs” and I missed the community of my small town high school and the stability of the ideological resources I had in my private life. Even though I had achieved academic success, after 1 year, I picked up and transferred to a denominational (Christian Reformed) liberal arts college in the United States majoring in physical education and science studies. Although I had never been outside of Canada, nor did I know anyone, I loved school—the classes were small, the professors engaging, and my school life seemed to align with my private life. These were people I “knew” and understood. Even though I was in a different country, for the first time since I had started school, the tension of duplicity was diminished and I felt a certain trust and authenticity as a learner.

13 Conceived as an immigrant, the concept of “public and private” is somewhat differing from Habermas’s meaning of the lifeworld. As an immigrant teen, my private world was my identity/activity in the Dutch neo-Calvinist enclave which included my family and church relationships while my public world was the secular and Canadian sphere which included school and the workplace.
As a trajectory of my learning in a neo-Calvinist school, I became a teacher and my life in school continued in an elementary independent neo-Calvinist Christian school. While it was never my intent to stay there long, having children and settling into a community where my husband worked, made staying convenient. I was a teacher in this system of schools for more than 25 years. Our children attended the Calvinist Christian elementary school and then choose to attend the local public high school. This choice caused tension in my professional life since children of employees were contractually required to attend schools within the independent system. I argued that choosing a high school was not my decision alone, that my husband and children were also integral to the making the best determination and in that vein it was an inappropriate stipulation in the contract. In the end, while they did not change the contract, they accepted our family decision. I regularly participated in professional development throughout my teaching but as my children became increasingly independent, I made a decision to enter graduate school to complete my Master of Education; in part to better contribute to the institution I had spent most of life in and in particular to grapple with the many tensions and unanswered questions that no one seemed to dare raise for fear that doing so would be disruptive in a workplace environment where harmony was assumed to be biblical.

My learning trajectory in my Master’s program had a significant impact on my decision to continue on in academia. One of the outcomes of my research was the development of a constructivist theoretical framework (VanderVliet, 2011) that was representative of my epistemic theorizing and for me a paradigmatic shift that significantly changed the way I conceptualized learning, in particular lifelong learning. Before doing graduate work, I worked with a view that formal schooling was where
legitimate learning happened and that the prescriptive curriculum that I worked with had significant weight in a person’s ability to be successful as a productive citizen. This idea determined my professional behaviour and my expectations of students. As my own children grew up, I noticed that what they were learning in school seemed to have limited interest and relevance in their lives. For example, on weekends they worked with their father in an industrial setting and acquired skills and a language they did not learn in school but has had a powerful impact in shaping the trajectory of their learning as adults. I noticed that learning that was happening in part-time jobs, recreational and social activities, travelling, and day-to-day experiences seemed to be far more educational than what they seemed to be telling me about school. The epistemic analysis that I conducted in my Master’s work brought me to the realization that a positivist perspective, while its structural relations still predominates and frames formal schooling, is a limited epistemic perspective to understand knowing and learning. This idea shifted my thinking about not only where learning occurs but the relevance and significance of that learning in a person’s life. As a woman, I was also interested in the various contradictions that seemed exceptional to a gendered experience. After defending my Master’s thesis, I was compelled by my findings and intrigued by the questions that it raised such that it seemed convincing for me to extend my research in a PhD program.

My life in academia still straddles an ideological divide. My neo-Calvinist identity, relationships, and labour continue to be deeply inscribed in the trajectory of learning. I continue to contribute to an independent neo-Calvinist vision of schooling as an instructor and faculty supervisor in a neo-Calvinist university college. I am also a student and a part-time instructor at a public university. The distinctions of these two
institutions however have become intricately woven in a personal tension of schooling/learning and, instead of being determined to keep them apart, I find myself being intrigued by their intersection and ambiguity.

**Purpose of the Study**

Employing a critical feminist conceptual framework, the purpose of my life history research was an analysis of the lifelong learning of three Dutch neo-Calvinist women who immigrated to Canada shortly after World War II. More specifically, I conducted a sociocultural critique of the institutional ruling relations (schooling, religious, family, vocation) that shaped the trajectory of these women’s lifelong learning. While formal schooling experiences were integral throughout the discussions held in the interviews, a life history methodology encompasses the fullness, breadth, and longitude of lifelong learning in various sites of learning and within contextual influences and thus incorporates a broader consideration and context of ruling relations. The life histories of post-World War II immigrant women not only bring new meaning to their lived experiences and memories in the context of adult learning, but also have the potential to interrogate the meaning and significance of the past as it influences the present and future.

**Research Questions**

The research questions investigated in the study are:

1. In the context of lifelong learning, what are the remembered experiences of schooling and learning for Dutch neo-Calvinist women who immigrated to Canada post World War II?

2. What institutional ruling relations (schooling, religion, family, vocation) are
evidenced in those remembered experiences and how have they shaped the trajectory of these women’s lifelong learning?

3. How did these women understand the relationship of gender to their lifelong learning?

Rationale for the Research

In order to examine the schooling experiences and lifelong learning of immigrant women in Canada, I chose a particular historical ethnic enclave for the research: Dutch neo-Calvinist women immigrants who arrived in Canada soon after the Second World War. As a significant immigrant group to Canada, it was chosen in part to take advantage of its longitudinal capacity necessary for an inquiry into lifelong learning and also set the inquiry into the tensions of my own immigrant experiences of schooling. To the question of how an immigration wave, that happened more than 50 years ago, can speak to a contemporary time, Simmons (2010) argues that the exercise of examining the past can provide useful perspectives for understanding present-day patterns. Also, by illuminating the past, the present is made clearer by contrasting it with different past trends. A life history methodology speaks to the way in which the world is now, through constructions of the past as well as through constructions of the present (Armstrong, 2003). Grace (2013) points out that “the past variously permeates the present” (p. 100) and it is that sentiment that motivates a sociocultural critique that is relevant to a contemporary time.

More broadly speaking, a research problem that examines the experience of immigrants in their host country is particularly germane when developed countries are currently experiencing high numbers of people moving across their borders. Homer-Dixon (2006) argues that as a developed country, Canadians have only begun to
experience the tensions and pressures of global mobility. With emerging technology, he predicts that millions of people will migrate toward rich countries in search of employment and a better life. As a complex reality, he asserts that this will bring both vitality and challenging dimensions to Canadian culture. As a social institution, schools—classrooms—will be at the very centre of where young immigrants face the tensions of cultural difference and pressures to integrate into Canadian citizenry. Schools have a major role in forming social and political identity and giving young people the mechanisms to become active citizens (Castles, 2004).

The embodied experience of being transplanted into a new culture is filled with trepidation and uncertainty. Homer-Dixon (2006) also notes, rightly so I believe, that few citizens of host countries see these immigrants as individual people or have a chance to hear their individual stories; to many, he says, “they are a faceless foreign horde pushing into the country from every direction, threatening to disrupt the existing economic, cultural, and demographic balance” (p. 67). In a critical view, Bronner (2017) argues, the dominator disposition propagates contempt for the outsider, the new, and the different. hooks (2009) furthers the sentiment by arguing that it is the refusal on the part of dominator culture to acknowledge the humanity of such people that leaves them held at the margins of a host country. This study raises relevant and important immigrant stories for all Canadians to better understand the tensions that arise in social institutions when there is cultural difference and the impact these relations have on a trajectory of lifelong learning.

Järvinen (2004) points out that in the past, there has been a predominance of androcentric life history scripts—as if men have heroically carried out the historical plot
of human history. A critical feminist perspective (Fraser, 2013; Gouthro, 2005, 2009a; hooks, 2013; Weiler, 2001) cultivates the idea that in a patriarchal society, there is a gender difference in how women negotiate and experience both immigration and lifelong learning. This is an important point to make since, arguably, the current literature demonstrates a context that distinctly privileges male stories (Goodson, 2013; Järvinen) and thus there is a scholarly gap of women’s experiences as told and understood by women in life history work. As Schryer (1998), J. VanderVliet (1994), and Lobbezoo (2014) argue, this is particularly true for Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women whose experiences have not only been minimized in the literature but have also been universalized and misrepresented by their own patriarchal religious ethnic enclave. Most historical literature (e.g., Fallon, 2000; Ganzevoort, 1988; Horn, 1997; Petersen, 1955; Schaap, 1998; Speerstra, 2005; VanderMey, 1983) representing Dutch neo-Calvinist immigration to Canada demonstrates a male-dominated perspective. Gouthro (2009b) argues that, in relation to our understanding of women’s lifelong learning, a critical feminist lens critiques the maintenance and normalization of masculine privilege and conducting a life history research is a way of “redressing the balance” (p. 20) and critically examining women’s learning.

Smith (1999) finds that the historical trajectory of ruling relations in institutions has also been “profoundly gendered” (p. 91). She points out that a feminist perspective discloses the ruling relations that prop up patriarchy (gender hierarchy) and reveal hidden boundaries, exclusions, and positioning. In a patriarchal dominated culture, when women have been relegated to lives situated mostly in the private sphere, it appears as if women’s lives are lived realities in a framework of lifelong learning that bear little public
or noteworthy accomplishment (Smith, 1999; Weisner, 1993). Gouthro (2005) examines structural factors that have marginalized women learners and brings to the fore the legitimacy of including a broader scope of the learning sites that shape the trajectory of lifelong learning. In particular, she challenges the societal tenets that place higher value on public spaces of learning and negates the work and learning that occurs in the private sphere. Gouthro (2005, 2009a), Weiler (2001), and hooks (2013) argue that a dual consciousness (e.g., public/private), inherent to patriarchal dominator culture, has also been perpetuated in social institutions such as schools, churches, and workplaces. Smith (1999) asserts, by insisting on a women’s right to speak from the actualities of her experience, there is something new to be heard and “there is always rethinking of established positions and representations to be done” (p. 17).

By inquiring about women’s lived experiences from a critical feminist perspective, it is possible for women to expose aspects of social reality that might be invisible from other positions (Tanesini, 1999). Mojab (2015) and Smith (1999) assert that in a life history narrative there is a feminist opportunity to reconstruct/reclaim the history of women whose lives have been told and understood in a patriarchal framework. For this reason, I employ a feminist perspective in my inquiry about immigrant women’s remembered experiences of Canadian schooling and their lifelong learning.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

The study is structured and presented in six chapters. In the introductory chapter, a research problem was presented, including a background to the context and the researcher. This was followed by a rationale for the study including research questions and purpose. In Chapter 2, I delineate the theoretical frameworks that inform, support,
and shape my inquiry process. The chapter begins with a discussion of critical theory and its relevance to the research study. The chapter then examines the theoretical scholarship of critical theorists, and draws in a feminist critique to develop a justification for linking a feminist perspective with critical theory.

Chapter 3 is a review of literature that explicates three Canadian historical frameworks: Canadian schooling as an aspect of lifelong learning, Canadian immigration, and a cultural analysis of the post-World War II Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant wave to Canada. With each section, the review of literature establishes an historical foundation and theory of context (historical, political, cultural) for an inquiry into the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women.

Chapter 4 delineates how life history methodology was employed to examine the experiences and memories of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women as it related to their trajectory of lifelong learning. By choosing a life history methodology, the scope of the research broadens where one’s life story is juxtaposed to a theory of context. In this chapter I discuss the historical trajectory of how life history methodology has been interpreted and used in previous research, and how in its current iteration, can be conceptualized as a tool for critically examining structures, operations, and contestations of power in social institutions through an exploration of the multiple contexts which shape the lives of immigrant women. I discuss participant selection, data collection and analysis, and delineate the methodological strengths and limitations and ethical considerations. With my own connection to a Dutch neo-Calvinist background, I discuss the research positionality of being an insider-outsider in the study.

In Chapter 5, I represent the findings by narrating three life histories as told by the
participants, Cate, Johanna, and Kali (pseudonyms). The inquiry was an interrogation of their lifelong learning in Canada, in the context of an immigrant family life, their pillarized Dutch culture, and Calvinist religiosity. I used the timeline constructed for each participant’s life to thematically tell each life history as an examination of the various sites of learning the participants experienced throughout their lives. As such the life stories are interwoven and multi-dimensional. I conclude the chapter with a summary and cross case interpretation.

The final chapter begins with a brief review of the study; how the research took place, its purpose, and methodology. As an inquiry of immigrant women’s negotiation of lifelong learning, the chapter proceeds with a brief description of four sites of learning (the family home, the church, the school, the workplace/volunteer place) that were evident in the women’s life histories. With this discussion as a background, a dialectic method delineates and makes visible the various cross cutting tensions/ruling relations that arose within the sites of learning. To conclude, I raise a number of implications for further research to be explored. I finish with some final thoughts concerning the experience of my own lifelong learning.
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this chapter, I delineate the theoretical frameworks that inform, support, and shape my inquiry process. Employing a critical feminist conceptual framework, the purpose of the life history research was an analysis of the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist women who immigrated to Canada shortly after World War II and a sociocultural critique of the institutional ruling relations (schooling, religious, family, vocation) that shape the trajectory of these women’s lifelong learning. The chapter begins with a brief historical overview and discussion of critical theory and its relevance to the research study. In particular the work of Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School are considered. The chapter then examines the theoretical scholarship of critical theorists, and draws in a feminist critique (e.g., Nancy Fraser, Dorothy Smith, bell hooks, Patricia Gouthro, Kathleen Weiler) to develop a justification for linking a feminist perspective with critical theory.

A Critical Approach

“Our society has to continue to be created through the syncretic tensions inherent in our differences” (Clarkson, 2014, p. 138).

In this research, I am interested in difference—the dialectic, the thesis and antithesis. Marx’s dialectic method is derived from Hegel’s three stages of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (Rühle, 1929/2011; Tucker, 1978) whereby, inherent in one’s current knowledge resources (thesis) there also lies discrepancy and contradiction (antithesis) which when creatively interrogated produces a reconceptualized synthesis. Conceptualized as such, knowledge is always in flux and thus possibility is the continuous outcome of such interrogation. Feminist scholar Megan Boler (1999) identifies this as a “pedagogy of discomfort” (p. 176); a contradictory approach that is
shaped and determined by a dominant culture of a particular historical moment. Martin (2002) argues that one’s approach—integration, differentiation, or fragmentation—also determines how one interacts in cultural organizations and how one strategizes for an ideal. Searching for and identifying difference/negation has always made sense to me; as a learner it is a radical choice that could be difficult and alienating, yet ultimately authentic and creative.

Reading Martin’s (2002) theoretical model of culture was the beginning of understanding that not everyone’s approach was like mine, that in fact most people see the world quite differently. Martin argues that in an integration perspective, the ideal image or espoused theory in use is viewed as individuals moving together in collaboration to reproductively represent an ideal. If someone resists, the strategy is to enfold and bring them back into the cultural organization. In a differentiated perspective, individuals move against or resist those who ascribe to the actual legitimacy of the espoused theory-in-use. A differentiated perspective believes that acknowledging and identifying organizational elements that prohibit the ideal must be disclosed and problem-solved so that a more authentic ideal can be reconceptualized. Bronner (2017) argues that Hegel believed that progress is ultimately furthered by the person who is out of step with the majority; the differentiated or nonconformist experiences the contradictions necessary in a dialectic relation. The disequilibrium of moving against is dissipative and unlike an integrative perspective, which assumes that dissipation leads to entropy, the differentiated perspective sees it as necessary for transformation and learning (Capra, 2002). Derrida asserts that deconstruction is a critical practice that aims to “dismantle [déconstruire] the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work, not in order to reject or discard
them, but to reinscribe them in another way” (as cited in Adams St. Pierre, 2000, p. 482).

Similarly, in his theory of dissipative structures, Prigogine (Capra, 2002; Doll, 1993) speaks to the necessity of “giving up” for transformation and survival. Like Derrida, Prigogine conceives that dissipation is not an ending, but rather a new creative ordering (Wheatley, 2006).

What is essential to know about my research project is my deep commitment to a critical approach. Like a differentiated perspective, critical research finds new methodological ways to irritate and disclose dominant forms of power obscured in systemic structures and institutional ruling relations, in an effort to transform structures that are problematic: relations that constrain, exploit and suppress (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). Critical theorists become “detectives of new theoretical insights perpetually searching for new and interconnected ways of understanding power and oppression and the ways they shape everyday life and human experience” (Kincheloe, 2010, p. 27).

Critical theory is a theory of history and society driven by a passionate commitment to understand how ideological systems of societal structures hinder and impede the fullest development of humankind’s collective potential to be self-reflective and self-determining historical actors. (Welton, 1995, p. 14)

It is never the dominant voice. Critical theory is always concerned with interrupting the status quo, with deconstructing the structures of dominance, and interrogating its limits and interpretations (Davis, 2004). Kincheloe (2010) continues, “To me, one of the most exciting dimensions of being a critical theorist and engaging in a critical pedagogy entails opening ourselves up to a passionate imagination, where we constantly remake ourselves in light of new insights and understandings” (p. 250).
Unlike Hegel who limited his ideas to the metaphysical, Marx’s interest stayed squarely positioned on the real. Critical theory posits that humans are immersed in historicity; in the actuality of context, space and time, language, and culture; “meaning” (truth) is born out of a materialization of history. Drawn from the work of Karl Marx (1818-1883), critical theorists argue that one cannot critique a concept on its own but only within a material dynamic process and it is in this process that the inconsistencies and contradictions in reality become evident (Welton, 1995). Bannerji (2015) argues, “The pathway to a ‘true’ form of knowledge or an inquiry… of society starts from the life activities of embodied, conscious socio-historical subjects as they produce and reproduce themselves. Any other starting point of social inquiry is ideological” (p. 165). Marx set out to seek the idea in the real itself, to show that the idea had evolved or was always mirrored in the experience of reality. Rhüle (1929/2011) summarizes Marx’s thinking by explaining, “All social life is essentially practical. All the mysteries which drive theory into the realm of mysticism, find their rational solution in human practice and in the understanding of this practice” (p. 92). Marx asserts, consciousness or ideas cannot make history, but living, active people do (Bannerji, 2015). As such, critical theorists employ a dialectical framework by which to understand the mediations that link the institutions (system) and activities of everyday life with the logic of relational forces that shape a larger social totality (Giroux, 2009).

An Historical Analysis

Early critical theory is most often associated with the interdisciplinary scholarship conducted at the Frankfurt School (established in 1923) located at the University of Frankfurt in Germany (Jay, 1973; VanderVliet, 2014). The academy began as a school of
neo-Marxist scholars. The term *critical theory* was coined as a type of code that served to “veil their radical commitments in an environment that was hostile to anything remotely associated with Marxism” (Gouthro, 2006, p. 6). Critical scholars were concerned with how modern society evolved and, in particular, they were interested in the contradictions of Enlightenment which demonstrated the overwhelming limits and delusions of Cartesian positivism and empiricism (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). Their critique shifted from a Marxist discourse on capitalism to a broader critique of Western Civilization and an examination of power and domination in the world (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Set in an ideology of modernity and in a dialectic vein, the Frankfurt School articulated a notion of *negativity*—it was in the contradictions of society that one could begin to develop forms of social inquiry that analyzed the distinction between what is and what should be (Giroux, 2009). Referring to the work of Frankfurt School scholars—Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer—Giroux asserts that if reason were to preserve its power of creating a more just society, it would have to demonstrate powers of critique and negativity rather than a quest for positivist social harmony. Giroux (2009) argues that the crisis of reason takes place as the social becomes more rationalized and thus loses its critical (negative) faculty and becomes “an instrument of the existing society” (p. 30). Reason is eclipsed by an instrumentalized and external orientation which Marcuse (1964) describes as “one dimensional” where humans behave in such a way as to accept the status quo and where an aptitude and ability for critical thought is profoundly diminished and lost (Gouthro, 2006). Recognizing the changing nature and consequence of positivism, the scholars of the Frankfurt School claimed that positivism had become “the
enemy of reason rather than its agent” (Giroux, 2009, p. 31), and as an instrument had emerged in the 20th century as a new form of social administration and domination. Instead of being exercised through brutal force, the power of domination was now reproduced through forms of ideological hegemony mediated through cultural institutions such as schools, family, and religion (Foucault, 1995; Gramsci, 1988). Gramsci argues, “Every relationship of ‘hegemony’ is necessarily an educational relationship” (p. 348) and dependent on two forms of control: coercion and consent.

VanManen (1977) points out that critical theory utilizes a method of reflectivity differing from those of the empirical-analytic and the hermeneutic-phenomenological paradigms in that it employs an emancipatory concept of truth. Welton (1995) claims that a theory of emancipatory learning has always been implicitly present in a Marxist tradition and even more so embedded and explicit in a more contemporary critical theory. Welton claims that a central question confronting critical theoretical work is how humans unlearn their adherence to unfreedom and learn emancipatory subjectivity. Referring to Fay (1987), Welton posits that critical theory parallels the self-estrangement myth that Marx critiques. Even though Marx dismisses the transcendental mystical idea of worshipping a godlike image for its redeeming capability, in a powerful story set in material form, he is in fact theorizing a secular version of the religious redemptive story. Welton (1995) argues that “the self-estrangement myth is one of the most powerful stories humans have invented to account for their feeling of powerlessness before an inexplicable nature and fear before the face of death” (p. 31). A critical approach continues to view human beings as fallible or deficient but through a material effort, are potentially redeemable such that, in this secular version, humans can dynamically achieve
a form of existence that is marked with emotional freedom and satisfaction (Welton, 1995).

In a critical vein, Paulo Freire’s (2010) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is an analysis of how oppression and subjugation are produced and reproduced in social institutions. He explains that humans because they are conscious beings, “exist in a dialectical relationship between the determination of limits and their own freedom” (p. 99). Like Hegel’s and Marx’s dialectical representation of thesis and antithesis, Freire’s terms, *limit situations* and *limit-acts*, articulate the “both/and” (in contrast to a positivist “either/or”) nature of dialectical reasoning. Freire (2010), quoting Alvaro Vieira Pinto (1960), explains that limit-situations are not “the impassable boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where all possibilities begins” (p. 99). Freire adds that limit-situations in and of themselves may create a climate of hopelessness and an outcome of status quo or redundancy (for example, oppression), however this is dependent on epistemic perception.

As critical perception is embodied in action, a climate of hope and confidence develops which leads men [sic] to attempt to overcome the limit-situations. This objective can be achieved only through action upon the concrete, historical reality in which limit-situations historically are found. As reality is transformed and these situations are superseded, new ones will appear, which in turn will evoke new limit-acts. (Freire, 2010, pp. 99-100)

For Freire, *praxis*¹⁴ is set in a framework that is simultaneously rule bound or limited (thesis) while at the same time capable of flexible, uncertain, and infinite possibilities

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¹⁴ “Only human beings are praxis—the praxis which, as the reflection and action which truly transform reality, is the source of knowledge and creation, ...Through their continuing praxis, men and women simultaneously create history and become historical-social beings” (Freire, 2010, pp. 100-101).
(antithesis). “In dialectic fashion, instead, utopia constitutes a renewal of the past that renders conscious what exists but is not yet conscious. Every story is thereby open to interpretation and the interpretation to reinterpretation” (Bronner, 2017, p. 71).

As a mechanism of oppression, the Marxist concept of *alienation* has its roots in humans’ inability to grasp the workings of history therefore, vulnerable, the individual is turned “into a cog in the machine” (Bronner, 2017, p. 4). In an emancipatory effort, Marx hoped to understand a human’s alienation as a producer where, increasingly separated from their fellow workers and the products they produce, humans ultimately diminish their possibility and freedom as individuals. For Marx, alienation was not a religious outcome of the discrepancy as marked by depravity (born in sin) but rather an alienation that was an outcome of the relations in the social. The capitalists’ power to exploit the worker, argues Marx, operates beyond the sphere of economic production. It harnesses ontological reasoning with its assumptions of production as a “nature imposed necessity” (Marx, 1978, p. 395) which implies in capitalism, *a priori* system that rationalizes undisputed authority of the capitalist over the worker. The presumption of the transcendent power of “nature” can also be found in the social construct of gender, where there is a presumed natural disposition that determines male authority over the woman. When one believes in the authority of Nature, then one accepts their position of unfreedom.

Likewise, Marx claims that the social principles of Christianity (religion) adhere to such authority in the sense that because humans are fallen, domination and oppression are its natural outcomes (Rhüle, 1929/2011). As a reflex of the real world, *religion* is a product of the human mind and in the form of a fetish, is an inanimate object that is
worshipped for redeeming power. Marx’s famous dictum that religion is “the sigh of the oppressed creature” and the “opium of the people” (as cited in Rhüle, 1929/2011, p. 57) conveys religion’s capacity to make tolerable a life which would otherwise be perceived as intolerable. By paying particular attention to the material darkness, the religious are driven toward their need of religiosity. Referring to critical theorist Walter Benjamin, Bronner (2017) points out that “the real changes its face in the light of future redemption. The imaginative will… shatters the material constraints of history. Each moment of time is the door through which the Messiah might pass” (p. 27). Marx argues that as a myth of self-alienation, religious outcomes are “obsequious” (excessively obedient; as cited in Rhüle 1929/2011, p. 122) as opposed to being emancipatory. Being held affectively by alienating attributes of self-contempt, abasement, humility, and shame, Marx craves for the proletariat to open their eyes and see the religious reflex as an illusion that cripples their freedom (Rhüle, 1929/2011). This is an important point to make especially in relation to a religious neo-Calvinist immigrant enclave who rationalize that freedom from their material deficiency (sin) is only accessible through a mystical mentalism. As an “instrument” (Giroux, 2009, p. 30) of their “one dimensional” reasoning, their religiosity is marked by obedience and thus the ability for critical thought is profoundly diminished.

A critical perspective challenges the ideological/theological assumptions about deficiency (alienation) and presses for citizens to become conscious of what makes them unfree. Likewise, Freire (2010) argues, the oppressed must recognize their condition and engage in critical awareness or in Freire’s words—conscientização—learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of society. Welton (1995) claims, a motivation of critical theory was to evoke a
critical consciousness and help people unlearn their adherence to unfreedom and become more transparent to themselves instead of “being passive victims who collude, at least partly, in their domination by external forces” (p. 37). Freire argues that by driving a wedge between reason and experience (theory and practice), a critical critique is dialectically positioned to disclose contradictions to bring awareness of how ruling relations intersect and shape the trajectory of lifelong learning.

A Dialectic Method

Carpenter and Mojab (2013) argue that a dialectic method is at the centre of “any articulation of ‘being critical’ in social theory” (p. 161):

To say that something is understood “dialectically” is to see it through the lens of its historical emergence, to see the way in which it appears in daily life, and to seek out an explanation of why it appears the way in which it does in order to understand the essence of the contradictions that form social phenomena. (p. 161)

A dialectic method also shifts attention from regarding phenomena as detached, isolated, and abstract (causal) to comprehending a most important characteristic; in the world there is nothing isolated, there is nothing at rest, there is nothing to be found apart from all other things (Rühle, 1929/2011)—everything is in flux, dynamically mobile. While Hegel (1770-1831) contemplated a dialectic approach (thesis, antithesis, synthesis), it was Karl Marx (1818-1883) who employed its apparatus of analysis to capture a motion or actuality of history. In his seminal work, Capital, Marx’s intent was to reveal not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced and in so doing, “force the secret of profit making” (Marx, 1978, p. 343). By examining the dynamic movement within the relation that is evoked in the contradiction (negation) of thesis and antithesis, Marx
solves the riddle that motivated his inquiry.\textsuperscript{15} Rhüle (1929/2011) asserts, Marx brings “light upon the darkness of economic happenings” (p. 357) and discloses the mechanisms of capitalist profit demonstrating that every form of capitalist gain is “nothing more than profit under a masquerade” (p. 357). Marx, applied a material conception so that production of the idea takes place in close connection with the material activities of humans and with their material relations. Mere criticism is ineffectual Marx says; it must be made flesh, a material force “gripped by the masses” (as cited in Welton, 1995, p. 17).

As demonstrated by Marx, a dialectic method can be used to disclose underlying power constructs in ruling relations that structure and determine outcomes of learning. In the relation, thesis and antithesis are positioned to dialectically disclose the discrepancies of reality therefore actualizing a tension between reason and experience.

Giroux (2009) claims that in a critical perspective, a dialectic method differs from positivist forms of social inquiry. As a disruptive methodology, ruling relations are interrogated to better understand and bring awareness to the underlying assumptions, premises, principles, and methods at play. With the premise that humans negotiate unfreedom and inhabit a world filled with contradiction and asymmetries of power and privilege (antithesis), a dialectic method examines the interactive context between the individual and the society. Hassanpour (2015) points out that non-Marxists may interpret these oppositions (thesis, antithesis) as binary, dichotomies, or dualisms but in Marxist

\textsuperscript{15} Applying a dialectic method, Marx discovers that integral to capitalism is a system of exploitive power relations that are hidden in the exchange value of a commodity. While the circulation of commodities is the starting point of capital, money is the final product and is representative of exchange value. Bowie (2003) explains that with money, value is no longer a material thing but rather a relation; real things are given a “wholly abstract status” (p. 131) which allows them to become interchangeable with one another as well as to conceal the social relations in the exchange; once the commodity has left the hand of the producer and has forfeited its peculiarity as a real object, it also ceases to be a product and to be controlled by a person and therefore is accessible to exploitive potential.
dialectics, the two sides stand in a relationship of “unity and struggle” (p. 253), dependent on each other for their existence with the potential to negate or transform into each other. Interpreting that dichotomies are an attribute of patriarchal reasoning, feminists also find this an important distinction to make.

In summary, a critical approach encompasses a number of epistemic assumptions important for research: (a) nothing is at rest, knowledge is always in flux and possibility is a continuous outcome of a dialectic method; (b) as a contradictory approach it is shaped and determined by a dominant culture; (c) it interrupts the status quo and discloses dominant forces of power obscured in systemic structures and ruling relations; (d) it assumes that knowledge is born out of a materialization of history; and (e) a concept cannot be critiqued on its own but only within a material dynamic process and in that process inconsistencies and contradictions in reality become evident. With these assumptions in mind, the following section considers the implications of critical theory in a feminist framework.

**Critical Theory and Feminism**

Tong (2014) argues that feminism is not a monolithic ideology but rather is dynamic, generative, and diverse. In her historical analysis, she not only follows the trajectory of the women’s movement but also brings an appreciation of the various scholarly approaches that have been advanced from a multitude of women’s perspectives and lived reality. Taber and Gouthro (2006) assert that one of the goals of feminist scholarship is to conduct research into women’s experiences to explore the absence of their voices and stories, and to make visible and valid their contributions. Groen and Kawalilak (2014) add that as feminist research seeks to construct knowledge in a way
that validates women’s experiences, at the same time it critiques an existing social context (political, cultural, historical). A critical feminist perspective provides a particular lens to examine a woman’s trajectory of lifelong learning for the purpose of a sociocultural critique.

Historically, critical theory has challenged the structures and practices of patriarchy in society from a superficial and privileged lens—critical theorists have been mostly White men (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009; Gouthro, 2002). A criticism of critical theory comes from feminist scholars who argue that it exhibits a paternal masculine voice of abstraction and universalization (Lather, 1998) which disregards a female presence. In her analysis of the trajectory of the feminist movement, Fraser (2013) points out that second-wave feminism rejected critical theory’s (Marxist) exclusive focus on a monistic view of oppression in the political economy by unveiling injustices located elsewhere, namely in the family and in cultural traditions, in civil society, and in everyday life. Boler (1999) argues that the absence of critical theory’s recognition of feminist challenges and contributions leads her to believe that while intellectually and politically parallel, the ideological movements are at the same time not mutually informing. To situate a critical feminist research position, I begin with a feminist analysis of the theoretical work of critical scholars Paulo Freire and Jürgen Habermas to demonstrate their absence of a gender subtext which fails to bring to the fore the oppressive/constraining relations held on women through a patriarchal positivist worldview. The analysis establishes an argument and commensurability for applying a feminist perspective to critical theory and highlights the critical feminist scholarship conducted by Patricia Gouthro (2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2014), Nancy Fraser

With a sizeable volume of writing, Paulo Freire’s theoretical discourse has had significant global influence and has inspired a new generation of scholars and critical research. In particular, his work on class oppression has much in common with the underlying concerns in feminist pedagogy. Weiler (2001) explains that Freire’s humanity and respect for “knowers” has “deep resonance for feminists” (p. 74). Like Freirean pedagogy, feminist pedagogy emphasizes the importance of consciousness-raising, the need to problematize the existence of an oppressive social structure, and the search for possible social transformation.

Both feminist pedagogy as it is usually defined and Freirean pedagogy rest upon visions of social transformation; underlying both are certain common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness, and historical change. Both pedagogies assert the existence of oppression in people’s material conditions of existence and as a part of consciousness; both rest on a view of consciousness as more than a sum of dominating discourses, but as containing within it a critical capacity…and both thus see human beings as subjects and actors in history and hold a strong commitment to justice and a vision of a better world and of the potential for liberation. (Weiler, 1991, p. 450)

As a feminist scholar, hooks (1994) shares, “Paulo was one of the thinkers whose work gave me a language. He made me think deeply about the construction of an identity in resistance” (p. 46). As hooks highlights, feminists share Freire’s emphasis on seeing humans as dynamical subjects and not the objects of history.
A criticism of Freire’s work concerns his failure to acknowledge and include gender issues and distinctions. Influenced by Marxism and Christian liberation theology (Dubin & Prins, 2011; Schugurensky, 2011), most scholars (e.g., hooks) recognize that much of Freire’s work was conceived and published in a particular historical and political context (1950’s-60’s) that reflected a deep patriarchal worldview. While this has been acknowledged, there has been recognition and substantial criticism, by feminists, of the sexism in Freire’s discourse, his paternal approach, and his failure to recognize gender issues (e.g., Weiler, Fraser, hooks, Gouthro). Weiler (2001) argues that Freire’s scholarship neglects to include the experience of women or to analyze the patriarchal grounding and male privilege of Western thought; she explains,

The tendency to ignore the personal, domestic world, as numerous feminist theorists have pointed out, is typical of the Western tradition of political philosophy and has been tied to the gendered division of the world into rationality and emotion, public and private, with men the actors in the public world and women the nurturers of the private. (pp. 76-77)

Overlooking women’s literacy in the private sphere, Freire’s work was single-mindedly focused on the economic (social class) and political struggle in the male public world (Weiler, 2001). By situating both oppression and liberation in the male dominated public, Freire did not address the complexities of the intersection of the private and public in what Habermas (Fraser, 2013; Welton, 1995) sees as the lifeworld. This is a key feminist insight that is also expanded and interrogated in an analysis of critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas’s delineation of the public and private spheres and a systems and lifeworld approach.
Weiler (2001) acknowledges that Freire attempted to address his critics and even identified himself as a feminist, but she argues, he never considered the need to analyze the underlying patriarchal assumptions of the Western intellectual tradition from which his own thought had emerged. This has been a “source of anguish” (hooks, 1994, p. 49) for hooks, which represents a “blind spot” (p. 49) in the vision of men who have profound insight. Conceding that this is a flaw in critical pedagogy, hooks remains determined not to let it overshadow its greater value. “There is no need to apologize for sexism. Freire’s own model of critical pedagogy invites critical interrogation of this flaw in the work. But critical interrogation is not the same as dismissal” (hooks, 1994, p. 49). As a feminist, hooks explains that instead of interrogating the work of patriarchs, she takes their threads and weaves them into her own pedagogical version. This was always Freire’s intent—that critical pedagogical principles exist and remain open to reinvention (Darder et al., 2009). Ana Maria Araujo Freire (2002) reflects that her husband always understood his work to be ever-changing, tentative, and elastic. We should not be afraid, she says, to re-create him because failing to do so would deny his own ontological and epistemological principles and would leave his work “finished” (p. 8) and therefore inert, sterile, and dead. So it is in this sense, that I consider Paulo Freire in the light of my own understanding of critical theory.

Drawn out of Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) phenomenological discourse (Gouthro, 2006; Bowie, 2003; Welton, 1995), Jürgen Habermas is attributed with adding the term “public sphere” to the sociological lexicon (Bronner, 2017). Like Freire, in his discussion of the public and private spheres, Habermas is silent on the matter of gender. Dorothy Smith (1999) argues that historically, the emerging capitalism of the 17th
century reorganized women’s and men’s relation to the economy such that the
domestic/private (female) setting became “sharply differentiated” (p. 91) from the
relations of the public sphere (male). In her historical analysis of the Reformation period
(1517-1648), Radford Reuther (2012) asserts there was a decline in public opportunities
for women especially when Catholic convents were closed and educational opportunities
withdrawn.

The early modern period saw an accelerating process by which paid work was
increasingly separated from domesticated work and women forbidden to engage
in work in the paid economy. …Licenses and educational requirements, forbidden
to women, heightened the exclusion of women from many kinds of work in which
they had been previously engaged beyond the family on the basis of family-taught
skills. …As paid work for men was separated more and more from domestic
work, an unpaid sphere of “women’s work” was defined as women’s proper
sphere as “housewife.” (p. 95)

In the development of 19th century bourgeois public sphere, Landes (1995)
asserts that women’s exclusion was not accidental. Women’s interests and emotions were
dismissed and deemed inadmissible material for public discourse and debate in the public
sphere. Gouthro (2009a) argues that exclusionary learning contexts in the public sphere,
where public debate is fostered, created lack of access to communicative action¹⁶ that led

¹⁶ Finlayson (2005) explains, in Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality, there are two types of
action: communicative action and instrumental action. Communicative actions aim at securing
understanding and consensus. Instrumental action is when an individual agent does something as a means
to bring about a desired end. Gouthro (2006) adds communicative action is characterized by a “relationship
of complementary and mutuality among participants” (p. 8). It can be used so that validity of social norms
can be critiqued and it can be utilized to develop more critical, participatory, and democratic approaches
towards learning. Bronner (2017) argues, communication is understood by Habermas to be grounded in the
open character of the discourse; the recognition of each participant as an equal and willingness to change
one’s mind when faced with a better argument. It preserves autonomy while fostering solidarity. “Those
to inequities in lifelong learning. Smith (2005) explains that women’s exclusion from the emerging public discourse was essential to men’s capacity to sustain what Landes calls, “the masquerade of universality” (as cited in Smith, 2005, p. 14), that the knowledge of the public sphere was representative of all humankind while at the same time excluding women.

Drawing on Habermasian theory, Gouthro (2005, 2009a), in speaking of a public/private dichotomy, explores how in contrast to critical theory, capitalism and neoliberalism have shaped a dual consciousness. Gouthro (2009a) argues that “Divisions between ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres create a false dichotomy that fails to acknowledge the interconnected aspects of these different realms, reinforcing structural forms of inequity at the same time as it conflates ‘public’ concerns with ‘private’ corporate values” (p. 159). She also points out, as an outcome, if women are relegated by ruling relations to the private sphere it undermines the possibility of communicative action that might lead to social change and learning. A positivist ideology demonstrated in neoliberalism supports a masculine worldview that also reinforces patriarchal binaries in the way economy and citizenship are constructed and interpreted. Gouthro concludes in Groen and Kawalilak (2014), “As many feminists note, the perceptual divide between ‘public’ and ‘private’ rarely benefits women” (p. 93). Critical feminist bell hooks (2013) concurs; this modernist binary or dualistic thinking is at the core of patriarchy and domination thinking.

who deny the norms of this ethic, or who exercise power arbitrarily, deny the very means they use to persuade: they find themselves caught, philosophically speaking in a performative contradiction” (p.102). 17 Neoliberalism: “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2).
Similar to Marx, Habermas understands the world in the practical. His theories are generated and confirmed by active engagement in the actuality. Conditions of possibility are not forms of thought but are structures of experience and action so that arguments about validity are carried out in social life via these structures (Bowie, 2003). In the vein of critical theory, Habermas attempts to understand the fundamental forms of knowledge in the light of the problems humankind encounters in its efforts to produce and reproduce, and places reason inside the historical process (Welton, 1995). Habermas maintains that subjectivity actually depends on socialization and the intersubjective language and practices of society. It is here in the intersubjective or in the sphere of relations with others, that Habermas conceives of a radically reflective concept of the practical (VanManen, 1977); a woven web of intersubjective relations that make possible a relation, like Freire (2010), between dependency and freedom (Wardekker & Miedema, 1997). It was in this relational and dynamic space where Habermas’s life work was committed to developing an alternative theory of communicative rationality (Gouthro, 2006).

Unwilling to accept negativity as the pessimism and dark underside of Enlightenment, Habermas expands the complexity of rationality to include language and action, for it is in the speech act or the dynamics of the communicative relation where rationality and agency is possible and where validity claims can be made. Davis (2004) argues that there is a positivist pretense to think we all understand in the same way, yet appreciating the diversity of understanding because meaning and knowledge arises and is constructed from within (as opposed to being “out there”) and in time and space means that mutual understanding is only possible in how that knowledge can be made explicit
and related through action and language to others. “By focusing on language and action, Habermas demonstrates that linguistic interaction has a sense of rationality which is not reducible to strategic or contextual dimensions” (Gouthro, 2006, p. 8). Communicative rationality is characterized by a “relationship of complementarity and mutuality among participants” (Gouthro, 2006, p. 8), and can be used so that the validity of social norms can be critiqued, and can be utilized to develop more critical, participatory, and democratic approaches to learning.

Central to a theory of communicative action or rationality, Habermas asserts that one must conceive of society as simultaneously system and lifeworld (Fraser, 2013; Gouthro, 2006). As Fraser explains, Habermas holds that modern societies split off some material reproduction functions from symbolic ones creating a duality of two specialized institutions: the (official) economy and the administrative state which are systems integrated, and two other institutions that specialize in symbolic reproduction—the modern, restricted, nuclear family or “private sphere,” and the space of political participation, debate, and opinion formation or “public sphere,” which together constitute the lifeworld.

Thus, modern societies “uncouple” or separate what Habermas takes to be two distinct but previously undifferentiated aspects of society: “system” and “lifeworld.” And so, in his view, the institutional structure of modern societies is dualistic. On one side stand the institutional orders of the modern lifeworld: the socially integrated domains specializing in symbolic reproduction (that is, in socialization, solidarity formation, and cultural transmission). On the other side stand the systems: the system-integrated domains specializing in material
reproduction. On one side, the nuclear family and the public sphere. On the other side, the (official) capitalist economy and the modern administrative state. (Fraser, 2013, pp. 27-28)

Welton (1995) explains that Habermas’s manner of conceptualizing and connecting the system and the lifeworld “provides a conceptual framework to understand how to think deeply and realistically about the systemic blockages to the achievement of a more fully democratic society” (p. 136). An understanding and attention of the lifeworld is especially important as the “ground of our learning capacity as human beings” (Welton, 2005, p. 180).

Welton (1995), Gouthro (2006), and Bowie (2003) point out that the phenomenological concept of lifeworld constitutes a reservoir of shared understandings (culture) that form the background of any piece of communication. The lifeworld is the background consensus of our everyday lives: “the vast stock of taken-for granted definitions and understandings of the world that give coherence and direction of our everyday actions and interactions” (Welton, 1995, p. 141). Gouthro (2006) explains that Habermas (1996) expands Husserl’s phenomenological orientation to not only include cultural reproduction but also the importance of social interaction and identity formation.

The lifeworld is constituted from [a] network of communicative actions that branch out through social space and historical time, and these live off sources of cultural traditions and legitimate orders no less than they depend on the identities of socialized individuals. (As cited in Gouthro, p. 10)

Communicative action relies on historically established consensus that although dynamic, is at the same time a stable functioning structure. The matrix of the lifeworld, “secures the unity of the collectivity and largely suppresses conflicts that might arise from power
relations and economic interests” (Habermas, as cited in Plumb, 1995, p. 158).

Metaphorically, the cell membrane behaves in much the same way; a necessary and protective structure for the dynamics and movement in cell metabolism while at the same time continually restructuring and renewing its own configuration.

In a feminist analysis, Fraser (2013) is concerned with the various relations inherent in the dualities of systems and lifeworld: the (official) economy and state administration, public and private spheres. Fraser claims, Habermas provides an extremely sophisticated account of the relations between public and private in the lifeworld and asserts that critical theorists would do better to distinguish different kinds of power, for example, domestic-patriarchal, on the one hand, and bureaucratic-patriarchal power, on the other. Both, she argues, enforce women’s subordination in the domestic or private sphere. Drawing on gendered roles of “worker” (masculine) and “consumer” (feminine) as well as “citizen” (masculine) and “client” (feminine) she demonstrates that what appears as a categorical divide, is in fact a relational synthesis that is dependent on a gender subtext in male-dominated, capitalist societies. Fraser (2013) summarizes her thinking:

The lifeworld, as we saw, gets differentiated into two spheres that provide appropriate complementary environments for the two systems. The “private sphere” or modern, restricted nuclear family is linked to the (official) economic system. The “public sphere” or space of political participation, debate, and opinion-formation is linked to the state-administrative system. The family is linked to the (official) economy by means of a series of exchanges conducted in the medium of money; it supplies the (official) economy with appropriately socialized labor power in exchange for wages; and it provides appropriate,
monetarily measured demand for commodified goods and services. Exchanges between family and (official) economy, then, are channeled through the “roles” of worker and consumer. …Exchanges between public sphere and state, then, are channeled through the “role” of citizen and, in late welfare-state capitalism, that of client. (p. 33)

Coupled to the system economy, both public and private spheres are sites of labour, although one not remunerated, and in a male-headed, nuclear family, both are spheres where the presence of women (consumer, client) is subordinated to men (worker, citizen).

The Homeplace

What is compelling about Gouthro’s (2005) critical feminist research is her analysis of the homeplace as a site of lifelong learning. In light of a sociocultural critique, she argues, the homeplace, in relation to the public/private discourse, has not been well researched. Gouthro begins by clarifying that its meaning is variable, depending upon unique life circumstances. A person will define the homeplace based upon their personal lived experience and family and cultural background. The homeplace may extend beyond the traditional nuclear family and fit into a larger sociocultural context—inclusive of community, neighbours, and larger cultural setting. She argues,

Using a critical Habermasian perspective, the homeplace can be understood as a core aspect of the lifeworld; the place of everyday existence within our homes and local community in which all human experience is grounded. The lifeworld is a place of communicative relations that must be sustained to withstand the pressures of the system; the political economic social structures that enforce exploitative dominant relations of power. (Gouthro, 2005, p. 6)
Gouthro finds that by studying the homeplace as an aspect of lifelong learning, there is an opportunity to understand the patriarchal factors that affect women’s decisions about learning, and by focusing on the neoliberal and capitalist assumptions of the public and private sphere, feminist research can illuminate the manner in which gender boundaries have been and continue to be drawn or negotiated (Gouthro, 2009a).

Gouthro (2005, 2007) asserts that a masculine perception has largely defined previous research parameters in lifelong learning and she challenges new scholarship to consider: (a) structural gender inequalities that situate women at a disadvantage in accessing and participating fully in educational contexts; (b) the narrow neoliberal definition of lifelong learning that focuses on the marketplace situated in the public sphere which serves to exclude, overlook, and diminish women’s learning potential; and (c) the historical view of gender as a complex variable within the broader discourse of education. In particular, Gouthro points out that when gendered roles and responsibilities are treated as private, they are not made accessible as issues for public debate and thus inaccessible for communicative action. Being invisible—oppressive and exploitive gendered arrangements that might bind women to the homeplace constrain women from being full and equal participants in public spaces (Welton, 2005) and the invisibility/silence of women’s work also makes possible the perception of it as a natural (instinctive) activity (Tanesini, 1999).

What is of particular relevance to an inquiry of the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist women is how Gouthro (2009a) speaks about women who have responsibilities and connections to the homeplace which she argues, prompts women to have different lifelong learning trajectories than men. She argues, “The influence of neoliberalism
renders the homeplace invisible by linking it with the ‘private’ realm, which neatly ‘tucks away’ untidy concerns around gender inequities” (Gouthro, 2009a, p. 158). Likewise, referring to Dorothy Smith, Bannerji (2015) points out that the prevailing patriarchal ideas inscribed in the ruling relations of capitalism creates an invisibility of women through patriarchal omissions and commissions:

Given that ideology’s most powerful trick is to cut off a concept from its originating and mediating social relations, even critical and resisting concepts, such as “class” or the feminist category of “woman,” when used in such a way, can become occlusive and serve the interests of ruling relations through exclusion and the invisibility of power relations of difference. (p. 116)

Supporting a critical feminist analysis, Smith (1999) looks to women’s experience as a primary site and source of knowing and argues, historically, patriarchy has negated and made invisible, the feminist story. In a Marxist perspective, Carpenter (2015) speaks of a feminist historical materialism where, by positioning the social research in a woman’s everyday life (actuality), the contradictions of the political, historical, and cultural have the potential to come to light. A critical feminist perspective is a compelling (and arguably, fierce) framework from which to conduct a sociocultural critique about ruling relations in social institutions (e.g., schooling, church, home) in relation to the lived experiences and lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women.

**Lifelong Learning and Citizenship**

Gouthro (2009a, 2009c) draws upon critical and feminist analysis to assess the social, political, and cultural factors that impact learning around citizenship. She points out a Habermasian theory provides a theoretical framework that raises the issue that when
citizenship is equated with the public sphere (as in patriarchy), many women and minorities are excluded from the political. Just as Smith (1999) and Landes (1995) highlight women’s exclusion in public discourse in early capitalism, Gouthro (2007) argues that, in the same vein, women continue to be marginalized or excluded from equitable public deliberation, thus diminishing their ability to participate equally as active citizens. Likewise, Jubas and Jubas (2006) concur:

Western liberal democracy emphasizes the qualities of reason, self-determination, and individual potential. These qualities have been gendered as masculine and men have come to embody the qualities of the complete citizen, while women have been regarded as “psychologically unbalanced and unable to articulate a political consciousness” and have been relegated to the margins of citizenry. By extension, many of women’s historical contributions to social life—child bearing, family care, home work—have been consigned to the private sphere. In short, because qualities are first gendered and then valued, men and masculinity retain predominance and power in citizenship. (p. 568)

Fraser (2013) argues that if citizenship is determined by a view of participation in political debate and public opinion formation it depends crucially on the capacities for consent and speech, and the ability to participate on par with others in dialogue and these capacities are connected with masculinity in male-dominated capitalism. She also points out, there is another aspect of citizenship not discussed by Habermas that is even more obviously bound up with masculinity. She argues that the soldiering aspect of citizenship, the idea of the citizen as the defender of the polity and protector of those who cannot protect themselves, also raises the perception of a woman’s vulnerability and her need
(and desire) for protection thus diminishing her role as citizen. Fraser (2013) asserts, “as long as the citizen role is defined to encompass death-dealing soldiering but not life-fostering childrearing, as long as it is tied to male-dominated modes of dialogue, then it, too, will remain incapable of including women fully” (p. 39). Summarizing this, Fraser brings to light both the importance and value of Habermas’s social insight while at the same time articulating a gender subtext that is relevant to a critical feminist inquiry.

Conclusion

The purpose of the life history research is an analysis of the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist women who immigrated to Canada shortly after World War II. In Chapter 2, I delineated a critical feminist perspective to inform a sociocultural critique of the institutional ruling relations (schooling, religious, family, vocation) that shape the trajectory of women’s lifelong learning. This included an analysis of critical theory followed by a discussion of the relevance of a dialectic method in a critical perspective. As demonstrated by Freire and Habermas, the chapter problematizes the context and historical silence of women’s voices in critical theory and establishes an argument and commensurability for applying a feminist perspective to critical theory. In chapter three, I establish an historical context for a life history research by examining a Canadian context of schooling in relation to lifelong learning, Canadian immigration, and an in depth historical analysis of Dutch neo-Calvinist culture.
CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS—A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Employing a critical feminist conceptual framework, the purpose of this life history research was an analysis of the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist women who immigrated to Canada shortly after World War II. As a context for the life history study, the selected literature explicates three Canadian historical frameworks: Canadian schooling in relation to lifelong learning, Canadian immigration, and a cultural analysis of the post-World War II Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant wave to Canada. Simmons (2010) argues that an historical analysis can provide useful perspectives for understanding present-day patterns and developments.

In some cases, the present is illuminated by seeing how it emerged from the past; in other cases, the present is made clearer by contrasting it with very different past trends. Perhaps more than anything, the exercise of examining the past reminds us that change is constant and that the present is only the latest instalment in an unfolding story. (p. 48)

With each section, the review of literature establishes an historical foundation and context (historical, political, cultural) for an inquiry into the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women.

Section 1: Schooling and Lifelong Learning

Canadians, like people in other developed nations, accept formal education as an inevitable part of their childhood and youth. People rarely question the legitimacy of formal education as a mechanism to structure learning, regulate and improve lives, and confer credentials (Wotherspoon, 2009). As a social institution, formal schooling is a
component of one’s broader lifelong learning which begins at birth and ends only upon
the conclusion of life. It includes formal schooling, but also informal, non-formal, and
incidental educative forms\(^\text{18}\) (Grace, 2013; Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). With a broader
interpretation of learning, Grace (2013) sees the conception of lifelong learning as a
“lever” (p. 89) to rethink an entire understanding of the modern concept of education
including formal schooling. In his analysis, Grace argues that lifelong learning has been
“a diffuse term with multiple meanings that have made the notion problematic, leaving
citizens as learners to wonder about its parameters and possibilities” (p. 73). He raises
questions about what constitutes a lifetime of worthwhile learning, quality work, and the
good life and proposes an interpretation that encompasses and nurtures social
engagement, political and economic understanding, and cultural work to benefit all
citizens as learners and workers. Citing Chapman, Gaff, Toomey, and Aspin (2005),
Grace conveys a holistic view, an integrated/multifocal standpoint relevant to all citizens,
asserting that the legitimization and lens of learning must “continue throughout life, as a
necessary part of growth and development as a human being, as a citizen in a
participatory democracy, and as a productive agent in a process of economic change and
advance” (p. 156).

In his critical analysis, Grace (2013) examines the historical hegemony of

\(\text{18}\) Formal: structured and defined—specific learning objectives, structured activities, measurable outcomes
to guide and evaluate learning.
Informal: not confined to the structures of formal—tacit knowledge is something all human beings acquire
through the day-to-day unfolding of life experiences that include observing others, associating with others,
engaging in activities, trying new things, making meaning of our emotions, and paying attention to our
intuition – embodied, personal, and somewhat elusive knowledge.
Non-formal: taking up a particular activity in order to learn something that interests us – usually non
structured and void of pre-determined time commitments.
Incidental: unexpected learning that comes along when we are involved in formal or non-formal learning
activities (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014)
political and economic neoliberal assumptions in lifelong learning and brings to the fore the omissions and constraints of that perspective. He argues that in its current iteration, lifelong learning is predominantly shaped and defined by neoliberal values (e.g., individualism, competition, and the influence of the marketplace) aimed at “controlling certain citizens” (p. 76) and exclusively strengthening capitalist economic output with the optimism that there are social benefits as a “side effect” (p. 91). This, he argues, is misguided, noting in particular that neoliberal principles undermine an inclusive and diverse society and perpetuate social exclusion and injustice such that lifelong learning construed in neoliberal terms is negligent in providing access and accommodation to all citizens. He challenges the neoliberal assumption where learning about all matters, including citizenship, is positioned as an individual responsibility and choice and thus the tendency to blame individual learners rather than the systems and structures that limit them. Grace exposes a neoliberal narrative for subaltern learners—sexual minorities, women, immigrants, Aboriginal, and youth—and asks how neoliberal assumptions shape citizenship, concluding that its policies are not committed to inclusion and justice for all learners across relationships of power.

Likewise, Gouthro (2002, 2009c) asserts that when the economy drives education, it too becomes a commodity whereby “citizen consumers” (Gouthro, 2009c, p. 89) who have access to power are able to situate themselves advantageously to compete against those who do not. As an example, McLaren (2015) demonstrates that when our schools focus on the link between citizenship and the economic profit imperative, even in full view of a world burdened with scarcity and inequality, children are pressed to negotiate and rationalize what it means to be a citizen in a capitalist culture obsessed with success
and wealth. As a critique, Grace (2013) calls for lifelong learning as a transformative practice; a refuge for all learners—agents able to assert their free will and autonomy—and a counter pedagogy to a limited neoliberal view.

Gouthro (2006, 2009a) questions the neoliberal monopoly of institutional learning by advocating that non-formal and informal education have vital roles to play, especially in the context of gender and the homeplace. Gouthro’s research reflects her concern for understanding how a neoliberal agenda has not only constrained education and learning to a narrow pragmatic (economic) orientation but she also raises the issue of neoliberalism’s masculine privilege and how this thinking impacts women’s access and interpretation of learning. “The influence of the marketplace in lifelong learning discourses is an indication of the pervasive influence of the system that threatens to limit some of the broader potentialities for human learning experiences” (Gouthro, 2006, p. 16). With this in mind, an historical analysis and critique of public schooling raises to the surface neoliberal prerogatives that shape and determine how society is influenced and shaped by its marketplace (public) assumptions.

**Schooling: An Historical Analysis**

Arguably, historians have contended that the inception of public or common schooling was more likely initiated to serve the needs of the state than the needs or interests of children and their families (Osborne, 2001). McLaren (2015) asserts that schooling must be analyzed as a cultural and historical process to interrogate how its constituents are positioned within asymmetrical relations of power on the basis of “specific race, class, and gender antagonisms” (p. 126). To conduct a sociocultural critique of schooling in a framework of lifelong learning, a brief historical analysis of
Canadian (and in particular, Ontario) schooling is conducted to provide a contextual background for the life history research study. It is important to point out that there are many histories of schooling (Wotherspoon, 2009) and there is a substantive volume of research represented in the current literature; this is beyond the scope of the research conducted here and most certainly warrants its own ongoing inquiry. Instead, in this context, a history of schooling in Ontario provides a scaffold or reference point from which the researcher can enter into and conduct an inquiry about schooling as it relates to lifelong learning.

The story of the rapid expansion (Wotherspoon, 2009) of formal public schooling in Canada begins in the 19th century. Wotherspoon (2009) points out, at this time, the model of schooling shifted from a private family affair, where children from the ruling classes were educated in their homes or in private schools, to a politically driven initiative for free common education for all children, regardless of class or social status. This transition from parent responsibility to political purpose is an important point because much of the earlier underlying premise (private parental domain) of education continues to linger in the overall perceptions of formal education, creating a dichotomous tension between what Gouthro (2009a) problematizes as the public and private spheres. Wotherspoon points out that in this intersection, the (paternal) protection of the public common interest prevails over parent (private) involvement. In this tension, there is an assumption of power that public knowledge outweighs and is more legitimate/superior to parents’ (private) knowledge and discernment. Wotherspoon also speaks of public schooling’s strict adherence to daily attendance, repetition of classroom routines and curriculum, and the monitoring of teachers and pupils which he argues, further represents
the hierarchical standards and practices that distinguishes schooling from everyday life (private sphere).

Osborne (2001) cites three key social issues of the 19th century that were an impetus for promoting education to be brought under public control. First, the political shift of nationalism and self-governance (the ability to exercise political power) required that citizens were informed and educated so that they would have requisite knowledge to rule and to vote intelligently. Second, industrialism in an industrial revolution called for increased literacy and skill for the workforce (marketplace). Industrial capitalism demanded new labour disciplines, new economic values, and new habits of mind from its citizens (Osborne, 2001; Richter, 2006). Wotherspoon (2009) argues schools became a critical mechanism in negotiating the uncertainty in the innovation and development of new industries and technologies. The third issue that drove public education was the increased immigration and settlement of families into Canadian lands. Public schooling was an integral mechanism for assimilation and integration into a Canadian culture; in particular for immigrant children (Horn, 2011). To a lesser degree, an efficient public education system was recognized as “the best form of state insurance against anarchy and bolshevism” (Osborne, 2011, p. 34), a political/ideological wave shadowing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Rühle, 1929/2011).

At the historical onset of public education, Canadian citizenship was represented by a British-oriented definition of Canadian identity (Osborne, 2001). Welton (2005) points out that the dominant society have always sought to maintain tight control over the “circle of learning” in order to maintain their position of power. Arguably, this style of citizenship was narrow, isolationist, and coercive. Gouthro (2009c) adds that at the
inception of publicly funded schooling, citizenship continued to be framed by a colonial attitude, tensions between Francophones and Anglophones, and discrimination of immigrants. Osborne (2001) reflects, “It was in the name of citizenship that Aboriginal children were forced into residential schools where they could be duly Canadianized, and minorities were coerced into as assimilative Canadianness, sometimes described by historians as ‘Anglo-conformity’” (p. 34). Schools were conceptualized as social institutions that had the potential to achieve an assimilated and prescribed Canadian identity. In this mindset, both immigrants and Aboriginal peoples found themselves caught straddling a cultural divide and pressured to abandon their own peculiar cultural knowledge and understanding. School curriculum reflected the presumed superiority of White British/Northern European values and assumptions that denied or dismissed the validity of other representative cultural traditions (Osborne, 2001).

The document, *For the Love of Learning* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1994), explains that free compulsory public schooling was first established in Ontario in 1871 for children ages 8 to 14 which was later extended to 16 years in 1919. By law, parents were to be penalized if they did not comply, however in practice, class, race, gender, and geography continued to discriminate and prohibit access for some children. A debate about whether schooling should be free and compulsory, came from the various sectors of society. For example, objections from the ruling class were grounded in a concern that the working classes would raise themselves from their “inferior” place and working class families worried about the lost household income and support they relied on from the work of their children. Osborne (2001) asserts that in time much of the debate was negotiated and reconciled so that by the end of 19th century, there was a broad population
consensus that schools positively influenced and improved social and economic outcomes, in particular, to train citizens and to produce workers. Compulsory attendance also brought new issues of how to diversify and broaden the curriculum to address the needs and capacity for all classes and economies.

The 1960s saw some significant ideological shifts in public education (Osborne, 2001). Liberal educational values aimed to ensure equal opportunity for individuals to have substantive options to become an autonomous person capable of reflecting rationally for his/her beliefs and commitments for a good life and citizenship (Taylor, 2017). The one-room school house model was discarded for larger, more central amalgamated school buildings. Larger schools were thought to offer better prospects for stable educational services accompanied by more extensive and modern facilities which enhanced educational programs and provided new curricular and extracurricular choices (Wotherspoon, 2009). Motivated by progressive theoretical educational research (e.g., Dewey), pedagogy shifted to reflect and foster student interest, creativity, and personal growth. Wotherspoon (2009) explains that experiential and innovative practices were encouraged to overcome what had come to be interpreted as “overly rigid and outmoded pedagogical models based on military and industrial principles” (p. 73).

Schools were designed or modified to incorporate open classrooms and learning resource centres to counteract the rigid, box-like structure of existing school spatial organization; boundaries between disciplinary subjects and grade levels were broken down; student evaluation and reporting come to emphasize a wide range of skills, competencies, and subjective observations rather than strictly letter or numerical grade; and teachers were encouraged to draw out the child through
critical thinking and social interaction rather than focus strictly on cognitive knowledge and prescribed curricular content. (Wotherspoon, 2009, p. 73)

In Ontario, the Hall-Dennis Report (1968) sought to reform the educational system by addressing the needs of students and shifting pedagogy away from rote learning to child centred opportunities and greater educational flexibility (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1994).

Through the 20th and 21st centuries, there continued to be substantive work and focus on epistemic and pedagogical interpretations that evoked changing ideas about child development, the nature of teaching and learning, as well as the influences of changes in political trends, fiscal priorities, student enrolments, teacher supply, and other issues. Wotherspoon (2009) argues that despite these various educational waves and reforms over the past century of public schooling, educational philosophies and practices continue to faithfully retain the fundamental patterns and distinctive quality of its earlier roots. Even in its current iteration, Wotherspoon (2009) points out that what seems an outdated description still resonates in our imagination of what schooling is like:

The physical arrangement of the classroom, with its rows of desks under the watchful gaze of the teacher, the division of the school day into distinct periods or blocks of time, an early emphasis on memory work and rote exercises, and concern for punctuality, proper manners, and good habits were derived from military and religious training, but were also highly amenable to a factory system of industrial production. (p. 66)

Arguably, while there is diversity, expansion, and innovation of practice, the underlying institutional structures continue to dominate such that the concept of schooling evokes
recognizable institutional traits and relations.

Over the past century, publicly funded schooling has become well established, normative, and theorized to operate in the best interest of society. Through its trajectory, criticisms have always been abundant and a motivation for contemplating change and reform. McLaren (2015) points out that critical theorists have challenged the often uncontested relationship between school and society, arguing that public schooling “supports an inherently unjust ideological and political imperative” (p. 126), resulting in the transmission and reproduction of the dominant status quo culture. Likewise, Freire (2010) referred to this kind of education as a banking model¹⁹ and argued that while he believes that it is foundational to an oppressive reality it is difficult to perceive it as dehumanizing or problematic when it is inherently connected to the greater neoliberal perspectives of lifelong learning.

Wotherspoon (2009) argues that this is an outcome of a system that paradoxically imposes control while at the same time purports to advocate autonomy. On the one hand compulsory schools are sites of social and cultural reproduction of capitalist and patriarchal relations as reflected in the political and social context (Elliott, 2000) while at the same time promotes emancipation and autonomy. Martin (2003) argues that the tensions forged in these competing interests are representative of an educational system that is a product of the dialectic (e.g., dominant and dominated; regulation and resilience;

¹⁹ A banking model, Freire (2010) argues, uses antidualogic action to further its reproductive domination by integrating characteristics that he describes as conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and cultural invasion. The idea of learning is conceived as mimetic or transferring deposits of knowledge into the learner. “The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (Freire, 2010, p. 72). Because its assumptions are not dialogic or relational, arguably, a reproductive banking model of education also silences subjective voices, reduces human autonomy, and suppresses creative learning possibility. Since it reduces knowing to receiving, filing, and storing deposits of information, it also focuses the learner’s attention on collecting, rather than on criticality or consciousness raising.
reproduction and social transformation). Whatever schools might say about the importance of critical thinking, social participation, personal autonomy, social responsibility, and the like, the message of the hidden curriculum can often be one of conformity, obedience, hierarchy, and order (Osborne, 2001). Ultimately, Wotherspoon (2009) claims the way public education has been conceptualized—what is taught, how it is transmitted, and what is conveyed—reflects the intrinsic constructs of power that operates both within the educational system and through the wider society.

This section has brought to the fore a background for formal schooling in a Canadian context including implications for lifelong learning in a neoliberal context. In the next section, a discussion of the historical political trajectory of immigration to Canada is discussed to provide a context for an inquiry into the Canadian schooling experiences and lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist women.

Section 2: Canadian Immigration

Simmons (2010) maintains that, integral to its nation-building policies, Canada has a long history of large-scale immigration—the movement of people from one country to another on a permanent basis (Guo, 2013)—that is characterized by its capacity to peacefully absorb productive settlers from other countries. With a population of more than 35,000,000, Statistics Canada (2018) estimated that in 2011, one-fifth of Canada’s inhabitants were born in other countries. Canada has the highest proportion of foreign born people among the G7 countries (United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada) at 20.6% (Guo, Gouthro, & Grace, 2014).

Historically, Castles (2004) and Simmons (2010) assert, in Canada, three broad policy approaches/waves have shaped the immigrant narrative with “each imagined future associated with its own cluster of nation-building goals and strategies” (Simmons,
Up to the 1960s, assimilation into a Canadian culture was assumed, multiculturalism/integration became significant in the 1970s, and transnationalism is emerging in the present. Simmons argues that three fundamental changes in immigration policy have had a profound impact on the kind of nation Canada has become: (a) the decision to resume large-scale immigration after the Second World War (1945), (b) the decision to terminate White Canada immigration rules in 1962 and to implement anti-racism and multicultural policies, and (c) the decision in the 1990s to implement skill-selection procedures for immigrants; in particular to emphasize highly skilled immigrant knowledge workers, entrepreneurs, and investors.

For immigrants arriving post-World War II, an assimilation immigration policy supported and guided them to learn the national language and to take on the cultural and social practices of the new country (Castles, 2004). The underlying goal of the policy was that immigrants and their descendants would be indistinguishable from the rest of the population and would not bring about significant social and cultural change in the host country. The policy presupposed positivist assumptions of cultural transfer whereby, Canadian culture could be transmitted to newcomers, and in time, their home culture would be diminished and abandoned (Kymlicka, 2003). Kymlicka adds that the ideology of assimilation was also applied to indigenous peoples, galvanizing the residential school movement with the intent to make a culture vanish. Banks (2008) conveys that the host country assumed that its newcomers would be highly motivated to attach themselves to a modernized democratic society and were only too happy to shed their cultural, less appealing baggage. Grace (2013) and Bheenuck (2010) point out that assimilation intends to erase the culture and language of newcomers, yet these are core essences of being and belonging that challenge the very process of acculturation.
The suitability and admissibility of an immigrant was inferred from their origins (Horn, 2011) and up to 1962, immigration to Canada was overwhelmingly oriented to attracting British and other northern Europeans because they were presumed to assimilate well into Canadian society and culture (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Simmons, 2010). They approached immigration with the view that mass immigration should not make a fundamental alteration in the character of Canadian culture. Schools were essential mechanisms to Canadianize newcomers, especially the children of immigrants because, as Horn asserts (2011), the immigrants themselves would to be “too set in their ways to become genuinely Canadian” (p. 12). Apart from the influence of their parents, schools provided the scaffold for immigrant children to surrender their commitments to other communities, cultures, and nations to advance national belonging and citizenship (Banks, 2008).

Through policy the government deliberately discriminated by selectively choosing immigrants who, they rationalized, would best be able and motivated to absorb an imagined Canadian way of life (Petersen, 1955). Kymlicka (2003) asserts, historically, an assumption about a hierarchy of peoples was widely accepted. The whole system of colonialism was premised on this thinking and was the explicit basis of both domestic policies and international law throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Prior to 1960, in a desire to create a national identity reminiscent of Britain, immigration policies were “overtly biased against people of colour” (Shan, 2015, p. 2) which prohibited/constrained the immigration of Black Africans and Asians into Canada (Joshee, 2004; Shan, 2015). For example, migrant Chinese workers who arrived in the thousands in the late 1800s to construct segments of Canadian Pacific Railway were said
to be “despised and discriminated against” (Horn, 2011, p. 13). During the Second World War, Japanese settlers in Canada were removed from their homes and interned in camps in British Columbia’s interior. Pamela Sugiman (2005) details these experience in *Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese-Canadian Women’s Life Stories*. She confides, that although many decades have passed, Japanese Canadians continue to “live with the injustices and indignities of the past” (p. 49). In order to shield their children from racial hostilities, immigrant parents promoted Canadian assimilation to their children, shedding cultural markers and snuffing out a genealogy, leaving the next generation “haunted” (p. 49) by the silence of their parents. There were others in Canada who did not entirely fit the criteria of the “real Canadian” and would never, based on their origins, attain preferential status; groups like Aboriginals, French Canadians, Blacks, Jews, South Asians, and even in some places, Catholics would feel the divisive wall of the ideal White, Northern European, Protestant who stood “above” with virtues of “honesty, sobriety, industry, perseverance, and loyalty to the Crown” (Horn, 2011, p. 12).

Horn (2011) argues that Quebec’s so-called Quiet Revolution in 1960 began a reform movement that raised a critical consciousness of the inequity Canadians faced based on the inference of their origin. In particular, English Canadians became aware of a Quebec sovereignty movement that was committed to a radical change in the relations between their province and the rest of Canada. Among the eventual outcomes of this movement, was a multicultural framework that received recognition in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and was constitutionalized as the Multiculturalism Act in 1988. The pluriform nature of Canada gained official recognition and a new reality in immigration (Horn, 2011).
The Multiculturalism Act formalized the Canadian federal government’s commitment to a multicultural conception of *integration of newcomers*. It identified that immigrants could visibly express their ethnic identity and that public institutions would accommodate those identities. Policies of multiculturalism mandated the host country’s acceptance of immigrant groups as distinct communities and implied that members of such groups should have full citizenship rights in all spheres of society, without being expected to give up their diversity (Banks, 2008; Castles, 2004). It also inferred that all citizens, should accept that society is not monocultural (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014) and that institutional (school) structures and practices must adapt to remove any cultural bias. In the 1980s, Multiculturalism Canada supported the belief that exposure to other cultural traditions brought about mutual understanding, bringing with it government funding available for multicultural festivals, concerts, programs of learning and retention of heritage languages (Schryer, 1998). Ghosh and Galczynski argue that this interpretation of multiculturalism actually keeps dominant privileging intact—appreciating and accommodating, but not integrating difference, such that privilege remains separated and on the outside. Banks (2008) contends that both assimilationist and multicultural (integration) views assume that cultural and ethnic differences will disappear over time, that “group attachments will die of their own weight within modernized, pluralistic democratic society if marginalized and excluded groups are given opportunity to attain structural inclusion” (p. 131) in the host country. If this is so, it begs the question whether the integration of cultural difference is equitably acknowledged and valued.

In a political shift, the cultural enrichment programs initiated in the multicultural wave were dismantled in 1990s. Joshee (2004) argues that at that same time, Canada also
saw an ideological rise of neoliberalism. The shift brought an economic agenda that advocated tax cuts, cuts in social spending, and a support for privatization and marketization. Educational attention focused on training for economic productivity and multicultural education initiatives faded. It was rationalized that the state should not and could not afford to offer too broad a range of programs and services in public education; in other words, cultural special interests could not represent a core interest and not within the scope of the “public purse” (Guo & Hébert, 2014, p. 173). Recognizing that there was significant economic loss for Canada when immigrant educational and work experiences were devalued, educational attention was given to integration and settlement services; programs that were geared toward bridging immigrants to their fields of practice and better positioning them into the Canadian economy.

Banting and Kymlicka (2010) summarize that in Canada the “integrative power of Canadian society for newcomers” (p. 57) remains solidly positive and many studies have shown that immigrants do best when they are able to combine their ethnicity with a new national identity. Kymlicka (2003) is positive in his assertion that the will to accommodate diversity in Canada remains evocative and persuasive, and counter to previously held assimilationist policies. Horn (2011) cautions however that a multicultural tolerance also brings new meaning for citizenship in a contemporary globalized world. Kymlicka (2003) points out that unlike the assimilation era, newcomers today have a greater sense of entitlement to equality as a basic right, and can be impatient with what they perceive as “lingering manifestations of older hierarchies” (p. 6).

Today, the experience of immigration continues to change. With access to sophisticated communication technology, and rapid means of transportation, the
emergence of transnationalism has transformed the way we think about immigration and citizenship. Simmons (2010) explains that in the contemporary field of migration, “Transnational space covers transnational institutions, transnational actions/actors, and transnational flows taking place across and outside the control of nation-states and across them to connect people and institutions within them” (p. 20). The heterogeneity of cultural values and practices within transnational space, hinders acculturation and assimilation into nation states, such that national boundaries “are being eroded” (Castles, 2004, p. 18) because in today’s globalized economy people have multiple citizenships and move, interact, and live in more than one country. As a result, Castles (2004) argues, nation building governments find that their power to control economy, the welfare system, and national culture is being weakened. Likewise, Horn (2011) perceives that in so doing, Canada becomes vulnerable to internal weakening of its statehood and that an attribute of cultural acceptance shifts instead to tolerance. He forewarns, “The tolerance that comes easily to people in good times can in times of stress change into virulent defensiveness, rejecting the different, alienating the new” (Horn, 1997, p. 306).

Transnationalism potentially contributes to vulnerability of the relations within state institutional structures (including education) along with commitment to state citizenship. In the current climate of globalization, a transnational approach to immigration presents a challenge to traditional conceptions of nation-state citizenship. Horn (2011) is concerned that citizenship is more apt to become characterized by an instrumental rather than an emotional attitude—or as he argues, “passports of convenience” (p. 10). Metaphorically, Horn wonders whether current policies of multiculturalism actually encourage
immigrants to treat Canada as one might a “public washroom” (p. 18); merely a place to run to in an emergency or a time of dislocation.

In this section an historical analysis of Canadian immigration policies was discussed. The next section extrapolates an in-depth historical analysis of the immigration experiences of Dutch neo-Calvinists in Canada immediately following the Second World War. The analysis includes a discussion of Dutch political history, culture, emigration, schooling, labour, gender distinctions, and religion and lays a foundation for the life history research concerning the historical, cultural, and political distinctions immigration presents for immigrant women in an ethnic enclave.

Section 3: Immigration—The Dutch Neo-Calvinist Case

It may as well have been for forty days and nights that we were on the long Atlantic. Two by two, with children most of us, we packed our bags, walked the gangway, waved, and leaning on a deckrail watched the sea rise up behind us, top the dikes and take the lives of loved ones, still waving, their raised arms at last drowned in the flood of the horizon. (From Forty Days & Forty Nights by John Terpstra, as cited in VanderMey, 1983, p. 13)

Simmons (2010) notes that the historical past of Canadian immigration can provide useful perspectives for understanding present-day patterns and developments. There is a lingering sense that the past, often left stored up in dusty vacant bureaus, once revisited, opened up, and shaken out, breathes new energy, colour, and meaning to one’s everyday life. In this section, I develop an in-depth historical analysis of the immigration of post-World War II Dutch neo-Calvinists to Canada. The analysis examines an
historical time frame and explicates the ideological mindset of the people that chose to leave their country (homeland) of origin to begin a new life in Canada. It was as, Ganzevoort (1988) describes, “a tribe on the move” (p. 66), convinced that once in Canada, the grip of classism would be loosened and that within a vast landscape, there would be freedom to live out and preserve, in obedience to God’s word, a distinctive religious vision with a prosperous economic outcome. As an ethnic enclave, the Dutch neo-Calvinists brought a particular Dutch way of life with them, “transplanted it virtually unchanged on the Canadian soil” (J. VanderVliet, 1994, p. 29). Ideas and concepts are historically rooted such that to understand a subject as it stands in the present, one needs to take into account all that surrounds and produces it over time, in particular the forces that produce understanding of the subject through both power and resistance to power. The section begins with a brief introduction of an historical period after World War II, followed by an historical analysis of Dutch history for a contextual background. The central focus is a literature review of the experience of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants to Canada.

As Schryer (1998) asserts, to understand any group of immigrants, an examination of their country or region of origin is essential. Exhausted, in a post-war (1945) society, with critical problems of overpopulation, unemployment, and lack of arable land (thousands of acres of land were under sea water), many Dutch citizens were also deeply concerned and fearful of impending socialism and communism in Europe (Ganzevoort, 1988; Horn, 1997). While there is theoretical speculation as to why 143,300 Dutch citizens (van Dijk, 2001) emigrated from the Netherlands and settled in Canada, between 1948 and 1962, significant is the underlying psychology of a population that had
undergone a traumatic period of foreign occupation, followed by a difficult period of economic reconstruction and increasing state intervention. A bilateral political intervention (The Netherlands-Canadian Settlement Scheme) promoted by Canada and the Netherlands for a mass population movement, also opened the way for citizens to contemplate and negotiate the immigration process. Simmons (2010) points out that migration systems are historical systems, “they begin at some point in time, develop into a pattern, then eventually, sooner or later, decelerate, accelerate, or change in some other way due to forces they generate or which come from exogenous developments” (p. 39). In this particular case, the density of migration occurred in a 10-year period following World War II and then tapered off in the 1960s (Schryer, 1998).

Schryer (1998) finds four consistent themes that explained why so many Dutch individuals and families made the decision to leave close family ties and a strong sense of Dutch citizenship for a new land. First, the trauma of war and its aftermath motivated people to get away from the bitter memories and the challenges of trying to reconstruct a new life in a country that could never go back to the way it had been. For many, after the countless sacrifices, there seemed to be little justice as people were not called to account or acknowledged for their actions and loyalties during the war (Speerstra, 2005; VanderMey, 1983). Second, there was a lack of space and housing, especially for families, and a perceived lack of opportunity and jobs for future generations. Many emigrated in hopes for a better future for their children. Petersen (1955) points out that in addition to the problems at home, the Netherlands also sustained the loss of the Netherlands East Indies, resulting in a significant loss of national income and the return of many Dutch citizens. There was also escalating government bureaucratization and
control of housing, zoning, and building such that many people felt the austere restrictions on individual initiative and constraints for social advancement (Speerstra, 2005). Wide open spaces and a chance at a well-paid job, and a perception of overall freedom in Canada was attractive. Third, with the invasion of Eastern Europe by Russia and the imprint of Fascism, there was a deep concern and fear for an impending wave of socialism and communism in Europe. In his memoir, Horn (1997) explained that his mother observed, “Holland had been in danger of falling prey to communism she said, and had offered us no future” (p. 47). Finally, with all of these tensions, immigration was like a fever in the air—everyone got together and had meetings and talked about it, and talked each other into it (Rekker, 2000; Van Arragon Hutten, 2001). While leaving the Netherlands was extremely difficult, it was the hope of prosperity and a future for their children that led many to embark in “chain migration” (van Dijk, 2001, p. 59) to Canada.

The Dutch viewed Canada with optimism: a positive impression had been forged by a future Dutch queen (Juliana) who had been protected by Canadians during the war, the birth of a Dutch princess (Margriet) in Ottawa, and the tangible generosity of Canadian soldiers who contributed to the liberation from the occupation of German forces (Ganzevoort, 1988). With Canadian collaboration, the Dutch government stimulated a mass movement out of the country in the early 1950s. In particular, it promoted the movement of large families to Canada to support a much needed labour force (e.g., agriculture) and in turn promoted economic and social opportunity. The mass movement was a strategy to alleviate the overpopulation in the Netherlands and the potential economic pressure of surplus labour (Petersen, 1955; van Dijk, 2001). In her memoir, Anne Van Arragon Hutten (2001) concludes,
My parents and thousands of others during the post war years, thought they were making individual decisions to move to Canada. In hindsight the question is being asked whether they were, in fact, only pawns in an intentional chess game whose wave of newcomers to Canada’s shore was a planned migration, conducted under the auspices of two governments with the cooperation and assistance of commercial interests looking for profit, and of churches seeking to bolster their number and influence. (p. 35)

Van Arragon Hutten’s insight is telling in an inquiry about ruling relations, for while the Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants believed their emigration from the Netherlands was self-directed, there were also social forces that compelled such a large volume of Dutch neo-Calvinists to come to Canada. By 1961, the Dutch represented the fourth largest immigrant group to settle in Canada (Ganjevoort, 1988), but by this time, the numbers of new Dutch immigrants began to decelerate.

An historical analysis provides further understanding of how this religious enclave came to find themselves as immigrants in Canada.

**Pillarization in the Netherlands**

In comparing the trajectory of Dutch Catholic and Dutch Calvinist immigrants to Canada, van Dijk (2001) and Schryer (1998) find that historical data shows there were significant differences in their assimilation patterns. When post World War II Dutch immigrants arrived in Canada, the Dutch Catholics joined existing Canadian Catholic churches and schools, while Dutch Calvinists quickly undertook the building of their own social and cultural structures because they were not satisfied ideologically and religiously with unfamiliar Canadian institutions. This was historically conceived. Since the latter
part of the 19th century, Dutch society had been divided into an institutionally segmented society with three (sometimes described as four) ideological pillars or *zuilen*: Catholic, Secular/Socialist, and Calvinists who were divided by Mainstream (*Hervormden*) and Orthodox/Neo-Calvinist (*Gereformeerden*) doctrinal/confessional positions (Post, 1989; Schryer, 1998; van Dijk, 2001). Koyzis (2003) explains, “The Netherlands therefore became to be characterized by what is called *verzuiling*, or the vertical division of society into various confessional subcultures existing parallel to each other and being largely self-contained” (pp. 228-229). Schryer notes that even though the Netherlands, with a constitutional monarchy, was politically similar to other European nations, its various institutions were segregated to a greater degree than any other Western democracy. Each pillar had its own social institutions (e.g., churches, schools, political parties, labour unions, banks, newspapers) and programs and had achieved a kind of stable “institutional completeness” (van Dijk, 2001, p. 58). Pillarization in the Netherlands achieved segregation so that there was no necessary association with “others”—a voluntary apartheid (Schryer, 1998).

Calvinism, a major branch of Protestantism, that follows the theological Reformed tradition of John Calvin (1509-1564), has deep roots in the Netherlands. Schaap (1998) asserts that from the late 16th century to the 1940s, the Dutch society was so deeply influenced by the moral character of John Calvin’s theology, that “the mind of the entire nation seemed to function in a way that could be described as Calvinistic” (p. 44). The Dutch Calvinist (*Hervormden*/Reformed) Church enjoyed political influence as the state church during the years of the Dutch Republic (1588-1795). Driedger (2002) argues that after the Reformation there emerged an interconnectedness of politics and
religion whereby religiosity constructed the social relations necessary for rulers and allied church leaders to force or educate its subjects to behave in ordered and routine ways. Driedger adds, “The use of polemics which were intended to protect God’s truth by pressing opponents to concede defeat and be silent, was a common instrument of public discipline” (p. 84). As the Reformed church began to moderate its Calvinist views and practices to mirror Enlightenment thinking some Protestant Calvinists (known as Seceders) resisted what they perceived as the church’s increased liberalization and secularization (Kossman, 1978), and responded with a Calvinist revival movement (Orthodox Calvinism) in the early 19th century. Dreidger claims that this kind of resistance is a defensive assertion of identity of confessionalization; the process of religious identity formation and was typical of the Reformation movement.

As Prinsen (2000) asserts, the reactionary movement came from the kleine luyden or the “little people,” interpreted as less intellectual and lower class. Schaap (1998) and Fallon (2000) argue that in spite of being predominantly formally uneducated, this group had a deep commitment to learning biblical knowledge. Initially meeting together in conventicles or home churches as a resistance movement, they criticized the Enlightenment’s absence of piety and the diminished message of sin and grace. They stressed the return to the central message of the Bible and adhered to a specific set of historical doctrines (e.g., Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort),

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20 Psalter Hymnal: Doctrinal Standards and Liturgy of the Christian Reformed Church (1976). Belgic Confession: The oldest of the Doctrinal Standards of the Christian Reformed Church. Its chief author, Guido de Brès, a preacher of the Reformed Churches composed the confession in 1561 to protest against the persecution of the Roman Catholic government. In it, the petitioners declared that while they were ready to obey the government, they would not deny the truth expressed in the Confession. The Synod of Dort (1618-1619) adopted this Confession as one the Doctrinal Standards of the Reformed Churches. Heidelberg Catechism: Published in 1563, The Heidelberg Catechism was commissioned by Frederick III and written by Zacharius Ursinus (professor of theology at Heidelberg University) and Casper Olevianus (Frederick’s court preacher). The motivation for preparing the catechism was for instructing the youth and
and its application to daily life (Schaap, 1998; J. VanderVliet, 1994). The movement known as *Afscheiding*, seceded from the state church in 1834 and formed the *Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken*. The Seceders looked at the world as an evil place and held little hope for redeeming society, thus their focus was to “guard their children” (J. VanderVliet, 1994, p. 23), their families, and congregations. The Seceders withdrew their children from public schools and worked tirelessly (*schoolstrijd*) to establish the right to direct the education of their children through parent-owned Christian school societies (Teeuwsen, 2016). After a period of government interference, fines, and repercussions, the group appealed to the government on constitutional grounds (Petersen, 1955). They succeeded in repealing the School Act of 1806, which forbid the establishment of separate schools, with a new School Act of 1857 where independent schools were permitted. The schoolstrijd was a defining myth that was carried to the North America. In the 1950s over 130 Dutch Calvinist independent schools were established in Canada (Prinsen, 2000).

In 1892, a neo-Calvinist group led by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)21 sought union with the churches of the Secession. Known as *Doleantie* (the grieving ones), the group joined with the Seceders to form the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*. The new church of about 600,000 (Petersen, 1955) marked the establishment of a visible guiding pastors and teachers. In the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), the Heidelberg Catechism was approved as a Reformed catechism and confession. *Canons of Dordt*: Adopted by the Reformed Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619), in response to the rise and spread of Arminianism. Each of the Canons consist of a positive and a negative part, the former being an exposition of the Reformed doctrine on the subject (e.g., unconditional election, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints), and the latter a repudiation of the corresponding Arminian error.

21 Abraham Kuyper: one of the Netherland’s foremost leaders in politics, education, and church. He was a neo-Calvinist theologian/minister, a journalist, a professor, a politician, a Prime Minister (1901-1905). He established The Free University of Amsterdam, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, and was integral to the formation of the Gereformeerde Kerk. Kuyper promoted “pillarization” of Dutch society (Mouw, 2011; Teeuwsen, 2016).
Orthodox/neo-Calvinist pillar in the Netherlands. Unlike the pessimism of Seceders, the Doleantie wanted to inspire “Christian crusaders” (J. VanderVliet, 1994, p. 23) thus their union, formed a paradoxical and contradictory ideology: protection and evangelism—two sides of the same coin. Historically, the tension situated within the contradiction has had a significant grip on the church’s historical trajectory, with ongoing organizational schisms, departures, and ideological restructuring with the outcome of a number of Orthodox neo-Calvinist branches (e.g., in Canada: Christian Reformed, Canadian Reformed, Free Reformed, Orthodox Reformed, Netherlands Reformed, Orthodox Christian Reformed) demonstrating a continued uneasy alliance between orthodox and neo-Calvinist thinking (guarding and crusading). Fallon (2000) notes that in each case of organizational schism the main reasons given for separating from the established church was a conserving need to be faithful to scripture and the belief by some that the established church was capitulating to secularization. Breems (1991) argues that this dynamic is also a sustaining mechanism: “It keeps them busy going back to their roots to find even more effective ways, perfecting and living the worldviews” (p. 384).

In 1901, Abraham Kuyper became the prime minister of the Netherlands, and emphasized the need for Calvinists to apply their religious principles to all walks of life, and to transform society and culture at large by setting up their own political, economic, and cultural institutions (Schryer, 1998). Specifically, Kuyper’s doctrine of Sphere of Sovereignty states that each part of life—family, work, church, education, recreation—have their own character in God’s creation and as such are subject to their own place in God’s plan for the creation (Mouw, 2011; Prinsen, 2000). Spykman (1976) explains that

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22 Also referred to as neo-Calvinist or new Calvinists, however with ongoing schisms and departures, the essence and significance of being orthodox (conserving) has historically played an important attribute
“Each sphere has its own identity, its own unique task, its own God-given prerogatives. On each God has conferred its own peculiar right of existence and reason for existence” (as cited in Mouw, 2011, p. 24). Kuyper believed that Calvinists had beliefs that would inevitably lead them into conflict with secular society, a conflict that could never be resolved therefore, he rationalized that it would be in everyone’s best interest to establish separate but parallel institutions (Teeuwsen, 2016). Teeuwsen (2016) summarizes the essence of this pillarized segregation:

They worshipped in Gereformeerde churches, did business with Geerformeerde businesses, read Gereformeerde newspapers, played sports on Gereformeerde sports teams, and sent their children to their Christian schools. Their children married into other Gereformeerde families, had children of their own and started the cycle over again. (p. 42)

Within each pillar, each subculture had everything to live well. Kuyper believed that the government’s role was to recognize people’s rights, and ensure that each pillar had the space to operate independently (Post, 1989). In particular, Kuyper argued that raising children was a parental responsibility and therefore it was the parent’s right and duty to direct their education. It was the government’s job to ensure just and fair conditions within which parents could effectively educate their children. Thus, for Dutch Calvinists, it was normative to separate oneself; a reality rooted in principle and faith.

The second World War changed some of this thinking. As an occupied nation, many of the boundaries constructed by pillarization became fractured and more permeable as the Dutch focused their attention away from ideological/worldview differences and on coordinated efforts to resist the enemy (e.g., hide the Jewish people,
protect their citizens, distribute food). Calvinists were very involved in the Dutch
Resistance movement (Eman, 1994; Rekker, 2000) but after the war, sensing the threat of
depillarization, begun in the war, they also interpreted it as a breakdown of their
religiously secure community (Schaap, 1998). Neo-Calvinists became caught in a wave
of emigration, believing that Canada might bring revitalizing opportunities to renew their
commitment to scriptural adherence, and a place to reassert and protect their worldview.
“They came with their mythology of a chosen people who had overcome threats to their
religious expression and their religious freedom. They came with their pillar mentality of
institutional completeness” (Prinsen, 2000, p. 179). Canada provided a place to transplant
and guard a religious way of life, and at the same time Dutch neo-Calvinists saw the
opportunity to reform (crusade) it into an improved country (J. VanderVliet, 1994). While
the solidity of a religious worldview was a seed of motivation, they too embraced
Weber’s (2003) Protestant spirit of “a calling” for the capitalist economic opportunities
being hailed as a better future after the devastation of war (Prinsen, 2000; Schryer, 1998).
It was as if a tipping point, a communal response into uncertainty, new possibilities, and a
desire to find new ground on which to live out their peculiar worldview.

**Dutch Post World War II Emigration/Immigration**

Sandwiched between the tensions of leaving and the uncertainty and displacement
of arriving, it is hard to envision the actuality of how Dutch post World War II
immigrants in Canada negotiated an historical migration. Upon arrival to Canada in 1947,
Dr. A.S. Tuinman, the attaché for agriculture and emigration affairs at the Royal
Netherlands Embassy and one of the architects of the post war influx (Schryer, 1998;
VanderMey, 1983), offered these words to some of the first new arrivals:
Your arrival on the Waterman [ship] has made a moving impression of Dutch people in Canada. A ship filled with Dutch people seeking a new future suggests to us, living far away from our land of birth, that the Dutch are still energetic and enterprising…I hope that you can confirm the hope placed in you by both the Canadian government and the Canadian people. It is in your own interest, as well as Canada’s, that you adjust as quickly as possible and become loyal Canadian citizens. (As cited in VanderMey, 1983, p. 41)

By 1947, the final touches to an understanding between Dutch and Canadian political authorities were made and even though in the beginning Dutch authorities were responsible for much of the program, eventually federal authorities in Ottawa were ready to activate The Netherlands-Canadian Settlement Scheme (VanderMey, 1983).

More areas of Canada were opened up for settlement and the Dutch kept on coming, agreeing to work for their sponsors for at least one year. The minimum wage was $75 a month for married men and $45 for single ones. Free housing was included. The mechanics of the program were not complicated. Farmers in Canada could apply for labor from The Netherlands at the immigration offices, the National Employment Service, or the provincial government offices, or the colonization departments of the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National railways. The applications were checked out and then forwarded to the Canadian immigration officers in The Hague. The Dutch were responsible for the placements. Then there were the medical examinations required by Canada of all immigrants, including the children. These were done by Canadian medical
officers. Background inquiries also were conducted before visas were issued.

(VanderMey, 1983, pp. 51-52)

Due to the Netherland’s critical economic situation, severe restrictions were placed on the amount of money that could be taken out of Dutch banks: $100 per adult and $50 for children under the age of 15 (Ganzevoort, 1988; Schryer, 1998). Horn (1997) explains that his parents, who identified as Neutral, upper middle class, were able to circumvent the monetary restrictions by moving their money into a Swiss bank. Dutch immigrants were permitted to ship a large crate of various possessions along with smaller trunks of clothing and linens. Most immigrants who arrived in Canada came by Dutch military ships that had been refitted for passengers, disembarked and were processed in large customs/immigration halls in various Canadian port cities (e.g., Halifax, Quebec City, Montreal), and then travelled by train to their pre-arranged destination (VanderMey, 1983).

As Prinsen (2000) asserts, much of the coordination of the migration was undertaken by emigration societies. These societies were formed along the lines of the pillars as they existed in the Netherlands. Petersen (1955) found that three-quarters of the neo-Calvinists who left the Netherlands immigrated to Canada due in part to a sister church that had been established in North America prior to the war. In previous immigration (1840 and late 19th century), the Gereformeerde church had been transplanted in North America and formed the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). A binational organization, the CRC (headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan) aggressively promoted immigration to Canada. Post World War II, neo-Calvinists accounted for 41% of the Dutch immigrants (Fallon, 2000; Van Ginkel, 1982) who arrived in Canada—an overrepresentation of the 10% they represented in the Dutch
population. While in general the Dutch were viewed by Canadians as preferred immigrants the Dutch Calvinists on the other hand, came for opportunity and growth and claimed their own agency to emigrate. Ganzevoort (1988) describes them as having “suspicion and cold assessment in their eyes, getting the measure of their neighbours and expecting little but what they could provide themselves” (p. 66). While the Canadian government saw the Dutch as hard working and industrious, they were seemingly unaware of the serious divisions that had, in a pillarized sense, separated Dutch society prior to the war (Ganzevoort). Petersen (1955) argues that a government policy that favoured Dutch immigrants because of their presumed easy assimilability in fact facilitated a group whose strict piety made it “relatively impervious to alien cultural influences” (p. 189).

While Dutch immigrants quickly demonstrated linguistic assimilation and economic integration, Ganzevoort (1988) also concludes that neo-Calvinist immigrants behaved differently from other Dutch immigrants and “often presented Canadians with mystifying and unique problems” (p. 69). With the help of fieldmen appointed and salaried by the Christian Reformed Church of North America (Breems, 1991; Teeuwsen, 2016; van Dijk, 2001; VanderMey, 1983; VanderVliet, 1994), neo-Calvinist immigrants were guided to settle around areas near newly established Christian Reformed churches. VanderMey (1983) conveys this sentiment: “In the event you should decide to emigrate, we would caution you against removing yourself too far from the company of fellow believers and from the church” (p. 58). Teeuwsen (2016) points out, “They [fieldmen] were very organized and efficient at drawing in and enfolding people within their pillar” (p. 102). In addition to strengthening the sustainability of the enclave, immigrants could
be assisted with securing employment, housing, translation, transportation, and in particular maintaining their commitment to their spiritual beliefs. By keeping the Dutch neo-Calvinist together, they developed a pervasive sense of community and intellectual/ideological conformity as they closely lived and worked together.

Upon arrival, many immigrants found living conditions primitive by European standards. The first years were marked by poor housing (often quickly converted chicken coops and farm buildings), with no plumbing or electricity. While the men went to work as labourers on their sponsor’s farm, many women found themselves isolated with small children in homes where they had little autonomy—a stark contrast to the easy access of shops, schools, and community in their home country. In the vastness of Canada, a bicycle did very little; until a family could afford a car, women found themselves at the mercy of their sponsor family to get food and other household necessities (Den Hartog & Kasaboski, 2008). This was very difficult for Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant families whose introverted family culture valued a physical setting of privacy, respectability, discretion, and seclusiveness; where home (and church) represented a strict line between a private domain and the rest of the world (Schryer, 1998).

In the Netherlands, Dutch was the official language used in schools. At home, most farmers and working class families spoke a particular provincial dialect which identified the area in which they lived. Dutch provinces like Friesland and Groningen had dialects that were largely unintelligible to other Dutch people. Since historically, communities remained mostly static, dialects would be fostered and preserved in homes and in community gatherings. This also further separated and isolated communities from the rest of the country, also maintaining to some degree a distinct class hierarchy. In
Dutch society, it was inappropriate to express a desire for a higher social status (Van Arragon Hutten, 2001). Emigrating to Canada with a desire to get ahead and realize class mobility, many Dutch immigrants quickly abandoned their dialect and used English to diminish class distinction. The presumption of a Canadian classless society, provided the rationale for a rigid Dutch class system to be loosened (Horn, 1997; Schryer, 1998). Van Arragon Hutten (2011) argues that while the dialect of the upper middle class dominated post-war and was essential for progress in the Netherlands, this was not so in Canada where broken English became a mechanism for progress and neutralized class stratification (Schryer, 1998).

**Canadian Schooling**

“But becoming a Canadian was far more complicated than learning the language and wearing the right clothes. Almost every detail of life had to be shifted, adjusted, and fixed” (Van Arragon Hutten, 2001, p. 219).

Historically, the Dutch school system reproduced social stratification (Schryer, 1998); where one went to school and for how long, mattered. Once children were 12 years of age, a decision had to be made between three streams of education (VMBO or MULO, HAVO or MMS, VWO or HBS23); decided by the student and their parents and most often predestined by family history and culture. Many Dutch neo-Calvinists had limited usefulness for formal education and schooling (Ganzevoort, 1988) and did not continue on, choosing instead to go to work or applied programs in landbouwschool (agriculture), ambachtsschool (trade/technical) for boys, and huishoudschool

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(houseschool) for girls (Luijkx & de Heus, 2008). This was particularly true for Dutch neo-Calvinist girls who, anticipating marriage, were most likely to pursue just enough education to develop house management skills after which formal school was deemed as a waste of time. Upon arrival in Canada, most Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant children, 13 years and older, did not return to school but went to work and provided income to the family unit. This included work on farms and as domestics. Before organizing their own independent Calvinist schools, younger immigrant children were integrated into Canadian public schools, many placed in lower grades to develop language skills. Den Hartog and Kasaboski (2008) convey that their parents and their siblings started in a one-room schoolhouse that served eight grades, “but all five of them read Dick and Jane, puzzling their way through a foreign language and a culture much less formal than their own” (p. 291). Van Arragon Hutten (2001) asserts that there was an awkwardness, to belong and negotiate meaning in Canadian educational institutions. She explains that in going to public school they were warned about how to interact appropriately; to acquire what was needed while at the same time avoiding parts that were questionable or counter to cultural and religious beliefs. Van Arragon Hutten (2001) describes that going to school was like living two separate lives where with a feeling of “vague shame” (p. 217) you never quite knew where you belonged and how you should represent yourself. In his research, Fallon (2000) found that there was a strict separation of “public school” from church and family life:

In interviews, the children of immigrants have indicated that they often felt that they were people of two worlds. They may have gone to the public school, but after school they were not allowed to participate in extra-curricular activities.
The message they picked up from church and home (and later Christian School) was that they were never to feel at home in the public school, nor were they to consider the friends that they made there to be on par with their friends from church. ...Some had the feeling from their parents, that going to the public school was a necessary evil. (p. 304)

However, even in a disposition of resistance, public school became important for acquiring essential cultural codes and children, at a very young age, became important cultural and linguistic interpreters for their parents (Ganzevoort). Public schooling played a key link/resource for immigrant families to negotiate their way in a Canadian culture.

**Virtue of Labour and Religious Chauvinism**

Canada.
They lived in a granary.
They worked.
They made $60 a month.
They worked.
They were homesick.
They worked.
They were tired.
They worked.
They were determined, but it was more than that, they were obsessed.
They worked.
Hand over hand, ever so slowly, they moved forward. (Aritha VanHerk, as cited in VanderMey, 1983, pp. 11-12)

“It was not surprising that a man...might move to Canada. It was supposed to be the land of equality, a land where opportunity awaited those willing to work hard, a land where no one lorded over someone else” (Van Arragon Hutten, 2001, p. 20). Calvinism
promoted a lifestyle of hard work; frugality and industry were valued attributes and a single mindedness that ascribed to the “virtue of labour” (Ganzevoort, 1988, p. 108). Weber (2003) argues the pursuit of wealth is tied into Calvinist theology. Labour is not merely an economic means, it is a spiritual end and calling. Economic prosperity was a sign of God’s favour and blessing. As such, for Dutch neo-Calvinists, physical labour was a site of learning (Welton, 2005) and pragmatically valued over formal schooling in school. Joshee (2004) asserts that a strong work ethic actually reinforces inequality between upper and lower classes, but this was not consciousness of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants. Instead, the immigrants became caught up in a powerful motivation to get ahead quickly such that money (geld-zucht—money lust) became the focus of families striving for agency and economic prosperity in a new country (Van Arragon Hutten, 2001). The frugal and close-knit Dutch family was able to save up more quickly by pooling their finances to a “common family purse” (VanArragon Hutten, 2001, p. 160) where children handed over their income until marrying and moving out of the family unit.

Ganzevoort (1988) and Schryer (1998) claim that since children were extensions of parents, every member of the family became significant and committed to economic maintenance of the family unit. While this thinking gave the Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant family a competitive advantage (Schryer, 1998), it also ideologically, imposed that child immigrants, 13 years and older, would abandon the idea of learning at school, to work on the farm or as domestics. To their Canadian neighbour, Horn (2011) asserts,

24 “It will be our task to find out whose intellectual child the particular concrete form of rational thought was, from which the idea of a calling and the devotion of labour in the calling has grown, which is, as we have seen, so irrational from the standpoint of purely eudaemonistic self-interest, but which has been and still is one of the most characteristic elements of our capitalist culture” (Weber, 2003, p. 78).
25 Learning is harnessed to transform one into the worker—the Calvinist saw learning in the work itself.
this was not held to their credit but instead was seen as the result of an “unseemly commitment to labour. …White people can’t work that hard” (p. 17).

Separating themselves, it did not matter to Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants what their Canadian neighbour thought. Schryer (1998) argues, Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants saw their ability to become “good” Canadians as a logical outcome of their perseverance and work ethic which he claims was forged by a long legacy of struggle. Prinsen (2000) cites a quotation from the CRC publication, Calvinist Contact (August 1949), “We wish to have a positive influence and we wish to see our Calvinist principles permeate this [Canadian] society, principles which, under God’s guidance, have bestowed such rich blessings on Christian countries” (p. 175). With a dim view of Canadian society, Van Arragon Hutten (2001) describes the disposition of the Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant as having a “fair degree of religious superiority and judgementalism [sic]” that demonstrated a kind of “religious chauvinism” (p. 129). In private there was an intentional resolution to curtail interaction with the “other” and remain invisible (Horn, 1997), while at the same time maintaining a deep steadfastness to take advantage of whatever economic opportunity could be procured from their host. Schryer determines that while there were strong aspects of assimilation into Canadian society, there were also strongly protected cultural values and beliefs, harboured within the church and home, that were deliberately kept apart and invisible to Canadians. Fallon (2000) goes even further claiming that the Dutch neo-Calvinists resisted in such a way as to create a counter culture. He argues, like the Israelites in the Old Testament, Dutch neo-Calvinists saw themselves as “children of the Covenant” (p. 13), a people set apart and chosen by God to reveal His light to the world through history. Canada represented their exodus into the promised land.
With a covenant mentalism the concern for neo-Calvinists was guarding the integrity of the relationship between God and His people. As the world outside of the covenant poses a potential threat to this relationship, there was a strong inward focus and tendency toward isolationism (Fallon, 2000). As if a myth, the Dutch neo-Calvinists believed that if they would submit to God’s will (through their commitment and steadfastness to the church and a religious enclave), He would make a great nation of them in a land flowing with “milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8, The Bible). An intense focus on covenantal theology and the idea of the “True” church made the integrity of Reformed faith a dominant issue with a concern that contact with “outsiders” might somehow contaminate the covenantal line. The concept of a chosen people also served as a strong impetus to “bind people tightly together through ensconcing a sense of purpose and significance which goes beyond the bounds of simple ethnic identity” (Fallon, 2000, p. 84). Although there was a commitment to evangelise and reach out to their Canadian neighbour, Fallon finds that this was always a one-sided discourse—a Canadian neighbour could only do so if they were willing to fully embrace the Dutch neo-Calvinist doctrine and way of life. In the end “covenantal isolationism” (Fallon, 2000, p. 321) was a safer alternative to a world outside that posed a potential threat to the relationship between God and His people. Fallon argues that this thinking is not unique to a Dutch neo-Calvinist ethnic enclave, but a common attribute among immigrant groups.

While the CRC church did provide important resources for settlement it also affected the Dutch neo-Calvinists’ assimilation into Canadian society. As Van Arragon Hutten (2001) describes, “the church raised unscalable walls that cut us off from our Canadian peers” (p. 130). The church imposed a sense of warning for immigrants to stay
away from Canadian ways and encouraged instead, full participation in cultural/religious observances. In this way, the CRC church also offered “continuity and comfort in Canada” (J. VanderVliet, 1994, p. 29). For people who had been torn from their homeland and religious enclave, “Sunday morning was the only time when people could find familiar music, liturgy, and language” (Van Arragon Hutten, 2011, p. 55).

Sabbatarianism was a key point in Calvinism; “a day of rest” and set apart from the workweek. On Sunday, neo-Calvinists engaged in multiple church services and spent time visiting and communing with their fellow “believers.”

As an already well organized and sophisticated ecclesiastical structure in the United States, Canadian CRC congregations quickly established spaces for worship, and conducted local voting of its male membership for an administrating church council (governance) of elders and deacons. With 13 CRC churches in Canada prior to WWII, by 1949, 30 had been established, and 158 by 1970 (Fallon, 2000). With an emphasis of ideological recruitment from within, education (e.g., Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Catechism), societies (e.g., Ladies Aid, Men’s), committees (e.g., Evangelism, Building, Finance), and clubs (e.g., Calvinettes, Cadets, Young Peoples, Drama) were established to preserve an exclusive, parallel society to their Canadian neighbour; providing organizational and educational structures throughout the week that reduced the need to socialize elsewhere (Ganzevoort, 1988; Schryer, 1998; Teeuwsen, 2016).

With the establishment of church congregations, school societies were also quickly formed and by 1960, 21 independent Dutch Calvinist Christian schools had been organized in Ontario (van Dijk, 2001). The emergence of these schools was not an isolated or accidental historical event; it was consistent with neo-Calvinist beliefs and had
developed and been fought for over centuries of Dutch history. Accustomed to segregating and operating their own schools in the Netherlands, Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants rationalized that Canadian public schools, while teaching nominal religious sentiments that aligned with Christianity, did not go far enough in moral instruction. Canadian public schools failed to recognize the supremacy (Sphere of Sovereignty) of God in all aspects/knowledge of life (Ganzevoort, 1988; Teeuwsen, 2016), therefore it was critical that children be nurtured in an educational system that was parentally controlled and inclusive of learning through a Christian/biblical perspective or lens. Schools were effective in maintaining Dutch neo-Calvinists as a homogeneous group, enabling Calvinist children to grow up together and eventually marry each other—passing on and evolving a particular theology and ethnic disposition (Schryer, 1998). Arguably, now into a third generation, there continues to be a thriving distinctive religious (Calvinist) and ethnic (Dutch) propensity about CRC churches, their schools, and organizations demonstrating the achievement of maintaining a particular “faith ethnicity.”

**Patriarchy and Feminism**

Historically, patriarchy is deeply embedded in Dutch Calvinist thinking and religiosity. J. VanderVliet (1994) argues that its patriarchal language and assumptions perpetuates a perceived reality which has been mostly explained by those who have ascribed to this view: “Women are equal players in the unfolding drama, but have traditionally been afforded unequal roles. Not only have their roles been trivialized, but their experiences, as well as their perceptions, have been granted less than serious consideration” (p. 6). Schryer (1998) also asserts, “The gender dimension is difficult to fit
into a kaleidoscopic picture [Dutch immigrants to Canada] when so much of the experiential world of women remains hidden from view” (p. 200). Women, he says, are most often misrepresented as playing a secondary or supportive role with low visibility in the public sphere; remaining quiet and submissive to their husband’s or father’s representation. He claims that Dutch Canadian immigrant women, while they have contributed to the formation and maintenance of ethnic networks, are consistently portrayed as “shadowy figures in both popular and scholarly accounts” (p. 200). The male myth, of the all sacrificing Dutch immigrant woman with strong maternal instincts who preferred to stay at home with her children, was interpreted as theologically pre-ordained and morally right and natural. In this relation, both in society and in the church, women were excluded from public leadership by the order of creation set up by God from the beginning.

The church, with an exclusive male order, reinforced the authority of fathers and husbands as the spiritual and economic backbone of the family unit. As J. VanderVliet (1994) and Schryer (1998) argue, there was a pride for the man who could have a dependent wife who stayed at home and did not have a driver’s licence. A licence to drive symbolized a measure of freedom that brought into question the “house-bound roles and church extensions” (Schryer, 1998, p. 103) that were pre-ordained. Lobbezoo (2014) and VanderVliet explain that as a consenting partner, a good wife was hard working and frugal, with a role of providing the comforts and stability of a private sphere where their men could take refuge from the long hard day of working and negotiating the Canadian public space. Reciprocally, within the scrutiny of the church, the expectation was that
men demonstrate a deep and abiding commitment to provide and protect their family households.

While the church held patriarchal sway over family relations, it also provided, for women, a place for social contact and an opportunity to extend their lifelong learning (albeit, segregated from mainstream Canadian society). J. VanderVliet (1994) summarizes that women’s roles in the church were extensions of the work they performed at home and gave them a certain degree of power and autonomy: “These roles were valuable and necessary, though not authoritative in any institutional sense” (p. 54). Protected and safe, the church provided an encouraging social sphere that remained relatively intimate and “unscathed by immigration” (J. VanderVliet, 1994, p. 78) but it also lessened the opportunities for Dutch immigrant women to negotiate the Canadian landscape, thus adjustment to a public sphere was “quite a leap for most women” (J. VanderVliett, 1994, p. 78).

**Conclusion**

Negotiating Canadian citizenship, during an historical period of assimilation policies, the Dutch neo-Calvinists publicly appeared to quickly assimilate in terms of language, dress, food, and economy while at the same time, quietly/invisibly, they resisted assimilation in areas where they perceived Canadian ways were ideologically incompatible and not negotiable (van Dijk, 2001). By establishing their own social institutions (e.g., churches, schools, retirement homes, labour unions, banks) in Canada, they achieved, through group endogamy and institutional completeness, a strategy to maintain and nurture strongly held cultural/religious convictions. In particular, independent schools became a central means in achieving and sustaining an ideological
view different than Canadian educational institutions. Church education, clubs, and societies were also a counter measure against the potential contradictory education of their Canadian host.

With Canada’s shift to multicultural/integration immigration policies most post-war Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants were already well integrated into Canadian society. Schryer (1998) asserts that assimilated Dutch neo-Calvinists found the political shift contradictory and confusing… that now in contrast to becoming Canadian as soon as possible, they were supposed to preserve or portray their heritage in order to contribute to a “better Canada” (p. 286). For some, it felt like coming “out of the closet” (Schryer, 1998, p. 286); a disclosure that been worked hard to keep invisible. For pragmatic others, multicultural celebrations and festivals were a waste of time and poor distribution of economic resources—a superficial representation of the deep-seated significance cultural distinctions embodied for immigrants. Over 50 years has passed since the immigration wave and a remnant of that Dutch neo-Calvinist pillar that came to be transplanted on Canadian soil, while changed, remains as a distinction in Canadian society. Interestingly, in their negotiation of becoming Canadian, Dutch neo-Calvinists did not mirror the evolution of Dutch neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands, demonstrating that these immigrants, in moving to Canada inscribed (and are still inscribing) their own Dutch neo-Calvinist Canadian story, perhaps “moulding Canadian society in its own image” (Schryer, 1998, p. 318).

Chapter Summary

By conducting an historical analysis on schooling, immigration, and Dutch neo-Calvinist culture, the review of literature provides a theory of context (historical, political, cultural) for a sociocultural analysis of the ruling relations relevant to the
lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women who came to Canada shortly after the second World War. In particular, the review of literature demonstrates the limited research that has been conducted about Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women, particularly from a critical feminist perspective. The historical analysis resonated and connected to my own life experience. What I found most compelling in writing the review of literature was recognizing, for the first time, the fragmented perceptions I had of my Dutch neo-Calvinist heritage and how this had been woven into my interpretation of immigration and schooling in a Canadian context.

Chapter 4 is a discussion of methodology employed for the research. It begins with a brief background of the study as a context, followed by a discussion of the historical trajectory of how life history methodology has been interpreted and used. I discuss participant selection, data collection and analysis, and delineate the methodological strengths and limitations. I conclude with ethical considerations for the research study.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

This story looks backward to the past for her and her two [three] participants and forward to the puzzle of who they are becoming in their new land. She looks inward to her personal reasons for doing this study and outward to the social significance of the work. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 156)

Kilbourn (2006) points out that research problems are usually a complex interplay of one’s own thinking about an issue, one’s own experience, and one’s discernment of the research literature. The way researchers choose to proceed reflects academic predispositions; it discloses epistemic assumptions, reveals ontological orientation, and integrates methodology that is congruent with the metaphysics that drives the inquiry (Cole & Knowles 2001; Schram 2003). A researcher’s commitment to associate with a particular research approach reflects the potential that one believes can be gained from that methodology—and reflects the tools that a researcher chooses to “think with.”

In this chapter I delineate how I employed life history methodology to critically examine the experiences and memories of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women as it related to their trajectory of lifelong learning. I provide a brief introduction to the study, followed by a discussion of how life history methodology has been historically interpreted and used in previous research, and how in its current iteration, can be conceptualized as a tool for critically examining structures, operations, and contestations of power in social institutions through an exploration of the multiple contexts which shape the lives of immigrant women. I discuss participant selection, data collection and analysis, and delineate the methodological strengths and limitations. With my own connection to a Dutch neo-Calvinist background, I discuss the research positionality of being an insider-outsider in the study. I conclude with ethical considerations.
In choosing an analytical qualitative methodology to address my research questions I was committed to a holistic and historical approach (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Initiated by my education work with immigrant families, I became interested in women’s experiences of learning and recognized, as an immigrant, the parallels and tensions situated in my own lifelong learning. As I contemplated and began to write my own story, I found compelling analytic reasons to frame research around the Dutch neo-Calvinist narrative even though their immigration had occurred more than 50 years ago. Within the network of my Dutch neo-Calvinist enclave, I began to inquire about my genealogy, about motivations for leaving a homeland, about immigrating to Canada and the transition to becoming Canadian. I scoured through photographs, read a large number of Dutch memoirs (Butt, 2011; Den Hartog & Kasaboski, 2008; Eman, 1994; Fuykschot, 1988; Hillesum, 1996; Horn, 1997; Rekker, 2000; Romkema, 2004; Speerstra, 2005; Van Arragon Hutten, 2001; VanderMunnik, 2005; Wielemaker Overdijk, 2002) and examined several scholarly theses/dissertations (Breems, 1991; Fallon, 2000; Lobbezoo, 2014; Prinsen, 2000; Schalk, 2012; Teeuwen, 2016; J. VanderVliet, 1994) that have been previous research studies concerning Dutch post-war immigration.

I also travelled to the Netherlands a number of times during the research project, visiting with family, travelling the landscape, exploring old churches and cemeteries, engaging with museums related to the wartime, and imagining what these Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants must have felt and done in that post World War II historical time period. As I experienced all of these various lived encounters, I was struck by the various fragments that I was piecing together to represent my own life history and how the process of construction came from multiple places and stories. Incorporating these
encounters into the fabric of my life transformed a single, very limited story and brought
a deeper awareness of what it means to be an immigrant woman.

**Qualitative Research**

Esterberg (2002) asserts that qualitative researchers pay attention to the subjective
nature of human life, not only the subjective experiences of those they are studying but
also the subjectivity of the researchers themselves. In choosing an analytical qualitative
methodology, I felt committed to an historical and genealogical approach but was unsure
of how to position myself in the research. Taber (2012) points out that the self can be
used as an entry point into research that explores experiences that lead to a sociocultural
analysis. An inquiry that starts with the researcher as knower and progresses to
participants as knowers, leading to a critical sociocultural analysis was how I had
envisioned a research project.

Cole and Knowles (2001) point out that a fundamental methodological shift has
persuaded the qualitative researcher to step away from the positivist dichotomies of self-
other, subject-object, and subjectivity-objectivity to an acknowledgement of an
intersubjective realm of being and meaning that places the researcher squarely in the
research frame. “The researcher self is visible in the research text and the researcher is
every bit as vulnerable, as present, as those who participate in the research” (Cole &
Knowles, 2001, p. 14). The goal, therefore, was to allow myself as the researcher, to join
with the selves of others (participants) and co-create an intersubjective understanding of
the phenomenon being researched. West (1996) contemplates,

I came to realize that in asking of others, I was asking questions of myself; and in
the wanting to understand the conditions for effective learning in other’s lives, I
wanted to understand more about these in my own. All research crosses
boundaries between self and others, professional and personal lives. (p. 12)

Like West, I came to understand that in contemplating what I would ask others, I was simultaneously asking these questions of myself. The research, he says crosses boundaries between self and others yet in a traditional methodological sense, most often the story of the researcher is omitted, repressed or denied. To answer my research question, I found myself looking for a methodological approach that had the capacity to weave multiple narrative layers (personal, historical, political) and a dimension where I could reflect my lived (emotional) experience within and through the lifelong learning of the participants. Life history methodology aligned with the predisposition and commitment of the research study.

**Life History Methodology**

“Critique recalls what history forgets by rummaging around the ruins and putting the [debris] to use in sparking the imagination” (referring to critical theorist Walter Benjamin; Bronner, 2017, p. 28)

My life history study of the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist women in Canadian schools addressed an historical and scholarly gap. As a methodology, it provided epistemic tools to explore the relationship between the woman and her social world; where one could take into account an understanding of the subject in the context of their time. Beginning by examining the schooling experience of women who immigrated to Canada, the research broadened to include a longitudinal (lifetime of memories) inquiry into the trajectory of their lifelong learning. Using a life history approach, there was opportunity for the participants in the study to explore and reflect on
the subjectivity, complexity, and context of human behaviour, thus, give meaning and form to knowledge constructions of the past (Gouthro, 2014).

In contrast to life stories, life history methodology goes further, beyond the individual or personal, and places narrative accounts and interpretations within a broader context (e.g., cultural, political, familial, and religious spheres). In other words, life history researchers not only pay attention to the participants’ life stories but also need to have an in-depth understanding of the focal context in which participants’ lives are situated. Life history methodology is driven by a central epistemological construct illuminating the intersection of human experience and social context (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Cole and Knowles (2001) point out, “Not only do life history researchers create histories of lives, they also reference those lives to history” (p. 79). Thus the life history aims to create a different story from that of the personal life story. “In this story, the wider worlds of power and meaning are situations in which the life story is embedded” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 62). The context is a reference point, an essential backdrop that brings meaning to an individual’s life.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) explain that life history takes life stories into contextual data so that they can be “seen in the light of changing patterns of time and space” (p. 18) and thus, as a reflective interpretive device, has the potential to interrogate the meaning and significance of the past as it influences the present and the future. Samuel (2009) clarifies, “the act of telling the story is a process of recording how the teller of the tale presently sees her position in relation to the subject/topic being discussed. Stories about one’s life therefore encapsulate the past, the future and the present” (p. 3). A life history methodology speaks to the way in which the world is now,
through constructions of the past as well as through constructions of the present (Armstrong, 2003). For the researcher too, life history methodology is an act of construction that is an engagement of the present; a perturbation that, somehow frustrated, initiates a reconstruction of the past. Polkinghorne (1988) explains, “The going back into the past is not a mechanical reproduction of what has been; rather it is a fetching back of possibilities that have passed by in order to make them real again in the present” (as cited in Turvey, 2017, p. 120). Likewise, Armstrong (2003) contends, the reconstruction of the past is “not so much a fabrication of some objective reality that could be authentically reproduced, but is rather about construction of new coherence in the undertaking of ourselves” (p. 203). Life history methodology gives form to what was unformed (Järvinen, 2004) and in so doing the research is positioned to critically contemplate how an experience shapes learning processes in different ways across the lifespan (Gouthro, 2014).

**Background**

Goodson (2001, 2017) explains that life history research methodology was first represented in Thomas and Znaniecki’s (1918-1920) study about Polish peasants migrating to the United States. It was also strongly in evidence in other research studies, for example: The Gang (Thrashe, 1928); The Hobo (Anderson, 1923); The Ghetto (Wirth, 1928). In North America, much of the foundational work in life history methodology was undertaken by members of the Chicago School in the 1920s (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The outcome of that early research disrupted and questioned societal perceptions and assumptions of what was “normal” and demonstrated the tendency of other research methods to favour and support existing power structures. Distinctly, life
history methodology grounded life stories in a wider social and historical context and paid attention to social relations of power (Bathmaker, 2010).

With the rise of modernist thinking, after the 1930s, life history research became mostly abandoned by social researchers because it was seen as having serious methodological flaws (Goodson, 2001) and did not align with the positivist objective methods that became predominant in acceptable academic research. Although, today, these positivist methodological assumptions continue to have repute in academia, a radical anti-positivist shift in the last number of decades has launched new possibility for life history research. In particular, this methodology has conceptualized new forms of engagement with the past and, allowed “new ways of understanding the present and framing action for the future” (Armstrong, 2003, p. 203). Like its earlier predecessor, life history research gives voice to the experienced life, making room for marginalized voices that might have been otherwise overlooked or dismissed. Feminist researchers have been particularly drawn to the approach, interpreting it as a methodology that can be used to “give expression to, and celebration of, hidden or silenced lives” (Goodson & Sikes, 2017, p. 10).

Germeten (2013) and Kincheloe and McLaren (2008) assert that life history research has been embraced by postmodern, poststructural, and critical theoretical perspectives. My interest in life history methodology began largely with Foucault’s genealogical texts Discipline and Punish (1995) and History of Sexuality (1978). In his work, Foucault demonstrates that tracing out an historical ontology, is a method that brings to light how a society, in a given era, frames and materializes its knowledge as a form of power. Armstrong (2003) points out that Foucault looks at ways in which
knowledge is made and remade as a cultural practice of regulation through which order is imposed within societies. What constitutes knowledge in any particular situation is seen as relative to the cultural standpoint of those who employ the concept. Foucault clarifies, “power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). For Foucault, power is present and circulates through the network of social relations: power relations are universal, and present in all kinds of social interaction; power is always already there and that no one is ever outside of it. This, he argues must be recognized if social relationships and social phenomena are to be fully understood. Likewise, Habermas (1986) concurs, “If power relations are immanent in every social interaction and determine the possibilities of transformation, then we will not be able to give an adequate explanation of such transformations without an explanation of power relations at work therein” (p. 68). The interconnections of power delineate general conditions of domination such that no relations of power are without possible human resistances.

In his methodological perspective, Foucault discloses a disruption that demonstrates how historical analysis is not the “temporal unfolding of historical events” (Armstrong, 2003, p. 207) but rather a delineation of those practices through which knowledge is made and remade. Tong (2014) claims that Foucault’s view of the subject is not as knowing, willing, autonomous, and self-critical (a Kantian view), rather that the individual person is a product of a variety of power relations which are interwoven with relations of production, kinship, family, and sexuality. In a contemporary research landscape, Faubion (1994) considers how Foucault’s genealogical methodology is an
empirical tool to study how the human subject, placed in complex institutional ruling relations, are regulated by the knowledge constructs inscribed in those relations. Within the framework of social institutions, power constructs invisibly conceal mechanisms by which subjects are disciplined, construct their social relationships, and limit their possibilities for particular thoughts and actions (Halse, 2010). Foucault maintains that to understand how power works, one must examine the knowledge, self-understanding and struggles of those whom powerful groups in society have identified as the “other”; a disruptive force to expose how power is distributed and materialized. Foucault (1978) summarizes, the intent of the research is not to provide a reforming discourse, rather in historically describing, the discourse is positioned so that resistance is possible and what can be known is an outcome of that resistance.

Choosing to inquire about the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women begins with a distinction for real people (Smith, 2005) whose relationship to schooling can be critically explicated by the researcher through a dialectic method. The tension created by cultural, political, and historical difference, raises consciousness of ruling relations (Smith, 2005) that are otherwise mostly invisible or taken for granted. The tensions/resistance that arise in the intersection of immigrants and Canadian institutions (e.g., school) are, in part, an outcome of cultural, political, and historical difference. Armstrong (2003) points out, “Through the careful examination and in the telling, we can discover that specific moments in individual lives inform us about both resistance and points of resistance” (p. 215). The life history researcher is concerned with unpacking the “social spaces of dissent” (Armstrong, 2003, p. 217) that have been created by those who resist what is imposed on them through acts of power. The dialectical
nature of a critical perspective assumes that problems of society are more than simply isolated events of individuals or deficiencies in the social structure—instead, using a dialectical method, the researcher is able to search out, capture, and examine the interactive context between the individual and society (McLaren, 2015). Foucault points out that humans are placed in power relations that are very complex and by examining forms of resistance against these power constructs, resistance becomes a catalyst to bring power relations to light (Faubion, 1994). Empirically, rather than analyzing power from a view of rationality, one is able to analyze power relations through “the antagonism of strategies” (p. 329). In other words, the focus on individual stories and subjectivities in life history research challenges the homogeneity of experience and resistance and in so doing raises those structures of power that evoke the construct of “otherness” and in particular its affective perception of deficiency.

In contrast to a public (official) discourse, Smith (2012) points out that life history methodology advocates for individuals’ meanings and beliefs to be explored to provide insight into actual lived experiences which are often obscured; where the real production of life appears as non-historical, while the historical appears as something separated from ordinary life. As Griffin (1992) conveys, “It was as if they had been placed outside the stream of history. History was being told, and they were not in it” (p. 257). A good life history disrupts traditional assumptions about what is known or considered to be the “truth” and challenges the “fetishism about certainty and objectivity of knowledge” (Dhunpath, 2000, pp. 543-544). As an example, in thinking about lived experience in schooling, Dhunpath contemplates that it is not surprising as an ahistorical assumption, there is limited knowledge about the actual lives of students in school. Since the relations
of power lie elsewhere in the social order, these non-historical voices are mostly ignored by traditional history and research methodology. A life history approach serves as a framework from which the researcher is able to examine subjectivity, complexity, and the context of human behaviour to understand how learning is bound up with the tensions of identity and power (Bathmaker, 2010; Turvey, 2017).

In my research, the goal, aligning with a life history approach, was to construct an in-depth profile and timeline of the participant’s remembered life experiences relative to the research problem being investigated. While remembering involves a re-interpretation of the past in the present, it is not a passive process or a mere retrieval from a memory bank but rather, is emergent, in flux, recursive, and relationally dependent on present perspective in which it is retrieved. To begin, Griffin (1992) asserts that a memory over the years “takes on an air of unreality, hidden as it is in a private unacknowledged world” (p. 47). The experience of remembering is as West (1996) describes a process of “gently, excitedly, experimentally, and sometimes painfully joining fragments together, within and across lives” (p. 32). The remembering subject actively and personally creates the meaning of the past as they engage in answering questions, showing photos, explaining the significance of memorabilia, and reflecting on what it has meant in the present.

In life history methodology participants are encouraged to share, holistically, their entire life histories without limiting the stories to specific events or environments and to interrogate the meaning and significance of the past as it influences the present and the future. While a life history approach is holistic, at the same time it has a capacity to pay attention to particular issues or life experiences. In this way, life histories can be purposefully bounded by the research questions underpinning the study and thus do not
attempt to document the entire life of an individual. Samuel (2009) explains that the life history researcher chooses to demarcate the realm of what is to be investigated, what realm of one’s life is being researched. The participant provides the ingredients for understanding more in-depth and in interconnected ways how the researcher’s specified domain/issue is reinforced, subverted, challenged in relation to other realms of the person’s lives (Samuel, 2009). What emerged in employing a life history approach was a relating of the complexity of the human condition, a representation of the fullness of life against the backdrop of an underlying critical feminist framework.

**Site and Participant Selection**

Three purposively selected (Esterberg, 2002) participants—Johanna, Cate, and Kali (pseudonyms)—were recruited for the study. As immigrant children, they arrived with their families in Canada from the Netherlands during the 1950s and identified religiously and culturally as neo-Calvinist. They attended Canadian schools. Sample sizes are typically small (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Labaree, 2006) in a life history research because each participant’s engagement requires intense and lengthy gathering, recording, transcribing, and interpreting of data. Goodson and Sikes explain that life history research relies on participants who are prepared and able to commit to both time and articulacy, as well as bring appropriate knowledge and experience to the research study.

The study was conducted according to the requirements for conducting ethical research with human participants as established by the Brock University Research Ethics Review Board. After receiving ethical clearance (File #17-116-TABER; Appendix A) from the Research Ethics Board to conduct my investigation, participants were recruited
through a snowball method, from the various Dutch Canadian Christian Reformed Church (CRC) communities in Ontario. While there are many degrees of overlap in these various communities, each participant came from different geographical CRC groups representing urban, suburban, and rural settings. Aligned with my own cultural background, as recommended by Smith (2012), I included a mix of intimately familiar and unfamiliar informants. Two participants were women I had known through my own Dutch Calvinist networks but were not familiar with each other. A third participant, although still connected to my own network was someone unfamiliar to me until the recruitment of the study. The mix of familiar and unfamiliar provided not only a contrast but also the potential for a deeper and expanded view of lived experience.

I recruited participants through word of mouth and emails which circulated through known members of the CRC. The email/letter outlined the purpose of the study, the criteria for participation, what was involved in participation, and contact information. Once the participants were recruited and indicated an interest in the study, a letter of invitation to participate was sent to them. If a participant indicated that they would participate, she was asked to sign an informed consent form. Participants were informed that the information collected would remain confidential and accessible only to the principal student investigator and her faculty advisor. Personal identifiers were changed and no real names throughout the text were used. Pseudonyms, known only to the principal student investigator and the participant, were assigned to protect the anonymity of the participant and the people in their life stories. Once the participants consented to participate, a meeting date, place, and time were determined by the participant. For two of the participants, the interviews were conducted in their homes. The third participant
choose to meet at her place of work. A series of four in-depth semi-structured interviews (2 to 4 hours each) were conducted with each participant over a 1-year period.

**Data Collection**

Goodson and Sikes (2001, 2017) point out that a defining characteristic of life history methodology is that there is not one “proper” or mechanical way of doing life history research. “Different projects will have their own features and requirements and each researcher is likely to have their own personal style and unique emotional engagement with any particular project” (Goodson, 2001, p. 19). One crucial attribute is that the life history researcher must be able to listen attentively and to think beyond what is actually being said. It requires the researcher to be the “sort of person that people want to talk to” (Goodson, 2001, p. 20). Cole and Knowles (2001) furthers this by conveying,

All of the enabling and relational conditions established during the early phases of information gathering are but preliminary to being able to “listen” with both head and heart to the information accumulated about the lives lived. We try to feel the depth of emotions yet step back, just a little. …We aim to reason the actions and empathize with their consequences. We surround ourselves with the lives of these individuals. We try to imagine their experiences. We try to walk in their shoes. We work rationally as well as intuitively. We try to relive elements of the life or lives told to us. As much as is humanly possible we try to embody their experiences—a notion that is often highly enervating in its realization. (pp. 101-102)

As such, a life history researcher must be able to relate (step into) to their participants’ lives and to formulate and ask pertinent questions in such a way as to lead to quality data.
Since the point of consent to participate for the three participants happened somewhat simultaneously, I conducted the first interview with each of them, before moving on to the second interview and so forth. I collected the primary data through the descriptive text of the four in-depth interviews conducted with the participants and also used personal artifacts such as journals, photographs, cultural memorabilia, and historical records as secondary sources to connect with the participants’ experience. All of the secondary data were retained by the participants and were only used as a discussion point, or as a way to draw out memories in the interviews and were thus represented in the text of the interviews. The importance of the secondary data became evident in building a deeper relationship between the researcher and the participant as we both hovered over the material and discussed their meaning for the participant. Having been collected and saved over the trajectory of a life span, it was apparent that there was significant emotional investment in these artifacts. While secondary data were used in all of the interviews, it was more significant for two of the participants because the interviews were conducted in their homes where the artifacts were more accessible and could be discovered or remembered through the direction of the dialogue.

Interviewing is an interpretive act where meaning arises out of social interaction and includes not only words but the tone of voice, emotions, silences, gestures, and body language (Boler, 1999; Easterberg, 2002; Kathard, 2009). The potential for meaning is created within the flow of the interview as opposed to the positivist assumption that the interview holds a store of knowledge. Goodson and Sikes (2017) assert that in life history methodology, the prime focus of the interview should be to encourage the flow of recall and reminiscence. The researcher must be sensitive to how information surfaces and
aware of how pre-determined questions might hamper and interfere with a genuine flow of memories and recollections. Hamdan (2009) found being an insider also made her aware during interviews of how and when to ask questions, when to interrupt and clarify, and how to interpret the answers provided by the research participants. When I listened to the recorded interviews, I was struck by the ebb and flow of conversation and, in particular, how each interview demonstrated an increasing depth and intimacy of data. As I listened I remembered and was emotionally aware of the participants’ inflections, emphasis, unfinished sentences, and pauses. These emotions held nuanced meaning that enhanced the text and were noted in the field notes or directly in the transcripts. For example, when an emphasis was placed on a word or a phrase, they were capitalized, when there were tears or laughter, they were identified with square brackets.

My experience and subjectivities of being born into a Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant family influenced my relationship to the research and with the participants, however my intention was to tailor my positionality to focus on constructing and posing deep relevant questions and to maintain neutrality (listener) so that the participant felt free to articulate their own unique life experiences. As I listened to the audio recording of the interviews, I could feel and remember the discomfort I felt with pauses and silences in the conversation, and found myself quick to fill it with my own reminisce, as if filling in the silence with what I thought the participant might say or making a connection to my own experiences. Aware of this, I worked hard in subsequent interviews to wait in the pauses, allowing the participant to be reflective, to negotiate the weight of sharing, and to allow them to determine their own narrative, thus constructing limits around my own voice. As an insider, I found this challenging because their story evoked so many of my
own memories. As a negotiation of balance, I was aware that while my own reflections and thinking were important to the conversation, they should not subjugate or appropriate the participant’s narrative. Smith (2012) asserts that participants must be given considerable freedom to tell their story in their own terms and identify for themselves what was significant and life history must be grounded on an acceptance of the validity of the participants’ experiences and truths. The interviews in life history research are a space for participants to construct and share their own subjectivities and lived realities as opposed to being restricted by official “public validation frameworks” (Kathard, 2009, p. 25) or the researcher’s inside perceptions and experiences.

The interviews, as recommended by Goodson and Sikes (2017), were guided by semi-structured questions (Appendix B) that were given to the participants upon invitation to participate in the research study and were then randomly and recursively used in all four interviews. Specifically, in the first interview, participants were invited to construct a time-line of key events in their life including a discussion of place of birth, family background, parents’ occupation/interests, immigration and childhood experiences, education, and personal occupation/interests. This initial interview set a foundational framework for developing a trusting communicative relationship and purpose that could be furthered and extended in the successive interviews. The intent of each successive interview was to recursively delve deeper into the particular issues raised in interviews (Gouthro, 2014) with questions that were relevant to the ongoing construction of the informant’s life history. The ongoing expansion and sophistication of the initial timeline became a summarizing exercise from which to begin the next session and while new questions always arose in each interviews, the data collected from them were connected back to the original guiding questions. Throughout the data collection
process, the interviews were an opportunity for informants to explore the significance of formal, informal, and non-formal learning experiences and in the framework of lifelong learning to reflect on a “broader fabric of their life” (Gouthro, 2014, p. 98).

The interviews were audio recorded and personally transcribed. Tilley and Powick (2002) assert that transcripts, although twice removed from the original interview, are also an interpretive act and not merely a mechanical chore. They argue that it is a positivist assumption to view transcription as simply a matter of transferring authoritative texts that hold certain truths and it is also a positivist assumption to believe that the person transcribing the texts maintains an objective stance. In transcribing, the interviews myself, I had the opportunity to listen and put words on paper thus extended the interview process and developed a stronger link to the analysis. The transcription process provided further and prolonged engagement in the data and also secured access of the data. As an integral element of the interactive relationship of researcher and participants, I compiled extensive field notes throughout the study period. This strategy enabled me to manage and organize the various facets of the research project and to articulate a personal representation of events, thoughts, and reflections centering on the interview experience, the review of literature, and ongoing data analysis. By keeping field notes I had the opportunity to be reflexive of my own positioning as an insider and how this might be contrasted and analyzed by a critical feminist lens. In other words, the field notes offered a space to contemplate and articulate my own thinking—an integration of my own memories related to negotiating a Dutch neo-Calvinist culture in a Canadian context.

Following each interview, the transcripts and summaries were mailed or emailed to the participants. Each time I found this moment somewhat anxiety provoking, as if I were the gatekeeper of personal and confidential information which I was releasing as a
representation of that private encounter. With the transcripts and summaries, participants received a feedback letter thanking them for their participation and asking them to review the transcript of the interview and any additional notes and/or summaries. The participants were informed that they could check what they had said and verify that the text accurately reflected the interview. Participants were invited to comment on, rephrase, delete, and/or correct any data pertaining to their interview. All of the participants demonstrated they were committed to reviewing the transcripts and provided corrections, clarified data, and added relevant details and understanding. Often, the revisions and corrections were a starting point to the subsequent interview. Throughout the study, the participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any time without penalty and that there were no institutional obligations, expectations, rewards, or risks associated with the research project. Upon conclusion of the interviews, the participants were invited to review and edit a representation of their life history story and at the completion of the research study, participants were sent a thank you letter with a summary of the main findings from the study.

**Data Analysis**

Esterberg (2002) asserts that in qualitative research, data analysis is a process of making meaning—a creative analytic process to actively generate meaning out of the data collected. The analytical process achieves a collective coherence and an interpretation of the data. Cole and Knowles (2001) point out in life history research, the analysis represents both the researcher’s interpretation of the research participants’ lives, and the researcher’s theorizing about those lives in relation to broader contextual situations and issues. Data analysis begins and is simultaneous with the process of data collection. For example, Cole and Knowles assert that analysis begins with the first insights which
usually occur in the conversation of the first interview with a second wave of analysis occurring in transcription and reflection of the conversation record. The second interview takes the initial analysis and reflection of the first interview and incorporates an emerging process to further the data in the successive interviews. Following up with each interview gives both the interviewer and the interviewee time to reflect on the meaning constructed in the previous interview and allows the researcher to ask questions that arose out of the analysis of the data. In this way, the analytic process remains connected, scaffolded, and iterative.

The analysis of the data began during and after the initial interview. The collected data, once transcribed, were moved first within the organizing framework of a *timeline*, and then as details to the *guiding questions*. Relevant field notes were also constructed and analyzed through this process. Both the transcript and a summarizing timeline were sent to the participants after each interview. Data were also moved from each interview into the framework of the guiding questions and this was sent to the participants for review before the final interview. Once the data were collected and organized, a life history narrative was tentatively constructed for each participant.

As I negotiated and analysed the large volume of data, I extrapolated themes that were derived from the overall discussions and data collected in the interviews. These themes (e.g., educated, helpmate, caring) were generated by a recursive process, that emerged and were built on throughout all of the interview process. Negotiating a large volume of collected data, the analytical process became emergent, not only for each participant, but also as an intersubjective dimension of the holistic process. In other words, I was concerned with how the data, drawn from each participant, was connected and congruent (or incongruent) to the narrative of the other participants and how this
data, in turn, represented a particular cultural, political, and historical context. Plummer’s (1983) description cited in Cole and Knowles (2001) I think resonates with the inductive, generative, and uncertain nature of life history data analysis:

In many ways this is the truly creative part of the work. It entails brooding and reflecting upon mounds of data for long periods of time until it “makes sense” and “feels right,” and key ideas and themes flow from it. It is also the hardest process to describe: the standard technique is to read and make notes, leave and ponder, reread without notes, make new notes, match notes up, ponder, reread, and so on. (p. 99)

As I sorted, classified and coded to take the data’s raw form through an analysis process (Cole & Knowles, 2001), various tensions related to the research questions became evident. Some tensions were unique to the participants, other tensions demonstrated the connection between the participants, and some tensions reflected the particular social context of the life history itself. For example, all three participants discussed gendered conception of caring and how this attribute became demonstrated in their lifelong learning both in the private and public spheres. In conducting data analysis, I was also simultaneously and recursively thinking about the literature and my own personal experience to help sort out the meaning of the data. Cole and Knowles (2001) explain that since the research becomes enmeshed in a life, our thoughts and feelings about the information gathered comprise an important element of our ongoing analysis. They explain, “We do not see this as a process of mythical or mystical proportions…, nor do we see it as one with a rigidly defined structure” (p. 101). Instead it is a matter of perspective, using the tools at hand, trying to make meaning from it, and trying to envision the life lived.

With all of this in mind, I wrote and rewrote the life histories of each participant a
number of times. Once written, the next stage of analysis, while already considered and connected to the previous stage of writing individual life histories, was articulated through a cross case analysis and analytically critiqued in relation to the theoretical perspectives and questions that framed the research. A critical feminist lens focussed the cross case analysis as a sociocultural critique in relation to the lifelong learning illuminated in the life histories of the women whose lived experiences were narrated. Four sites of learning (the family home, the church, the school, the workplace/volunteer place) were identified in the women’s life histories. With this discussion as a background, a dialectic method delineated and made visible various cross cutting tensions/ruling relations that arose within the sites of learning. Seven tensions (Pillarization and a Canadian Context; Thesis and Antithesis; Temptation and Curiosity; The CRC Homeplace and the Canadian Public; Consent and Coercion; Isolation and Citizenship; Loss and Transformation) were extrapolated and examined as a sociocultural critique relevant to a Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women’s trajectory of lifelong learning.

**Methodological Parameters: Strengths and Limitations**

The outcome of the qualitative study was limited and it cannot be assumed that all points of resistance or tension relevant to a sociocultural critique were raised in the life stories that were collected. While the research is set in a particular social and cultural milieu (post-war immigrant women), the inquiry itself is relational to a current time and context. As a strength, Goodson and Sikes (2001) point out that individual stories taken from the same set of socio-structural relations have the potential to support each other and make up, altogether, a strong body of evidence that bears new meaning and insight to a personal and social intersection. The evidence drawn from in-depth interviews, for the construction of individual life histories, form a social/cultural history of immigrant
women whose lives are uniquely connected by society, history, and culture (Dutch neo-Calvinist post World War II immigrants) and thus together have the potential to disrupt the hegemonic socio-structural relations negotiated in their experiences of schooling and lifelong learning.

Esterberg (2002) asserts that qualitative researchers pay attention to the subjective nature of human life, not only the subjective experiences of those they are studying but also the subjectivity of the researchers themselves. As researchers try to understand the meaning of social events for those who are involved in them, they also try to understand the researcher’s own perspective. I describe my position in the research as both an insider and an outsider. Being born and raised in a Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant enclave, I am an insider and have negotiated many of the same cultural experiences and assumptions as the participants, thus I have access to subjective attributes such as: familiarity with the organizational setting and its members; shared common social and cultural experiences; understanding how to interpret cultural practices; and deeper reflexivity (Labaree, 2006), which strengthen the research. I was surprised that the stories the women told evoked strong emotions for me and were always present, needling, guiding, and interrogating as I worked through the various stages of the research. As I conducted the literature review, the interviews, and the data analysis I was transported back to my own past. The life stories became moving pictures—I was embedded in them, a subjective character, a witness (Boler, 1999) with the responsibility to make sense of what was happening in the story. At times the evocative seemed to supersede the analytical which I needed to negotiate to ascertain how my emotions fit into the research. Taber (2018) and Williams and Jauhari (2016) assert that separating evocative and analytical methods into a binary is fundamentally a patriarchal assumption and combining evocative and analytical methods
can be a strength where “analysis and emotion support and build on each other” and where the reader has an “affective connection to the content” (Taber, 2018, p. 9).

I believe as a researcher, the strengths of being an insider gave me access to work with the participants in a way that would otherwise be impossible; an interaction deeply rooted in shared experience and understanding, and a desire to make sense of and articulate a life of learning as an immigrant in a host country. Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue, participants may be more open with an insider researcher and they may also “be more willing to share their experiences because there is an assumption of understanding and an assumption of shared distinctiveness” (p. 58). As a limitation however, I was aware that my intimate knowledge of events, people, and situations raises questions of bias and a “particular” point of reference. Schryer (1998) argues, that the advantage of having an insider’s knowledge of the social phenomenon under investigation, may make it more likely to be reproduced instead of discovering “the relationships and connections that remain hidden within the wealth of appearances and actions of everyday life” (p. 306). Corbin Dwyer and Buckle concur saying,

It is possible that the participant will make assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experience fully. It is possible that the researcher’s perceptions might be clouded by his or her personal experience and that as a member of the group he or she will have difficulty separating it from that of the participants. This might result in an interview that is shaped and guided by the core aspects of the researcher’s experience and not the participant’s. (p. 58)

One strategy to mitigate this concern was to include both familiar and unfamiliar participants, anticipating that, not being familiar with my life story, the participant might
contribute new and surprising elements that would shift the particular point of reference I was bringing as an insider.

A second strategy to mitigate “insider” concerns was related to my “outsider” or critical feminist research position. Reflexively, a critical feminist theoretical perspective is counter cultural to my insider patriarchal reality/traditions. Hamdan’s (2009) description so eloquently fits my own experience. “Reflexivity is especially an act of rebellion for me because I was brought up to believe that a ‘well behaved’ woman should neither disturb nor critique her cultural traditions” (p. 398). By raising the contradictory assumptions of my “outsider” position, in contrast to my insider position I raise tensions necessary for a sociocultural critique. Like Taber (2012), in her discussion about feminist anti-militarism, I question, as an outsider, whether I am a critical feminist or if I use critical feminist theories to conduct a research about the lifelong learning of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women. As Hamdan points out, choosing to conduct research as an insider-outsider is not without discomfort or anxiety; it is a necessity. Interpreting with two sides of the same coin so to speak, I never felt entirely at ease, always cognizant of my power and position to ultimately narrate and represent the stories of women who were like me, who trusted me to validate their life experience.

**Establishing Credibility**

Like other qualitative methods, life history research relies on criteria other than positivist interpretations of validity, reliability, and generalizability. Life histories do not present neat, chronological accounts and the relationship between what participants say and “reality” or “truth” is not straightforward but only a partial and selective commentary on lived experience (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Memory is a subjective form of evidence
that cannot be fully verified externally, but is dependent on the subject’s authority (Smith & Watson, 2010). They assert,

If we approach such self-referential writing as an intersubjective process that occurs within a dialogic exchange between writer and reader/viewer rather than as a story to be proved or falsified, the emphasis of reading shifts from assessing and verifying knowledge to observing processes of communicative exchange and understanding. (pp. 16-17)

Since life history work is so often collaborative, with researcher and participant seeking meanings and explanations together, it is a relatively a “permeable method” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 108) with procedural transparency and respondent verification built into the research design. For example, the participants were provided various documents that described and reminded them of the purpose and methods of the research study throughout the research period. In a recursive process, they reviewed the transcripts and summaries and corrected, clarified, and expanded the collected data. They shared various photographs and memorabilia to further verify the data collected through interviews and were an integral contributor for the co-construction their own life history.

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) define verification as the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain. They explain that in qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring coherence of the study. Morse et al. assert that these mechanisms are woven into every step of the inquiry:

In other words, qualitative research is iterative rather than linear, so that a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation
to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data
collection, strategies, and analysis. Data are systematically checked, focus is
maintained, and the fit of the data and the conceptual work of analysis and
interpretation are monitored and confirmed constantly. (p. 17)

They add that the qualities and responsiveness of the investigator are a critical aspect of
credibility in qualitative research. It is essential that throughout the research inquiry, the
investigator remain open, use sensitivity, creativity, and insight. As the researcher I was
committed to the time spent in personally listening and engaging in the interviews, re-
listening, and transcribing the audio recorded data, as well as generating of a great
volume of notes from literature reviews and reflections. The research represents a
significant academic depth and a lengthy time commitment for a fulsome sociocultural
critique.

The participants of the research study worked throughout the inquiry process, to
contribute, review, and verify the writing of their life history narrative. Since each
interview brought forth new or scaffolded versions and connections of the participant’s
narrative, the soundness of the researcher’s interpretations rested not on an objective
truth, but instead on internal consistency, coherence, and authenticity—the extent to
which those interpretations make sense in a particular time and context.

The creative process between the life history researcher and her research subject
weaving an interconnective net to hold all the representations of fullnesses, stands
in strong contrast to the processes of traditional researchers whose goals are to
attempt to establish the veracity of certain truths. Life history research does not
aim to test out a pre-formulated hypothesis. Instead, the life history researcher is
one who encourages herself to be surprised by her data, to be thrown off track from her original thoughts, to veer into territory that she did not anticipate, to find data that is contradictory. The life history researcher aims to develop an understanding or illumination of the specific realm under scrutiny in its complexity rather than in its reductionist abstraction; she does not expect to provide an explanation of the truth regarding the realm. The interpretive and critical framework is often offered as multi-dimensional illuminations of the phenomenon being investigated. The life history researcher’s goal is to be generative of alternative ways of seeing, knowing, understanding and interpreting life experiences. To research is to look again with new eyes. (Samuel, 2009, pp. 4-5)

Gouthro (2014) points out that in good life history research, what comes out is resilience. Even though what is said is selective and partial and despite experiences of injustice, there is an underlying force of authenticity and light, as the participants are dialectically propelled by a sense of personal agency and an emphasis that “life is sweet” (p. 99) and bountiful (Behar, 1996). Regardless of challenges the stories told, the researcher and the participants negotiated a fullness, a coherence, and as Gouthro and Behar infer, an ethereal beauty that transcends the trajectory of their lifelong learning.

**Ethical Considerations**

As with other qualitative methodologies, researchers using a life history approach must develop their studies based on “good design, reflexive modes of implementation and analysis, and sound ethical principles” (Labaree, 2006, p. 123). The in-depth fullness of life history research is guided by principles of relationality, mutuality, empathy, care, sensitivity, respect, and authenticity (Cole & Knowles, 2001) and yet as Goodson and
Sikes (2001) convey, life history research can pose an “ethical minefield” (p. 15). Because life histories are highly personal interpretations (partial, selective commentary on lived experience), they raise important ethical issues, especially those concerned with protecting the privacy of anyone involved in the research project including those beyond the participants themselves; *storied* contributors located in the narratives (Gannon, 2017; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The participants themselves were not particularly concerned with anonymity but participated and contributed knowing the ethical parameters of the study and thus they understood that their identities were protected. Pseudonyms were used and geographical locations were generalized and not specific. With a commitment to maintain the integrity and authenticity of the story, removing identifiers was a challenging and often reluctant task, as geographical locations, people, events, and particular vocations all connect and contribute to the story in substantial and meaningful ways. As a researcher, maintaining the essence the story without identifying the participant sometimes felt counter-intuitive. In the research process, this had to be worked out and navigated, culminating in how the research was represented and defended.

Labaree (2006) suggests one strategy for encouraging participation and reducing vulnerability of highly personal information is to frame the research for the participants with the expectation for new meaning and knowledge to emerge. The intent of life history methodology is to expand the unidimensional and partial story by provoking a different understanding and providing another lens to interpret the complexity of the broader world (Samuel, 2009; Sparkes, 1994). The participants were aware that there were other participants contributing to the study but did not know them. They were informed that
their information would be used in a cross case sociocultural analysis employing a critical feminist lens. In the analysis, the issue of ruling relations in a social institution and the trajectory of lifelong learning ultimately moves past the participant’s personal life *per se* and pays attention to broader sociocultural issues.

Ethical considerations are not completely dealt with once a university ethics review has been completed and approved. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert, ethical matters shift and change and need to be negotiated over the entire inquiry process. My ethical commitment to conduct sound, authentic, and relational life history research was framed by Downs’s (2017) three types of ethics. First, *procedural* ethics encompasses those situations and challenges that can be anticipated and met ethically before the research begins. Second, *situational* ethics encapsulates the idea that qualitative research involving participants and researcher is a dynamic process that is shaped and re-shaped through the course of the study and thus ethics is inherent at every stage of the research. Third, *relational* ethics involves ongoing checks of the interpersonal relationship that is fostered in the in-depth interviews necessary for life history research.

In articulating the various aspects of ethics, Downs (2017) also ascribes ethical principles to navigate the complexity of ethics in life history research. Similar to Schryer (1998), she argues, it is vital that the research design does not re-inscribe participants into prevailing representations. Hendry (2007) argues, when researchers construct life histories from interviews, they also are at risk of reducing them to a series of events, categories, or themes and then reconstruct them to make a whole narrative. In doing this, the researcher ultimately imposes a particular way of thinking about the experience.
Goodson (2001) adds, moving the life story to life history offers the “researcher considerable colonizing power to locate the story” (p. 139) and thus involves negotiating issues of power. The researcher must be vigilant in ensuring that the analysis is not a mode for saying what one wants to say and not really listening to what is being said (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Hendry, 2007). Being mindful of constructing limits around my own participation was one method of focusing on what the participants had to tell. Including a participant who was unfamiliar to me provided a novel story and made me aware of aspects of a trajectory of lifelong learning that were not known to me. This also made me more aware of new ideas (e.g., Spiritual Path, Women’s Association) coming out of all the stories which led me to explore these elements as part of the data collection and life history construction.

The researcher must always be cognizant of the macro historical political context. Set in an historical and political context of post-World War II, this is particularly relevant to an inquiry about the Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women who participated in this study. Downs (2017) conveys that even though life history research is a contemporary analysis of the past, it is important to remember the underlying motion of history and its impact on a shifting philosophical landscape. Even as I think on previous research and literature of the 1980s and 1990s about the Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants, its analysis is reflective of that time period and already seems outdated today—yet entirely relevant and coherent to that time. Likewise, Gouthro (2014) points out that inherent in life history research is a risk that a deeply intense memory, revisited in the present, may bring new emotional anxiety whereby the researcher must be prepared to support the participant (e.g., providing information/access to appropriate community healthcare resources). As
Smith (2012) conveys, it cannot be assumed that participation in a life history research study will lead to clarity, self-determination, or emancipation. While participants did not express a need for mental healthcare supports, a strategy to assist the participants to find appropriate resources to negotiate any negative consequences experienced in their participation was in place. While it may not always be possible to predict the sort of harm that participants may experience as a consequence of their involvement, researchers must be consciously diligent in their responsibility to not cause harm in a participatory and intimate relationship.

Downs (2017) points out that while there may be ontological commonalities between the researcher and the participants (e.g., Dutch neo-Calvinist ethnic enclave) there might well be epistemic divergences such that the knowledge and epistemic frameworks of the researcher cannot be addressed through methodology alone. Downs asserts, “Indeed it is methodology itself that disguises here the strength and extent of the epistemological warrant on which the research proceeded” (p. 464) and as such, discloses another ethical dimension. Kathard (2009) concurs stating that epistemological concerns “are crucial because as knowledge workers we occupy potentially powerful positions in a knowledge-driven society. We [investigators] have the power to transmute private knowledge into public knowledge into public knowledge domain” (p. 34). As public knowledge it must always be open and transparent to critique and interpretation with the aim to further new understanding. Sikes (2010) argues that it must be made clear to the participants, the “nature of the gaze” (critical feminist perspective; p. 13) that is being brought to bear on a version of someone’s life. While the participants were informed that the research was framed by a critical feminist theoretical perspective, it did not mean they
understood the full scope of the researcher’s meaning. Downs (2017) points out, in critical thinking, the processes of domination and subordination are not easy to explicate and the concept of scholarly feminism is difficult to comprehend in a patriarchal enclave. In the end, Downs says, life history research can “never be other than challenging and uncomfortable and require versatility and sensitivity in its realisation” (p. 468).

A final principle for navigating the ethical terrain is for the researcher to insist on transparency around the micro-political processes of research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert, “As researchers, we need to be aware of the possibility that the landscape and the persons with whom we are engaging as participants may be shifting and changing. What once seemed settled and fixed is once again a shifting ground” (p. 175). Clandinin and Connelly also encourage the researcher to keep close, the criticisms and risks of narcissism and solipsism, saying that a “language of wakefulness” (p. 182) is necessary to keep a constant, alert awareness of simplistic plots, and unidimensional characters and to foster diversity of thinking and possibility.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the use of a life history methodology was an authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience (Dhunpath, 2000). In a critical feminist perspective, my research goal was to be generative of alternative ways of seeing, knowing, understanding, and interpreting by examining and registering the subjectivities of resistance in personal life stories in a framework of lifelong learning. In keeping with a critical perspective, a dialectic method was used to examine tensions that were raised in the research discourse. By studying the dynamic movement within the relation that was evoked in the
contradiction/resistance of thesis and antithesis, the dialectic method employed as Marx claims, an apparatus of analysis that captured the motion and materialism of history (Tucker, 1978). In choosing a distinct and intentional historical and genealogical setting, the research, was a co-creation, an interaction that was deeply rooted in shared experience...and in the vein of Marx—it was an attempt to grasp the inner history of one’s actual experience and context (Rühle, 1929/2011) and then as a critique, reflected on how it permeated the present and a future (Grace, 2013). Cole and Knowles (2001) conclude, as life history researchers, we can only go so far in unraveling the complexities of the broader social conditions and yet because our commitment is to examine these relations through “lives in context” we sense that we can more fully know and understand the diverse, complex, and unique actualities of real people who experience the intersection and negotiation of social institutions.

In Chapter 4, I have conveyed my commitment for relevant, credible, and meaningful research by justifying how life history methodology was conceptualized for critically examining ruling relations through a life history inquiry of the participants’ lifelong learning. Gouthro (2014) speaks of an “emotional labour” (p. 93) that goes into this kind of work of co-construction of a life; a critical contemplation of how one’s lived experience shapes a learning trajectory. In chapter five I represent the findings by narrating three life histories as told by the participants, Cate, Johanna, and Kali. I tell each participant’s story in reference to an inquiry into their lifelong learning. Using the timeline, I constructed from the interviews, I tell each life history thematically as an examination of the various sites of learning the participants experienced and are an interwoven and multi-dimensional representation of the participants’ lifelong learning.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE FINDINGS

“The silence of a story must be understood over time” (Griffin, 1992, p. 172).

Recruiting participants for the study was relatively easy and uncomplicated. While Kali, Cate, and Johanna (pseudonyms) were the first to consent and thus fulfilled the parameters proposed for the study, there were a number of other Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women who came forward and indicated their interest in telling their life story. De Beauvoir (2011) ponders that as women mature into old age, they return to the “mirror” (p. 670) to contemplate both their official biography and perhaps more implicitly, many silent and buried childhood and youthful memories; as she contemplates, “her unity does not come from the concrete world: it is a hidden principle, a kind of ‘strength,’ ‘virtue’ as obscure as phlogistonism26” (p. 674). This is “fire in your gut”—a pedagogy of discomfort. As Gouthro (2014) asserts, women engage in lifelong learning research often as a way of gaining control and moving their life forward in a positive and hopeful direction, even when they have struggled with significant adversity. In this light, Kali, Cate, and Johanna’s life history reflect stories of triumph alongside recollections of suffering. For these women, who had immigrated to Canada as children after World War II, the research legitimately invited them to explore the tensions of their exceptional experiences in a sociocultural context.

Meeting Kali, Johanna, and Cate

Kali, Johanna, and Cate were born in the Netherlands during the turmoil, chaos, and economic aftermath of German occupation in World War II. They were born into large neo-Calvinist families who were reliant on farming for their survival. As children,

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26 Phlogistonism—a theory that superseded Scientific Theory—postulated that phlogiston, a fire [emphasis added] like material element, contained combustible properties released during combustion.
they immigrated to Canada, dependent on their parents, and thrust alongside them into a new kind of uncertainty yet hopeful for a new beginning—a rebirth. They arrived in Canada by ship; military vessels retrofitted after the war to carry thousands of Dutch citizens to a new homeland. Each family experienced a chaotic beginning with early promises broken by Canadian farmers to support them and the disappointment of various squalid accommodations they were afforded. The families all moved to Canadian geographical areas where other Dutch neo-Calvinists settled. They were able to access and become members of the emerging Christian Reformed Church (CRC) where together the immigrant families supported one another in their transition to a new country. At the same time, they established a social enclave quite distinct and set apart from their Canadian host. As the participants tell it, this is a story of lifelong learning: a peculiar space to negotiate meaning and understanding about being an immigrant woman.

In representing the findings of my study, I tell each participant’s story in reference to an inquiry into their lifelong learning. In constructing the narratives, I was struck by the candour, humility, and hopefulness of each, and by the complex ways in which each story fit into a broader social context (political, historical, cultural). Each of the life histories bring about a certain cultural coherence while at the same time raising distinct tensions of lifelong learning. Using the timeline I constructed from the interviews, I framed each life history thematically as an examination of the various sites of learning the participants experienced in their lifespan. Perhaps from a tradition of patriarchy, what surprised me most was that before I conducted my research, I saw these women as just ordinary, everyday people and yet once our time and intention together was framed by life history methodology I understood how exceptional and significant their stories were.
Griffin (1992) conveys my experience of conducting a life history methodology from a critical feminist perspective: “Ordinary. What an astonishing array of images hide behind this word. The ordinary is of course never ordinary” (p. 120). Each story represents a lyrical, compelling, and perhaps surprising social reflection within a distinct political, cultural, and historical context that speaks of the past, in the present; “little bits and pieces of ourselves that reflect the effects and influence of culture, family, gender, and socio-economic and cultural status to understand who we are as learners” (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014, p. 7). Griffin (1992) asserts, “There are those who think a story is told only to reveal what is known in this world. But a good story also reveals the unknown” (p. 24).

**Kali**

I met Kali at a social event around the time I began working on my research study. This event included mostly people from Dutch Calvinist immigrant extraction and so as is always the case, something we call “Dutch bingo,” we had several people that we knew in common. Serendipitously, we were introduced, and fell into a captivating conversation—the kind where you forget that other people are in the room. Kali was interesting, well spoken, and different than my stereotypical image of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women. Unmarried and living in the city, her life had been focused on a significant career path that demonstrated leadership and civic responsibility in public life. For me, this was the unfamiliar, and so, shortly after the event, I sought her out to see if she might be interested in participating in my research. We met again at her place of work and did so for each of the four interviews. Sometimes there were work distractions as she was called to attend to particular issues that arose, but for the most part, we sat in
her office, in deep conversation, and worked out her life story. While often it reflected remnants of a fragmented memory, it was a story that was quite exceptional from what I knew and understood in a Dutch neo-Calvinist enclave, and yet, as she describes it, she has never felt abandoned by her Dutch familial Calvinist roots, rather she sees her life as an extension of those roots: a journey of lifelong learning.

Kali’s Story

I will say the big difference is that…we are spiritual beings. We reincarnate and we keep coming back to learn these lessons... you have your guides—in the spiritual realm. Yes, and you sit down with them and you review your past lives and what you are working on and what circumstance do you need to do next. I think, I figure… WELL why not? Of all the things we believe, you are going to tell me this is CRAZY. (#2, pp. 7-8)

Kali, the youngest in a family of seven children, immigrated to Canada as a young girl and began her formal education in a Canadian public school. As she describes it, until college, her schooling experience was mostly unexceptional; she did not achieve high grades and for the most part she felt content in her day-to-day life experiences. This was in contrast to her older brothers who were high achievers and who strove to succeed in their new host country. As Kali grew older, her trajectory of lifelong learning would be shaped by their educational example and she would be the first girl in her family to achieve a university degree. As her story unfolds, she demonstrates a certain resilience needed as a single woman in a neo-Calvinist ethnic enclave. The life history is told in eight thematic segments providing a glimpse into the various sites relevant to learning and lived experience. While Kali’s lifelong learning has shifted her away from a neo-
Calvinist worldview and religiosity, as the quotation above reflects, she continues an ongoing spiritual pursuit—committed to learning how to live out her human capacity.

**A Dutch Immigrant Family**

Kali was born in 1948 in the Netherlands in the northern province of Friesland. She was born to neo-Calvinist parents who had minimal education and whose father did not own a farm but worked as a labourer\(^\text{27}\) on his brother’s farm and also worked as a beekeeper. Kali was the seventh child in a family with both brothers and sisters.

Apparently I was colicky and I had to get somebody else’s milk. My one brother had to go get the milk…[from] the wet nurse. Apparently there were women who would give milk. Either my mom didn’t have enough or whatever but I needed more milk. (#1, p. 1)

Kali recalls a story that her father’s brother (her uncle) and his wife were not able to have children and so they asked Kali’s parents, being the seventh, if they could take her. While Kali’s parents did not consent to this, she reflects: “there were times I thought I wished they had given me to Oom (Uncle) Piebe because life would be different…you know it wasn’t always fun. I shared a bed with my sisters—a double bed with…[all] of us” (#1, p. 4).

Kali’s father was the “breadwinner” or the economic backbone of the family. In his lifetime he took on various jobs to keep the family afloat and was open to learning new skills and new ideas. Upon his retirement, he started his own business. Kali showed admiration for her father’s pursuits: “You know the older I get the more I marvel at my dad. I’ve marveled at him before because of his varied interests, but he opens up a business like [when he is retired]” (#2, p. 3).

\(^{27}\) In a rigid class system, the farm labourer who hired him/herself to local farm owners and farm renters was viewed as a lower social class (Van Arragon Hutten, 2001).
I know that my dad was always into different things. My dad taught himself to weave and macramé and he became a hand radio operator and he went to college to take—he read Edgar Casey. He took an ESP [Extra Sensory Perception] class. … My dad was into that and he was into UFOs. He believed that there were probably other worlds out there than what the church was saying. So I had a dad who was questioning… he was open minded. (#1, p. 16)

“It was certainly a bond I had with him. We would talk about those things” (#3, p. 12). In remembering her father, Kali demonstrates her closeness to him. She loved that they could garden together and that they both had a love of animals. In her mind, he was a “woman’s libber” (#1, p. 16) by sharing in the household management and insisting that the boys have equal responsibility for household chores. In quiet ways he showed his support (e.g., doing Kali’s chores) so that she would have extra time for school work. It was Kali’s father who arranged for his daughter to have driving lessons so that she could get a driving licence. Kali was struck by her father’s unselfish mission to care for his wife and family. Even though he was open to alternative ways of spiritual thinking, he was committed to the Christian Reformed church, attended regularly, and served in leadership as an elder.

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28 Edgar Casey (1877-1945): An American mystic/clairvoyant who answered on subjects as varied as healing, reincarnation, and future events while claiming to be in a trance or sleep thus given the nickname, The Sleeping Prophet.

29 An office (authority) bearer in the CRC church: The work of the elders is that of ruling in the Name of the ascended King, and as servants of the great Shepherd, caring for His flock. It is therefore also the duty of the elders to maintain the purity of the Word and sacraments, to uphold the good order of the church, carefully guarding the sacredness of the offices and faithfully exercising discipline. They should, moreover, with love and humility promote the faithful discharge of the office by their fellow-officers, having particular regard to the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word, that the church may be edified and may manifest itself as the pillar and ground of the truth. (CRC, 1976, p. 175)
Kali’s mother was the oldest in a family of five children. One of her sisters also immigrated to Ontario but Kali does not recall having a lot of contact with the family.

With minimum formal education, Kali believes that her mother had really wanted to go to school and it was always very unsettling to her that she was not able. Kali speculated that perhaps her mother was somewhat jealous of her daughter when she went on to continue her studies after high school:

My mother was more adventurous with ideas, not with life experiences. … My mother was not playful. She was bright, she was very bright and she was of course made to work in the fields at 12. She resented, she always resented that. That was clear. (#1, p. 2)

Kali remembers that her mother read and thought about things. She figured people out. “She didn’t go out much. … She liked to stay home. She liked to watch people. If they socialized it was people from the church” (#1, p. 6).

You know we were not a terribly social family and I don’t remember a lot of socializing. Even people coming over was a big deal. My mother… my mother was not comfortable with people and so she didn’t like people over. And I think that is why she loved being in Canada because there was nobody minding her business. … It was unspoken. Nobody talked about it, but no mom was not going to church. Dad ALWAYS went to church faithfully. My mother would read. She would read religious books and I think she would do that on Sunday and somebody would have to stay home with her in the morning to get the house ready and the coffee ready for when the others came home from church. (#3, p. 4)
Kali’s mother never had a driver’s licence. “She didn’t go out walking in the street either so there is no way she would have driven” (#3, p. 19).

In Canada, Kali did not observe that her parents were attached to their Dutchness. “They [parents] never talked about, ‘oh, it was so much better back home. Let’s go back home.’ NEVER ever” (#3, p. 7). Modeled by her Canadian neighbour, Kali’s mother learned to bake pies and she consistently encouraged her daughter to play with the school and neighbourhood children. Kali notes that one exception to assimilating to Canadian ways was that in their home the family always spoke Frisian.30 “You know we spoke Frisian in the home all the time—ALL the time. I thought nothing of it. Walk in that door, it’s Frisian. Walk out the door, it’s English” (#1, p. 7). Although Kali spoke Frisian to me a number of times in our interviews she reflects that her ability has faded somewhat now that her parents have both passed away.

Kali’s parents returned to Holland only once after immigrating to Canada. She makes it clear that this was initiated by her mother and interprets that her father was definitely not interested in returning to his home country even though none of his family had immigrated to Canada. Kali has also returned to her birthplace. After college, she travelled to Europe with her friend, Donna. As an adult, she also contemplated that she would study in Holland as an older brother had, but this never happened. More recently, Kali returned to Holland with some of her siblings.

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30 Frisian: a language spoken by Frisian people who live on the southern edge of the North Sea in the Netherlands and Germany; in particular, the Dutch province of Friesland. In the 1940s and 1950s the Dutch language was the official language used in school thus the Frisian language was most commonly used in the home.
The Immigrant Church

In the early 1950s, Kali’s family arrived in the port of Halifax, a Dutch Calvinist family of seven children aged 3 to 18. Having turned down a farming sponsorship in northern Ontario, the family was left to its own devices to negotiate their immigrant context. As Kali’s brother conveys in a story for the Pier 21 Museum in Halifax, the family depended on the close-knit fellowship of other Dutch Calvinist immigrants that had settled in enclaves in the various areas of Ontario. When the family got off the train in southern Ontario they were met by four CRC families who, not knowing what to do with this family of nine, divided them up and took them home. As Kali’s brother recalls, “Each of the four different families took a few of us home. We did not know where our siblings or parents were and we did not see each other again till the next Sunday in church.” In February and March there were no jobs for a farmer, no home, no money, and no social services for immigrants. Families were also very limited on the cash they were allowed to take out of Holland and bring into their new country. This money could not feed a family of nine for very long. And before there was any success, the family was hired in the spring, given a house and then abruptly terminated and thrown out of their living space.

Eventually Kali’s father was able to get a contract with a farmer in southern Ontario but that too was short lived and was terminated just before Christmas of their first year in Canada. Kali’s father was then able to secure a job in the city working at a factory. “I don’t know how he did this because the man could not speak English” (#1, p. 2). Kali’s oldest sister also found a factory job and together with her father, took the bus into the city each day. Kali recalls that in these first years, the older children all took on
various jobs (e.g., tobacco fields, factories, canning) to economically support the family. In the next year the older children continued to work to help bring the family onto its feet, the family settled into a home and the younger children, who by law were required, began to attend the local public school. The family gathered in the local CRC church community and as Kali conveys, the church became a normative aspect of their everyday life.

Kali remembers that church services were often conducted in the Dutch language. Being Frisian, and not being able to speak Dutch (Kali had not gone to school in Holland) she found herself limited in her ability to participate in these services. “I learned Dutch in the church because one service was in Dutch and so was the singing… so I learned a little bit then. … And then I liked it when my sister-in-laws [came because they] were both Dutch” (#3, p. 20). “So I tried to learn Dutch then because of them and the singing in the church” (#4, p. 15). The coffee time after church on Sunday was a strongly held tradition, whether it was at church or in people’s homes. There were traditions, rules, and routines that separated the Sunday, the church from the everyday weekday. Kali considers how her Sunday regiment seems odd today:

You know you couldn’t work on Sundays…but we could sun bathe. We couldn’t go to the beach… and then my mother would say, ‘Well write letters on Sunday.’ Well to me that was work but not to her thinking. We didn’t have to work. There was something nice about that. I didn’t mind [listening to sermons]. We could play cards on Sunday. (#3, pp. 2 & 4)

Remembering the atmosphere around Sunday, Kali recalls how the Dutch Calvinists held their traditions, mores, and devotion above their Canadian neighbours.
I also thought, we knew about family life much better that those Canadians. Look at them. They go to church and then they go to the restaurant. What is that? For Pete’s sake. Give your head a shake. And I see newer immigrants do the same thing and I say to them, ‘We did that. You are not doing anything new here. We all think that.’ So why do we come here [host country] then? We all think we are better than the people of this country that we come to. (#1, p. 6)

Speaking of a friend, someone she describes as a soulmate, she reflects today on the church’s elitist thinking, “She was raised in the United Church, but you always thought that was loosey goosey—those people” (#3, p. 24). In the eyes of the neo-Calvinist, while other Christian denominations in Canada were well meaning, they did not compare to the theological [covenental] “truth” represented in the CRC. Today, Kali’s community of friends are all found outside of the CRC church walls.

Although Kali does not have specific memories of church activities (e.g., Vacation Bible school, Calvinettes, Young People) she feels that in her family context she would have attended. She remembers Catechism classes and as a conclusion to those classes she remembers doing Profession of Faith before going to college. “I remember being a very strong believer, and you know all the things they try to drum into you they drummed into me for sure. … And how could it not? The whole family was steeped in it” (#3, p. 26). The decision to apply to and attend a Calvinist college as opposed to a secular one was just another choice that aligned with church thinking and church expectation.

31 Neo-Calvinists were Sabbatarian—Christians who strictly observed Sunday as Sabbath. Neo-Calvinists only conducted essential work on Sundays. Shopping and going to a restaurant were strictly prohibited.
32 Profession of Faith: In the 1960s, Profession of Faith was a formal public commitment to the membership of the CRC church and most often the culmination of catechism classes. Typically, it required an interview with elders of the church who asked questions related to faith and church doctrine. Profession of faith was celebrated in a church service using a formal liturgy. Privileges of membership included participation in the Sacrament of Communion and Baptism.
While Kali’s life at college continued a trajectory of her Calvinist upbringing, it also introduced her to some alternative and independent ideas. She recalls that once she graduated and settled in the city she did continue to attend the CRC church and recalls that the elders even visited her in a *huisbezoek.* At this time, living with her Black American boyfriend/partner, who she had met while attending college, she was also aware of the exceptionality of this relationship in the eyes of the church and her family. At college she had been open to experiences that were new and unknown. Living and working in the city after graduating, she continued to explore alternative spiritual ideas that were outside the assumptions/beliefs of the church.

I did go [to CRC]. I did. … I remember the elders came to see me. … But I slowly started fading away. And I got into yoga so that gave me a whole other view of other beliefs and I guess that was the start. (#3, p. 22)

Kali believes that her father’s open mindedness gave her permission to explore beyond the boundaries of her immigrant cultural and religious beliefs. While Kali no longer identifies with the CRC church or Calvinist thinking she still feels that her childhood and young adult experiences gives her an ability to comfortably attend the CRC. On what she calls a “whim” related to our discussion, while on vacation, she attended a CRC church to reacquaint herself with this community. She comments, “The minister that day was visiting and he was the president of Calvin Seminary. And he was good—I have to say he was light and breezy and got a nice message across” (#2, p. 3). While a small number of Kali’s siblings still attend the CRC church, some have moved on to other denominations and others have abandoned their church life altogether. Even though Kali is open to

33 Annually, elders (usually in pairs) of the church visited the membership in their homes. While this was meant as a benevolent act to stay connected to its membership, sometimes it was interpreted as the church checking that members were living a particular Christian lifestyle as ordained by the church.
critiquing various church assumptions and traditions, she continues to be willing to attend special events with her family and celebrates their milestones in respectful and honest ways.

**Educated**

Kali believes that her parents decided to leave Holland for opportunity and the possibility for education:

Opportunity, opportunity—education. Times were tough [in Holland] I guess. Times were tough and they said they made the decision to go and they did because my oldest brother was I think 18 and nobody was attached yet. They realized that if we don’t want to leave anybody behind, we have go now. (#1, p. 2)

The first few years were insecure with Kali’s father and older siblings working at various casual jobs to sustain the family’s economic needs. Once her father had a more reliable income, these older siblings did return to high school to complete their diploma. Even though some had been older than 13 when they arrived in Canada, all seven children completed their Grade 12 or Grade 13 high school diplomas in Canada.

Kali’s brothers attended university and achieved professional degrees including graduate studies (e.g., PhD, MD, Master’s, Law). One brother attended a Calvinist college in the United States which set a pathway for Kali who attended the same college a number of years later. Kali’s brothers all married women met within the CRC and had children. Kali’s oldest sister, worked initially in a factory when she arrived in Canada before returning to high school. “So first of all, [my oldest sister] would never put herself forward. And I think, for her, the whole experience of going back to school, being tall and older was very tough on her” (#4, p. 10). She married an immigrant Dutch Calvinist
farmer she had met through the church and worked at the bank until she had children. Kali’s second sister, finished high school and worked at the bank and at a local grocery store. As a young adult, she became involved with a man outside of her ethnic and religious boundaries. As a teenager, Kali remembers this as a sharp memory where her parents intervened to voice their disapproval. “So she dated a guy… he was a divorced Catholic. They worked together at [a grocery store] so somebody thought they should tell my dad… she did continue to see him, secretly” (#3, p. 11). Passing away at a young age, this sister did not marry. This was the family setting and context of Kali’s early life that would shape the trajectory of her own educational decisions.

Unlike her siblings, Kali began Grade 1 in school in Canada and continued through to Grade 13. Except for 3 years when she attended a Christian school established by the CRC church, she went to the local public schools in the communities where she lived and then, following in the footsteps of one of her older brothers, went to a denominational Calvinist liberal arts college in the United States. Kali recalls that his knowledge and encouragement was foundational to her decision to continue education after high school. She did not consider going to a Canadian university or college. Kali was interested in becoming a social worker and though she has never worked in this profession, her various occupations and career reflects this disposition. Kali has never married and at 70 years old, continues to work full time.

Kali acknowledges that her parents’ motivation to immigrate to Canada for education opportunity, was realized. “[Your family is well educated.] It’s true. I know. It’s true isn’t it. There are five PhDs in my family” (#3, p. 12). She remembers that school was viewed with respect and authority. Although some of Kali’s brothers
remember their motivation for going to university coming from an older brother, Kali recalls that her mother was particularly motivated to see her boys continue their education. “As soon as you got something, mom would say, ‘What’s next?’” (#4, p. 10). While Kali’s brothers all went to university, neither of her sisters did. “I went to college because of my brothers, not my parents, certainly not my mother. It was the push of my brothers, the two, that I go” (#1, p. 5). “My mom … absolutely [did not put an emphasis on educating girls]; that’s MY view of it” (#4, p. 9). Kali contemplates that her decision to attend university was counter to the contextual and cultural assumptions of her particular circumstance. To demonstrate this thinking, she reflects on her aunt’s comments to her brother, that going to work was the natural trajectory for a woman before getting married and having a family—not higher education. Thinking on this, Kali wonders about her decision.

I think of your question of, where did the encouragement for [me] to go on—in light of the fact that the other two girls didn’t? And why did I go along with that, if the boys were pushing me? I was not a good student. Lord have mercy—I was not committed. [My brother] was COMMITTED. I was not. (#4, p. 12)

In the interviews, it became apparent that at this particular juncture of her life, even though her grades were not strong, she must have been moved, with a certain trust, that she was able to make a decision to go on to college after Grade 13.

School

As we talked about her early school experiences, Kali sat quietly for a moment and then shared how her early recollections of school evoked memories of profound loss and the beginning of a lifelong learning thread that seems to have become intricately
woven throughout her life history. In a small town community, Kali recalls how at a very young age she was gripped by the experience of the death of two schoolmates:

I remember we lived in [a small town] and you know, it is a long walk to the school. [The small town] is on the highway—a little highway community on the way to [a bigger town]. I think it was when I was in Grade 1 because I think she was in Grade 2—so there was a little girl in Grade 2, she had a silver bicycle and during the school year she died. I remember that still. She was sick and I don’t remember what it was, but prior to that I had a little friend who lived across the street there in [the small town], across the highway. And he came to visit me and I didn’t want to play that particular day. And he went across the street and he was hit by a truck. It sickens me. …I have MANY deaths throughout my life. I have people say, “I can’t believe you have had that many people die,” starting then. (#4, pp. 13-14)

Shortly after this happened, Kali’s family moved away settling closer to their church community and for Kali, changing schools.

While school at this point was somewhat unremarkable, she does remember one teacher in her early years, who paid attention to her athletic ability. She describes him as someone who “saw me” (#3, p. 25). In contrast, she also remembers the attitude of another teacher who lined the class up according to each student’s achievement and how as an immigrant she felt completely “dumb” and deficient. In Grade 6, Kali’s family moved to a city and for 3 years she attended a neo-Calvinist Christian school established by immigrant parents of the CRC church:

Yes, they [parents] did make the commitment [to Christian education],
surprisingly …I shouldn’t say surprisingly, but yah, I’m the only one because the others were …because [my brother] was 3 years older than me. …I just remember that it was hard to get in and feel part of the group. And I remember I beat up a boy …I don’t know why, but he was giving me a hard time and I had to beat him up—and then everything was fine. I thought, REALLY, I have to do this at a Christian school. I didn’t have to do this in public school. (#3, p. 5)

For Grades 9 to 13, Kali attended the local public high school. At this time, she also began working part-time as a cashier in a grocery store. Although she does not recall why, she followed a general academic program as opposed to a commercial or tech stream and did not take typing, shorthand, or other business subjects. She explains that she did not excel as a student. “My grades [in high school] were not great. …I was not a go getter. I was like, let me get through—I will confess” (#2, p. 4).

I did things at the last minute all the time. I would get up really early in the morning to study, I remember that. I liked high school. I was pretty content. I was shy. I had one friend—a close [Canadian] friend …and I couldn’t go to dances so I was able to go to parties at her house sometimes. (#3, p. 21)

Kali’s memory of one teacher in high school serves as a key moment when she began to contemplate her life beyond high school. Miss Smith was referred to in more than one interview and Kali comes to the conclusion that maybe Miss Smith’s probing made her think about her future. Reflecting on her sisters’ work in a grocery store and the bank, she did not view these occupational options as at all appealing.

So it could also be a little bit that I had that [teacher] Miss Smith. [She would ask], “Why are you here? Why are you here?” Well, what the hell do I know.
Why am I here? I might have been affected by that and thought, “Well, I don’t want to work in a grocery store.” I don’t know. I worked part-time there in high school. …[Miss Smith posed this question to] everybody in the class. What are you doing here? What is your purpose here? I think, oh my gosh, I guess I’ll be a social worker. So that probably had a bearing because to be a social worker, I had to go on. I couldn’t just do that. …SO I think that was a big part of it and I choose [a Calvinist college] probably because of [my brother who had gone there] and I don’t recall applying to anything else. (#4, p. 13)

Her high school yearbook aptly reminds her that the comment about her future goals still resonate to this day:

So I wanted to be a social worker. That was my goal and then who was I? One comment [in the yearbook] was, “Being social at work.” And I thought it’s true because although I enjoy going to work, I enjoy being around other people. … I like to be with people. I guess I do, yes. (#1, p. 5)

Reflecting this, Kali conveys interests and memories about school that are most often focused on her social experiences, her relationships, and work activity as opposed to classes and their curricular content.

Kali attended a Christian Reformed college in the United States in the late 1960s, graduating with a Bachelor’s degree. She says, “It was kind of a big deal [to go to college] because very few girls in my church went on. … Fran and I were the only two that year from [my CRC church] that went on and I know I was aware of that” (#3, p. 22). She funded her education through the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and working part-time in campus food services and later, when living off campus, as a cashier
in a local grocery store. Before attending her first semester, she came to the college in the summer to upgrade her English mark/skills.

You know I wasn’t an academic. I didn’t work hard like my brothers did and [college] gave me an opportunity to go and I had to go to the summer program to bump up my English …you know we spoke Frisian in the home all the time—all the time. (#1, p. 7)

It was in that summer that Kali became aware of a program called Reach Upward (pseudonym) held at the college campus for racialized inner city children:

So the other thing I think that really impacted me, so that first summer… we had you know two people in a room, a suite. They put me with the ONLY Black girl in the program. … So there was also, at the time, a program called [Reach Upward] that was going on for 6 weeks at the campus. So I got to see that and I remember reading A Patch of Blue34 and being very… like what’s going on? Why do they hate Black people so much? So now suddenly, I never saw a Black person in my life except once on the beach, there are all these kids from the inner city and the counsellors so I just started hanging around watching. I kind of got to know the people so when I went in the fall, I applied to the program and became a counsellor during the school year on Saturdays. And then every summer I worked and became friends with Donna who is American and Black. So we were a unit all the time. Everybody knew it and we were seniors and we were the ones, you know made sure what was expected and it was a great life. It was a great life. She

34 An award winning 1965 American film based on the book Be Ready with Bells and Drums by Elizabeth Kata. The story is about the relationship and romance of a blind young White woman and a Black office worker during the Civil Rights movement.
and I went to Europe and she went to Holland with me. That was my first time back. (#1, pp. 7-8)

Kali found that immersing herself in Black culture expanded her life. “So I was introduced to Donna’s culture and yah, I got quite an education at college. Yes, it was great! …And the kids would say, “Kali’s not White, she is Canadian” (#1, p. 8). While working off campus at a grocery store, Kali met Andrew who became her boyfriend/partner for 11 years. Andrew was not from Dutch neo-Calvinist descent but from a racialized minority which in the 1960s raised some countercultural attention. Kali recalls her parent’s concern: “When I told them [parents] that I was seeing this man, they each sent me a letter expressing their concerns. …But they never said no. … I was at college” (#3, p. 14).

Kali experienced academic success and flourishing at college. “I had the good sense to know I had to do some homework. I pulled it together at college… there was a lot of motivation [to succeed]” (#3, p. 22). In a Calvinist college, her experience with a different culture expanded the borders of her ethnic enclave. In her lifetime, this knowledge would be scaffolded into new areas of exploration. Over time, Dutch ethnic relationships and beliefs would be abandoned for alternative cultural ones.

A Trajectory of Adult Learning

After completing her degree in the early 1970s, Kali returned to her family home and for her first year, worked as a youth worker in a group home.

I thought I was doing quite well. I got along with the kids. I almost burnt the place down but one of the boys saved me from that and you have to cook for them and stay overnight and I said something maybe to one of the kids, I don’t totally
remember anymore and he [owner] fired me on the spot and my dad picked me up. Then I lived at home and worked at a [department store]. (#1, p. 8)

It was not long and Kali picked up and, on her own, moved to another city in southern Ontario, renting a flat and working at a deli in the daytime and as a hostess at the local restaurant in the evening. After a short while, she moved to another city where she worked a number of short-term jobs until she was able to find work in public safety and correctional services which was related to her educational degree in social work. She worked there for 11 years. Her relationship with Andrew continued and eventually he joined her. While Kali’s parents knew that she had continued to have a relationship with Andrew, they were unaware that for a time they lived together as partners. In the late 1970s, Kali became interested in yoga. Associated with an alternative spiritual way of thinking, this too would be scrutinized in a neo-Calvinist view.

Because I was living with Andrew and we were living… in a high rise and there was a notice in the building that somebody was teaching yoga there. I went to the teacher’s training so that involved all of it. (#3, p. 23)

While she recognizes that it was a countercultural choice, Kali contemplates that her interest in yoga was not an act of resistance to the church but rather came from her own sense of freedom to explore alternative ways of spiritual thinking which she had seen modeled by her father.

When Kali was almost 30 years old, she purchased her home—the one she lives in today. “Oh thank goodness, I made that decision—like buying my house. Oh my gosh, I listened to my brother. I followed through. Hallelujah! It could have been different” (#4, p. 9). Soon after, Kali’s relationship with Andrew ended. “Well it kind of died in the
water. He kept wanting to go back home [United States] after a time… and I certainly wasn’t prepared to go” (#3, p. 14). It was also at this time that Kali became introduced to the work of the Spiritual Path35 (pseudonym). She explains that being exposed to yoga kind of opened the door to her current interest in this organization. The idea came from a massage therapist as an alternate way to address her tension and stress. As Kali asked questions she was given a name of someone who lived close by who conducted what she calls communication classes:

I started seeing her and then she did communication classes and then she introduced me to the Spiritual Path and then she invited those of us that she worked with in group to go for a weekend to experience the Spiritual Path Centre. That’s in the United States. That was my first introduction to it and then she ran workshops later. She did priestess workshops and I attended those and I did a transformational program… that was once a month. I would drive there, stay at my parents, get some food on the way home on the way back. (#1, p. 10)

In her later 30s, motivated by what she was learning, Kali took a leave of absence from her work, and moved to participate in a Spiritual Path community: “I was in a spiritual community… there was no exchange of money really. I stupidly took out my pension money and lived off that, but my room and board was paid for” (#1, p. 9).

Kali clarifies that the underlying thinking of the Spiritual Path organization has a lot of Christian undertones; “God is love and the energy that holds it all together” (#2, p.

35 The Spiritual Path (pseudonym) is an international organization that bases their work and teaching on a particular person’s writing and illumination. According to its official website, it promotes a body of practical spiritual wisdom that lays out a step-by-step learning journey into personal transformation. It is a voyage of discovery to the Real Self through the layers of defenses, denial, and fear.
For example, she describes that the idea of Jesus while still integral, is reconceptualized:

He’s big in this—the Christ consciousness but not the Jesus that was born to a virgin—but that Jesus, he didn’t die for our sins. He certainly died because of our sins… but not for all the reasons that you’re going to hell if you don’t believe. If my sister thought I didn’t believe that, my god she’d be on her knees a lot more that she is. (#1, p. 9)

Upon reflection, Kali does see that her time with the organization has had an ontological influence in how she sees the world and negotiates the various situations and contexts of her life:

Well I stand back and watch myself. The bitching and complaining about whatever and then look at what you’ve got and then how that bitching and complaining doesn’t help this at all. Instead of thinking somehow that those thoughts control me, that they are my thoughts and I can control them. And if I have difficulty controlling them, what’s that about? What’s going on in me that I need to keep focused on this particular issue? (#2, pp. 13-14)

Kali conveys that since she is audio recorded at her workplace, she is careful in how she integrates and expresses her ideological thinking. She explains that her work is framed by a certain job description and policy which she recognizes as a discretion that must come first in her work life but her spiritual knowledge shapes how she responds to people she encounters in her workplace. She says, she has learned “to wait, not step in, and to stay calmer” (#2, p. 16). Looking ahead, Kali anticipates that she will continue to be involved
in the Spiritual Path; reading, attending workshops, listening to speakers, learning and spending time with others who are likeminded.

Shortly after spending the year at the spiritual retreat centre, Kali embarked on a road trip that she says she felt compelled to take:

Now, I did drive across the United States by myself. I planned it. I don’t know why I felt compelled to do this… COMPELLED [emphasis] and I drove alone. One night I slept in my car all night because I wasn’t paying $60. It was already late. I was not paying $60 at the Holiday Inn [laughter]. Oh my god, I called my parents to say hello. I told them I loved them. I thought if anything happens to me tonight at least I told them. What a dummy! I left the windows open a crack. I had a pipe with me. Anyway, I slept in the back seat and had a pipe [for protection]… just in case. I was under a light. (#4, p. 29)

Kali expressed that travelling on her own evokes a certain amount of anxiety and discomfort for her so making this trip was a courageous feat and lifelong learning achievement.

When Kali returned home she continued working in the area of public safety and correctional services and also began continuing education through an adult learning centre. Here she upgraded her sciences with the thought that she could apply to physiotherapy school in Holland:

[I] had some thoughts about studying the human body. By then I had already been into yoga. [I] had the yoga teacher’s training under my belt, so this might have been my big thoughts of the new career. But why Holland, I don’t know why I
thought… it might be something exciting, because I did like Holland. But I mean, who was I kidding? Like I couldn’t have done that Dutch. (#4, p. 11)

Kali was now in her early 40s.

In the early 1990s, Kali transitioned to new work in correctional services focusing on young high school students in the local School Board. “I was trying to make things happen for kids and I thought we had programs that were trying to address that” (#4, p. 26). After 10 years, Kali shifted to work as a liaison between the Court system and the School Board:

So I went from being a counsellor who did home visits to the person who worked in the courts… first it was half and half, the morning in the court and then in the afternoon I had a small case load and then it became full-time at the court. And then when I left I took a package. (#2, pp. 11-12)

With restructuring in her workplace, Kali took a second package and worked at a number of different jobs unrelated to the social services. In time, she was able to return first as a temp and then was hired full time in the Crown Attorney’s office which she says she enjoyed because she was back into a workplace she knew and was dealing with people who had become an integral aspect of her workplace. In her mid 50s, she applied to be a judiciary official because she had seen this public space up close and personal: “I liked being in this world. So I applied” (#1, p. 11). Shortly after applying she was appointed. The lengthy educative process came after the appointment which included reading, training, and mentorship. Now in her 70s she continues to work and contribute to the public office (e.g., mentorship):

Yah, work takes a lot of time but I have to work so I’m grateful that I have THIS
job if I have to work. I like it and the hours are really decent and it is always challenging… but that is okay. (#3, p. 16)

Kali does not anticipate retiring in the near future and remains committed to a meaningful and purposeful trajectory of lifelong learning. As she explains, “I say it horrifies me that these people (retirees) go to Florida for months on end and do nothing. But they have happy hour and I say that is how you are spending your life—your God given life?” (#2, p. 3).

**Loss**

Kali’s life history includes a lifespan of losing significant people in her life. This too has had profound influence on her lifelong learning. Kali has experienced the death of schoolmates, siblings, friends, and parents. When Kali was a college student, her sister died of an unspecified disease. She explains that as a young adult, her sister had travelled with friends and returned with physical symptoms that gradually worsened and became debilitating. She recalls the experience of being informed of her sister’s death:

> And then I went off to school knowing that my sister was sick. And then you know how in residence you have somebody who is your floor person; an RA. This woman was dating a man in seminary. Anyway, she got the phone call. She finds me. I was sewing… I must have known she was dying because I was sewing a navy dress and I’m walking up the stairs and she comes and meets me. She just said, “Oh, Kali, your dad called. Your sister died.” So at that point I shut down and I said nothing to anybody. I remember that I continued sewing and then of course as the word gets around, my friends didn’t know what to do with me. But at that point… anyway, I took the bus home. Yah, it was tough because she had
pneumonia. That is what did it. I think she had double pneumonia, and then my
dad had visited her everyday—he wasn’t visiting because of that and then she
died which I thought was mean. (#4, p. 3)

When Kali was in her 40s, her partner, Jake, died suddenly and traumatically in her
home.

He was a smart guy but you know he had—he was native and he had an addiction
problem and that just dogged him. He couldn’t get passed it. Yes, it was hard.

That was hard. That was hard. ... [That’s a huge memory.] It is. It is. (#3, p. 15)

Shortly after, Kali’s oldest brother died. He too had unusual health issues that led to
hospitalization and eventually a lung infection that led to his death.

In the late 1990s, Kali’s parents passed away. At the time, they were living in a
Senior’s residence established and operated by the CRC. Years before, they had sold the
home they built where Kali had spent her adolescent and teen years. For the last 6 months
of his life, Kali’s father was admitted to a nursing home attached to the Senior’s complex.
While Kali admits this was a good institutional set up for her parents, she recalls, with
deep emotion, the experience of moving her father into the nursing home. “I had the
miserable task of making him move. … Oh my god, it was awful. Like it can make me
cry—just sit there and tell my dad you have to leave. Oh my GOD [evokes tears] (#4, p.
16). Kali reflects that this event was a culminating moment in the trajectory of her
parents’ relationship and life. She brings to the surface how her mother’s anxiety shaped
her father’s life and how her father accommodated the “nonsense” she wielded over him
and the family. “I think she [mother] was freaking out and he was becoming quite frail
and he did need more care. … Had she been anybody else, I think he could have stayed
longer” (#4, p. 16). In Kali’s mind, she saw her mother’s lifelong inability to manage the stress of negotiating people and the perceived responsibility that this brought upon her:

And the anxiety and not wanting to go out and lahlalahlah… fuck—you have to clean, and you have to cook and you have to clean. Oh SHOOT ME! So when he’d go and she’s uptight and he’s over there because… what did she want? NO because I’m still angry at her. I can still come up with some anger. (#4, p. 17)

Even after moving into the nursing home, her father remained dedicated to visiting his wife in their apartment. When her father passed away, Kali thought her mother would feel some relief of her anxiety and could further her own sense of autonomy in the life she had left. Instead, her mother died less than 6 months later.

So once he died, this is what I’m thinking, “Okay he’s dead now, so now you don’t have to worry about anything. Nobody is visiting you. Nobody is going to mess up your little apartment.” … That BITCH—she decided, she finally thought [her husband] is gone. He’s gone and she went… she didn’t have him to bat around. No, this wasn’t about love. It’s about, you are used to having this person here. He’s your rock and you get to do your wingy nonsense and now he’s not there. (#4, p. 17)

Kali discloses the dynamic her parents represented and modeled throughout her lifetime. In light of her mother’s limitations she was struck by the strength of her father’s will to provide stability, even on his deathbed, for his wife and family. He had been the family’s economic provider and protector, he had worked side by side with his family in the home, he had been their religious mentor, he had been there in times of sickness; supportive roles taken on as a lone parent who perceived that his wife had emotional exceptionalities
that prohibited her from an equal partnership and responsibility. Kali’s assessment of the attributes and dynamics that her parents brought into her home life shaped her gendered perceptions. While she interpreted that her mother was exceptionally intelligent, she was limited because she struggled to engage in the social world. Her father, on the other hand, was generous, open, and curious. In many ways, Kali’s lifelong learning reflects her father’s disposition but, on the other hand, she was hopeful for her mother.

In contemplation of her life and loss, Kali reflects,

And my life turned out the way it did. I assumed I would get married and have children, so don’t get me wrong. I never envisioned this to be my life. Why would I? I wasn’t raised with that. Why should I? But it didn’t happen and so you know you just forge on. You know, I know some people get very unhappy and miserable about it all, but I don’t know. I don’t know. Fortunately, thank God, I did not get miserable about it. (#3, p. 30)

As Kali expresses, marriage and children were gendered expectations that she had grown up with, a normal trajectory of one’s lifelong learning. At one point, being single, her mother, “OUT of the blue” (#3, p. 13) asked her about being “gay” (#3, p. 13). “I thought that was most progressive… I always admired her for that. … And once she said, you are too old to get married now” (#3, p. 13). In a neo-Calvinist terrain that more typically kept silent, Kali finds it progressive that her mother was able to “speak out” about her speculation (and fear) that, because she did not marry, her daughter might be homosexual. It also conveyed neo-Calvinist assumptions about what was a “normal” and religiously ordained trajectory of a woman’s life. Overall, Kali finds that all of these unexpected and profoundly sad experiences have made her more determined to explore
deeper meaning in her life, that in the trajectory of lifelong learning we have opportunity to *reincarnate* and to grapple with our next circumstances.

**A Heart Connection: Adopting a Family**

Almost 20 years ago, Kali met and informally “adopted” a daughter who had come to Canada as refugee.

So I picked her [Khadra] up somewhere along the line. [I was] working for the School Board in 2001. I was given a referral for this girl. You always get referrals. You go to the school. You check them out. I go, I meet her and there was just something about her—that spunky thing—and I thought, why is this girl in the dumbest high school in the city, pray tell? So it occurred to me that she was misplaced but in the meantime what I didn’t realize on that day, that she was 16. That day I met her, she was 16 and there is no law making her go to school, so I had no jurisdiction over her anyway. ... So in the summer, she called me. She had no place to live because she had run away from her aunt’s house. ... I took her around trying to find a place for her to live and then I don’t know my mouth opened and I said, “Well you are just going to have live with me until you find a place.” I had been used to taking people in anyway. It was kind of my thing. They’d call my house, Kali’s house for wayward women… you split up, you need a place, okay, you need a place… that’s what I did. (#1, p. 13)

Khadra stayed. Kali, recognized that this young woman, before coming to Canada, had never been to school, had never learned to read, and had a much greater capacity than the school had assigned her to.

I mean when I met her, I thought, “What is she doing here [with low functioning
kids]?” You know when you are bright eyed and bushy tailed, and you have a presence and you are like… you can’t read but you managed to cover that over.

You have to be kind of bright to do that too. (#4, p. 26).

Kali provided tutoring and Khadra was able to graduate from high school. Kali also helped her negotiate international immigration officials so that she could travel to Europe and Africa to visit/confront her parents.

Khadra married Aaden, also an immigrant to Canada. Since much of the family was located in Europe, Kali travelled to England for one of the two wedding ceremonies. As new Canadians, Khadra’s family are practicing Muslims, attend mosque, and recognize the various Muslim observances (e.g., Ramaden, Eid Mubarak). They interact and live in an area with a large Muslim and ethnic community. Khadra and her husband have had two children who call Kali, their Nana. Kali continues to be involved in their lives and negotiates how to interact in a distinct cultural enclave.

Well so I kind of know what passes muster without causing me giving up too much and causing discomfort. Um, there was a time when it was really hard for Gurvey [grandson] because the kids were constantly questioning him about me making him feel uncomfortable. But now… they are all used to seeing me. Now one of the boys will call me Nana and it’s stopped and it seems not to bother him and we can go out together and he doesn’t care who sees us. So that’s been very nice, been very nice. (#4, p. 22)

She understands that while she has learned to navigate the Muslim culture that influences her “adopted” family, she finds it a complex web that is censored by the women in the housing complex where Kali’s adopted family lives. She interprets that Khadra’s husband
is very much like her father, very much Muslim but easy going and open to Canadian ways:

He’s okay with me and for who I am but I don’t really need to worry about him. It is his wife [her daughter] who said, “I have to wear the scarf.” Khadra decided that, now that I have a child and am married and I have a child, I need to wear the scarf… I think she [daughter] feels, um, challenged I think by what the other women will say because they give her a hard time. … It wasn’t her husband. Her husband would say, “Whatever makes you comfortable.” (#4, p. 22)

Kali interprets that the censorship of women in a Muslim community is not from the men but from the women themselves. As a married woman with children Kali points out that Khadra has become re-focused on her religious and cultural conventions. Kali makes it clear that acceptance of her presence in their lives is very much a compromise on her part, that she is the one feeling the line or negotiating ethnic and religious traditions to fit into her daughter’s life.

Kali reflects that in immigration, immigrants are motivated to maintain what they know from their home culture, particular values, and religious convictions. She also perceives that there may also be initial feelings of wanting to change the host culture. Thinking on her own experience, Kali knows this was also true when the Dutch neo-Calvinists arrived in Canada. Now as a Canadian citizen and someone who has straddled and crossed a cultural border, this concerns Kali.

There are times when I feel that is what people [immigrants] want to do. Some people—certainly not all people because I think a lot of people do realize that it’s good what they get here—what they have here. … Like get the hell out of here—
go back somewhere else if that is what you want. Leave us alone. I certainly feel strongly about that because we have something here that is special. (#4, p. 20)

This is an interesting intersection of being a White Dutch Calvinist immigrant and a racialized Muslim immigrant/refugee to Canada. I asked Kali if she sees any parallels with Khadra’s family and her own immigrant experience:

Yah, probably, you know the effect of our culture and the religion because it is all wrapped up together but I think what we didn’t have that they have is the way they dress and the pressure on that. …We blend in. If we keep our mouth shut, we blend in. Our clothes are the same pretty much, right. We wear pants and skirts and shorts and you won’t see these Muslim women wearing pants, obviously no shorts. (#4, pp. 22-23)

Kali reflects that for immigrant children like her grandson, there are clear discrepancies between schools that serve the enclaves of immigrant Canadian populations and those whose primary constituents are White, middle and upper class Canadian. While she doesn’t remember this as her own experience Kali critiques the experience of her grandson and finds that institutional expectations portray significant deficiencies towards the immigrant learner. “And if that structure [the assumption that these children do not have the cognitive ability] looks upon you as, well you probably don’t know anything, and you probably don’t care and your parents probably don’t care” (#4, p. 28). Kali remarks that what she notices about schooling for immigrant children is that the public school system does not practice what it purports to do. Her grandson’s experience in an independent Muslim school for 2 years is contrasted to this current situation in a Canadian public school classroom. Kali is particularly concerned with the discernment to
accommodate classrooms, that are predominantly Muslim, with a Muslim teacher:

Last year this woman—a Muslim woman—you’d think she would want to teach these Muslim kids so that they can move on in life and have a life. No, she did not do that. She taught to the lowest denominator. … Like it doesn’t matter if you had a White teacher, because that was an issue, who gave too much homework to the kids and then her, who barely gave any homework and she was a Muslim… we talk about White teachers not caring because you are immigrant kids, but you are an immigrant woman. …Why aren’t you lifting these children up? (#4, pp. 26-27)

As someone who has been employed in the public school system, who thought she was working to make a positive difference, this experience with her adopted grandson has made Kali more critical of a Canadian schooling institution.

**A Final Reflection**

Now in her 70s, Kali contemplates how being an immigrant shaped the trajectory of her lifelong learning:

I felt like an outsider pretty much my whole life because of being an immigrant and yah, the religion I guess, it was a bit a package deal. It was different. I didn’t belong and I assumed everybody knew but that was all in my head, really. When I think about the friends I had, I didn’t feel that it came from them but we were outsiders by our immigration, our language, and our religion. (#3, p. 37)

Kali contemplates throughout the interviews that her life turned out quite different than most other Dutch Calvinist immigrant women who came to Canada and reflects that because she never married, her life was more open to possibility. “First of all I have no
children that need my time and attention and there is certainly no husband saying, ‘No, are you crazy? Or, ‘we don’t have money for that. We are not doing that.’” (#3, p. 36)

Yes, I am by myself. Nobody is telling me what to do. There are no expectations. I can, yah, just. … Sometimes I think what would it be like if I had a relationship, really—what would that be like [You have had relationships.] Well I have had and I have had people live with me pretty much all the time. (#2, p. 17)

Since purchasing her home as young adult, she has shared that private space with a diverse number of people. Currently, she has a tenant in her home who is a young student with a Dutch background. While she recognizes that in the past her home was a refuge for people who needed her help, she says she is done with that and today sharing her home is more a matter of economics and mutual need. Kali’s time is found in work that she considers purposeful and fulfilling. Through her ongoing spiritual and philosophic interest in the work of the Spiritual Path she finds opportunity to negotiate wisdom. She gardens, has cats, enjoys time with her siblings and a small group of friends. She is steadfastly committed to the welfare of her adopted family. When I asked Kali about the experience of remembering in the interviews, she says that in trying to remember how things led up to these life experiences, it almost feels like, “whose life was that anyway? But then you think about it and OH that was my life. That’s all the ways that my life fell—how it unfolded” (#4, p. 12).

**Johanna**

I recognized Johanna as someone known to me in the community of where I had spent my childhood and grew up. My parents knew her family, and we were often participating in the same church community events. Today, Johanna lives in a quaint rural
area of southern Ontario. Her home, where we met for the interviews, is nestled amid small country villages, abandoned one room school houses, and aging town halls. It is filled with a lifetime of memorabilia and well used furniture. Her walls and shelves bear family photos of both her own family and that of her second husband; a representation of their blended life together. Johanna became a participant in the research study because she had been approached by a friend who was aware of the recruitment for participants in the study and thought she would be well suited to participate. Her friend knowing the various local projects Johanna had been involved in, contemplated that her memories and engagement would align well with the scope of the research.

Over her lifetime, Johanna has told her immigrant story many times in many ways. She has saved school writing projects, is an avid scrapbooker, and collects photos, newspaper clippings, and other mementos. Her pile of scrapbooks, which in her words “are overwhelming,” continue to be an important representation and memory of her life. Johanna’s reputation and connection to the community made her a natural liaison for a local museum’s exhibit on the post war Dutch immigrant experience. “She [curator] knew me and… asked me if I was interested in helping her. Since there were so many Dutch immigrants [in this area], she would like to have a history of it” (#1, p. 5). As a heritage to the community, the organizers of the museum recognized the significant presence and contributions of this enclave of post-World War II Dutch immigrants that came to settle as farmers and labourers. For Johanna, the museum project was again an opportunity to rehearse and retell her immigration story. In the various artifacts and writing she has collected, I found that some of the stories raised in the interviews, also appeared in these
earlier versions, as if participating in this research was yet another space to reflect on the past in the present.

**Johanna’s Story**

1. Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?
   A. That I am not my own,
      but belong—
      in life and in death—
      to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.
      (The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 1)

Johanna, the only girl in a family of eight, immigrated to Canada in the mid 1950s as a young teen and transitioned from a modern post war system of schooling in the Netherlands to a one-room school house with eight grades in rural Ontario. In contrast to her educational resources in her homeland, Johanna, negotiating the English language and a different culture, felt like she was starting all over in what she interpreted as a backwards system and was relieved to finally pass her Grade 8 exams with English proficiency. By this time, she was becoming increasingly aware of her age and pending adulthood. She left high school at the conclusion of Grade 10, and a year later enrolled in a nursing program that ultimately would give her resources for a trajectory of lifelong learning related to her various circumstances and opportunities of caring and nurturing others (e.g., children, husband, parents, seniors). Much of Johanna’s lifelong learning is negotiated within the borders of her neo-Calvinist community but as she navigates internal struggles she looks outward to her Canadian neighbours and is surprised by the profound learning resources they provide. As her story unfolds, Johanna’s lifelong learning is also juxtaposed to a certainty of God’s overriding providence. Through all of the chaos, uncertainty, and loss God remains steadfast and faithful—a solidity—that
whatever happens, God has a plan that is inscribed in Johanna’s life. Told in eight thematic segments, the story begins with being uprooted from a loved homeland and in time becoming rooted again in a new citizenship: a story of loss and transformation.

**God’s Providence**

During the early years of World War II, Johanna was born in the Dutch province of Gelderland. She had older brothers and lived with her parents on her paternal grandparents’ farm. “I was born on a mixed farm and we had, you know, a horse and cows and pigs and chickens… and they were excited when I was born because I was the first girl” (#1, p. 1). Johanna’s grandfather had died before her birth and so the family had come to live on the farm to support Johanna’s widowed grandmother who had a degenerative disease. Three unmarried uncles also lived in the household making it a large family unit:

They [uncles] weren’t married yet so it was a busy, busy household and I assume my grandmother needed help. So my mom did a lot, a lot, a LOT of work there. … She had to do all the cooking and the cleaning and the feeding of the pigs, working in the fields. Like she worked pretty hard, so they probably needed help. (#3, p. 10)

Johanna’s family did not always live on the farm. She explains that her father, as the second oldest in the family, left the farm to serve in the Dutch national army. At that time, each family was required to send one son to serve and since the older brother was needed on the farm, Johanna’s father fulfilled the military obligation. After serving, Johanna’s father married and rented another local farm. It was in 1939, just prior to the war, he returned to the family farm with his wife and children.
Because she was very young, Johanna realizes that her memories of the wartime may be stories that she has heard from others, but she definitely recalls the fear and tension that was the atmosphere of that time:

It was wartime when I was born and we lived close to the German border so it was quite the experience and I remember hearing the planes flying over very low at night and sometimes we had to run out of the house and we had to go in a hiding place which was a hole in the ground… which was for the cattle feed and they made it so we could hide there and they put straw in there and blankets and pillows and what not. (#1, p. 1)

One remnant of wartime that continues to shape her thinking and actions today, is that she cannot throw food out. With the imprint of scarcity of food and hunger during the war she finds it difficult to watch others be so insensitive to the value of food. As an aspect of lifelong learning, she spoke a number of times of her interest in various food salvaging initiatives in the community. She is critical of the current lack of education in schools about food and uses her membership in the Women’s Association (pseudonym) to support programs that educate young people about food security, healthy eating, and stewardship.

Johanna has fond memories of living on the family farm in Holland. Even today when she visits, she finds this place evokes memories that are comforting and a reminder of family:

That is where I had my start in life and I have good memories because I loved roaming around the farm and so on and being in the barn—and in those days the
barn was attached to the house… so from the kitchen you walked right into the barn. (#1, p. 2)

With no electricity and running water, Johanna remembers that the toilet was beside the cow stable just outside the kitchen. “It was kind of a long hall and you looked into a deep, deep hole. I remember when I was a kid it kind of scared me… and then they had to clean it out and it went into the manure pile” (#4, p. 17). In the evening her mother would light a gas lamp and sit beneath, darning socks. On her trips back to Holland, Johanna has returned to her place of birth. The farm continues to be in the family so she has retained a cultural connection.

Immediately after the war, Johanna’s father left the family to work in the Noordoostpolder (Northeast Polder)\textsuperscript{36} to prepare the reclaimed land for farming. He hoped by doing the preparatory work he would have a chance at owning one of these farms. He stayed in a work camp and came home every other weekend.

My dad wanted to get a farm. He worked in a camp there for 2 years and he wasn’t home much and then he would come home every other weekend so when I was growing up I didn’t see a lot of my dad and he planted trees there and he dug ditches. Everything had to be done by hand in those days… so he lived in a camp which wasn’t very nice. (#1, p. 2)

When thinking about her father, Johanna remembers him as a quiet man. She frames her thoughts around her dad’s “steady” (#4, p. 18) vision of owning a farm and how he set about to make that happen.

\textsuperscript{36} The second IJsselmeer polder. With the construction of the Afsluitdijk in 1932, IJsselmeer Lake was formed and a land reclamation project begun. As the newest Dutch province, Flevoland was formed with Emmeloord as the administrative centre.
When Johanna was 7, her family moved off the farm and joined their father in the Polder. Johanna explains that the houses, which were all torn down later, were all the same, almost like cottages. “It was all modern, everything was brand spanking new” (#3, p. 65).

This was like being pioneers because there was very little there yet, and I watched so much being built, whole streets, stores, churches, canals being dug, bridges being built, it was quite an undertaking. Then the farms came, land was divided and farm homes and barns were built, and my father, wanted to get one of those farms. (Johanna’s journal)

Unlike the family farm, this house had electricity and running water and a flush toilet. “Oh we had flush toilet. Oh, we were MODERN” (#4, p. 17). Moving to a newly conceived and constructed community with new modern technologies was a space for learning where Johanna experienced and negotiated the distinctions of the life she had on a traditional family farm. This would again be in contrast to her first experiences in Canada. Reflecting, she explains, “We only had cold water—no hot water [laughter]. No, a shower is still a luxury to me. Like I’ve been used to it for years and years now but I will never take it for granted” (#4, p. 16). In these everyday experiences, Johanna demonstrates her trajectory of learning through the various transitions she makes in a lifetime.

The distribution of land in the Polders was controlled by the government and each spring notices would come out notifying the “lucky ones.” Johanna’s parents hoped they would be on the list, but in 1953, the southern part of Holland experienced a devastating flood. Many of those farmers were also looking for farmland in the Polders. Johanna
explains that by 1955, her parents had accepted that they would most likely never get a farm in Holland. To reconcile their circumstances, Johanna perceives that it was God’s will for their family to search for a new destiny.

But we know that God orchestrates our life and directed us to this big beautiful country, Canada. So the big decision was made, now to start the preparations. We were not the only family who was planning to go to Canada, the government again very much encouraged it in prepared films and stories about the good life that would be waiting across the ocean, full of promise and opportunity. Then they were told to take English lessons, which was hard for my parents. I remember also we had to be immunized for small pox which made us all feel awful for a while. I’m sure there must have been a lot of paperwork and organizing which at the time I never thought about. (Johanna’s journal)

At this time, her parents, already in their 40s, made the decision to leave their homeland and go to Canada. Johanna’s mother already had a sister and a brother that had gone in the late 40s and early 50s. “So, we were in contact with them by letter. We didn’t have phones. It was all done by letters” (#2, p. 14). In the spring, Johanna’s family made their way to Rotterdam to embark on a ship destined for Canada. In Canada, her father’s goal of owning a farm would be achieved and the original farm, now expanded, continues to be successfully operated by some of Johanna’s brothers and their families.

**Immigration: The Journey**

Sailing out of Rotterdam, Johanna remembers the “send-off.” A bus was rented so that about 50 relatives and friends could accompany them to the dock in Rotterdam. She showed me a photograph of the group standing together before their family went on
board the ship. Johanna comments that everybody looked so sad: “You think it looked like a funeral procession” (#1, p. 4).

It must have been 50 of them. That was quite neat and then I still remember going onto the boat… walking into the boat and I was excited, and nervous, and sad, and scared, you know like… mixed emotions. The boat takes off and you stand there waving and waving and waving and waving until you can’t see the shore no more and everyone was waving until you couldn’t see the boat no more. (#1, p. 6)

As a young teen, Johanna recalls making friends on the ship. She also remembers the stormy weather, the sea sickness, and an ongoing sensation of uncertainty.

Arriving in Quebec City, Johanna was struck by a landscape so unlike Holland. She thinks about the contrast and strangeness of Canada’s rocky shore and her own flat homeland. She remembers trying out her first English words, asking, “Orange, please.”

There was no one to meet them in Quebec City but they knew the name of their destination so, as a family of eight, they boarded a train heading for a small city in southern Ontario where they planned to reunite and stay with Johanna’s aunt and uncle.

Johanna recalls the early sense of bedlam she felt in making a transition to a new country.

Yah, we arrived around 2:30 in the morning and like they had ten children. … We had 18 people [altogether] and there was an outside toilet with three holes and there was no running water inside with 18 people. … They did have electricity. So I said, “Oh MY!” and everybody had to be packed together. They had big beds and they had to put a whole bunch of kids in one bed… to make it work… it was a full house. (#1, p. 9)

Three weeks after arriving, and with the help of a Christian Reformed fieldman,
who was also a local Dutch immigrant farmer, the family was able to find a house and employment. Johanna explains that, for a short time, her father worked in the local canning factory before working for a farmer. Johanna’s mother stayed at home, managing the children and household tasks. Within a year of immigrating, the family moved three more times and Johanna recalls that once the crate with their belongings arrived from Holland, her mother had a real knack for fixing up each place and making a cozy home.

I know that she [mother] had the house fixed up quite nicely, you know like in no time you had your basics; your beds. I don’t know how they fit everything in there [crate] but... your table and chairs. You didn’t have a couch or anything like that but we got a new table. I remember we got new chairs in Holland and a new table... and your linens and your silverware, your clothes [which] they packed in there really, really, really tight; just so. We had a few pots and pans... really everything to set up a household. (#1, pp. 11-12)

Johanna describes that her mother was the “pusher” in the family. “She was the one who kept things together” (#4, p. 18). Johanna expresses a deep admiration for these Dutch immigrant women who had to be so brave to keep their homes looking and feeling in such a way as to make it a refuge, a haven from the chaos of being in a new country.

Well, mom... she always kept a nice home and a comfortable home and it was always cozy... and she cooked and she could make a house like a home because they moved quite a few times too before they bought the farm. And then she would have to pack up again and move to another house and then—well she would have pictures on the wall and the curtains up and the flowers—you know trying to make it look homey, right off the bat. (#1, pp. 48-49)
Her mother’s determination to bring normalcy to the homeplace in a context filled with the tensions of uncertainty and unknowns helped to curb feelings of frustration and of being homesick. Johanna knew that while coming to Canada was a decision to realize goals, it also was a profound sacrifice for her parents. She recalls later that when her parents went back to their home country to visit, her father, in particular, would wear his sadness for some time when coming back to Canada. Her parents, who stayed close to their church and farm, never learned to speak English well, nor had a driver’s licence. They struggled to assimilate. They never became official Canadian citizens.

Having buried a baby sister in Holland, Johanna views that her mother was so happy to have a girl amongst her boys. “I think my mom was very proud of me” (#3, p. 32). Johanna saw her mother as always being very busy, but at the same time very supportive of her, including her schooling. Even though both her parents struggled with understanding Canadian ways, Johanna felt that they gave her freedom and autonomy to explore and make decisions in this new country. In many ways, Johanna interprets that, with the dynamics reversed, the children became cultural interpreters and their parents’ advocate.

I think my mom was supportive but she didn’t understand the Canadian way of life you know… you had to find a lot of it for yourself... because she didn’t understand that part of life, because she had never experienced that. (#1, p. 19)

Johanna concludes that as immigrant children, they had to become independent very quickly, negotiating two worlds; their private Dutch Calvinist home and church life and the public Canadian world. It was not an either/or negotiation but rather, out of necessity a both/and experience. “I wasn’t a rebellious teenager as far as that goes. I tried to fit into
two worlds” (#4, p. 38). She says that there was no reason nor time to rebel; instead
Johanna perceives that as children, they took on greater family responsibility to negotiate
their new circumstances, especially a Canadian culture. Looking back, she says that we
understood the hardships our parents had endured and we respected that they were trying
to make it in their new country and as best we could, we supported that.

**Uprooted**

Sailing to Canada, Johanna celebrated her 14th birthday. Today she realizes how
intense and extraordinary her immigrant experience was as an adolescent.

It was like moving to the moon [laughter] and it was so different. … But anyway
it was a totally new world and then you are 14, eh. I mean, at 14 you are… you
know the age of 14… you are not a kid anymore. You are transitioning from a
child to an adult. You are in that transition period. (#4, p. 39)

In this moment on the ship, Johanna straddled two worlds. She was a young woman in
her homeland, just beginning to find her own footing, when she found herself negotiating
precarious and unknown circumstances.

Emigrating, presented a disruption of normal daily life. While her parents
negotiated the various steps of going to Canada, Johanna was busy with her everyday
“pillarized” life in Holland; school, a girl’s club at her church, and a gym where they
were making preparations for a special presentation to celebrate a 10th anniversary.

We were going to do this great thing for a 10th anniversary and I was all pumped
up for that and we left for Canada just before. Well, I was so upset because I
couldn’t do that [laughter] and you had to leave all of your friends behind. It was
traumatic. (#4, p. 39)
As a young teen, Johanna also recounts how she had to say good-bye to her dearest friend, “We did everything together. As kids we went to school together and we biked together… oh we shared everything together” (#2, p. 53).

It was very traumatic… we were both crying and you know we were both teenagers and we [thought] we are never going to forget each other and we were crying and saying good-bye and that we would see each other again but you feel like you are not going to see each other again. You couldn’t look into the future.

Now, everybody travels everywhere. You, kind of laugh about it now… it was almost like it was a funeral. (#1, p. 4)

Johanna showed me a photograph of her best friend on her wedding day and reminisces how this childhood friendship became deep and abiding. “We always wrote letters. And then our favourite flower was the pansy and we would stick a dried pansy in it. And whenever I see pansies, I always have lots of pansies, it always reminds me of Tineke” (#3, p. 48). Later as adults, they would travel to spend time together; catching up, supporting each other in times of trouble, and reclaiming the friendship that had been forged in the intensity of immigration. For Johanna, this is a friendship that is interwoven in a trajectory of lifelong learning. Now having passed away, Johanna continues her relationship and connection with Tineke’s daughter.

**School**

After completing Grade 6 in Holland, Johanna had been advised by her teachers to follow the high school academic track. “So anyway, I choose the MULO [preparatory middle-level applied education]. We had a lot of homework. It was pretty hard. … The MULO was more—like it was harder. You could become a teacher. You know it
branched out into a lot more different things” (#3, p. 15). Her older brothers attended agriculture and trade schools so this was a new educational path for the family. Aligning with her religious traditions she attended a neo-Calvinist school. “I was very fortunate about that. It [Calvinist schools] seemed the norm over there. It was more prominent over there and you didn’t have to pay. It was all government. It was sponsored” (#1, p. 46).

Johanna was in her second year of high school when she immigrated to Canada in late spring. In contrast to her Dutch high school curriculum, Johanna’s schooling in Canada began in a one-room school house with Grades 1 through 8. I still remember that morning so well because I had to be the big brave sister because Fred he went. He was eight and I was fourteen, the big sister. I did not know where I fit in because in Holland I was going to the MULO. That is equivalent of high school but because of the language and everything I didn’t know where I fit in and my parents didn’t know. In Holland you went to Grade 6 and then you went on to high school. … And so it was kind of the equivalent of Grade 8 I suppose. Anyway, my brother Fred was so scared. He didn’t want to go. He ran up and down the stairs and we had to catch him and we said, “Well, we’ve got to go.” … I was scared to death because I didn’t know what to expect and didn’t know a single solitary soul and I couldn’t speak the language. Like you felt really strange in a strange country… and at that point, then I had to be brave for my brother. [I said], “Come on we have to go.” … Mrs. Kirk was very, very nice but I felt so silly because I felt like a little kindergarten kid you know. She was cutting pictures out of the catalogue and putting them all in [a notebook] and she wrote the English name. (#1, pp. 12-13)
Being “thrown into” (#3, p. 14) a Canadian school at the end of a school year, Johanna felt like she was on her own, that she had to take the lead. Her parents depended on her to make sense of schooling in a new country. “I had to be the translator for my parents [laughter] you know… you had to know more than they do almost, yah” (#4, p. 38). That September, Johanna’s father took a job as a farmhand and so the family moved to another home and, for Johanna and her brother, another school. Located in a small town, Johanna remembers that at this school she could sit with a Dutch immigrant girl like herself who had been in Canada for 2 years. While it was only 2 months, Grace helped Johanna translate so that she could more effectively engage in school:

I only went there for 2 months. … It gave me a start and then I got to sit with Grace. … I got to sit beside her in school and then at the back and then if there was something I didn’t understand because of my English you know, we had only been here 3 months, if there was something I didn’t understand, to ask Grace… she had been here 2 years. (#3, p. 17)

Grace and Johanna attended the same Dutch immigrant, CRC church and became lifetime friends.

Staying at this school would be short lived. The farmer sold the farm and no longer had need of Johanna’s father. So in December, Johanna’s father found another farm that required a farmhand and the family moved once again. Johanna attended another rural one room school house which she recalls as being backward and “another hole” (#3, p. 18).

Fred and I, we walked to the country, to the one room school house and then we had Mrs. Gilbert. She was our teacher… oh my… and she would come to school
with her big German shepherd and she always had a headache and she had long hair and had a braid around her head. It just felt like a step back a 100 years. … They had to do everything you know and then they had a big wood stove there and you took your little dinner pail and you put it on the little bench in the back and then you had two toilets when you came in, one for the boys on the left and the girls on the right… it was like the Little House on the Prairie days. … And I remember walking to school but we didn’t have the proper warm clothes that they have today, you know like the warm boots and the snowsuits and what have you. (#1, pp. 14-16)

A significant event that happened in school that year was Johanna’s first celebration of a Canadian Christmas. The school put on a special performance for the parents in the local town hall and with her accent, she was chosen to play the lead role in a play about a Russian woman named Olga. She remembers this as an experience of inclusion, where she felt a special recognition and belonging by her Canadian community.

That was quite the experience because I didn’t have the experience of Christmas in Canada… we did the production of Olga in the Volga, and the town hall was just full of people and then we sang Christmas songs and we learned a lot of songs and what have you and then Santa Claus came in and we all got a little gift. (#1, pp. 16-17)

“You know it was very different in Holland than here… I had never heard of getting a gift at Christmas… we always got it at Sinterklaas.³⁷ It was all so new” (#1, p. 16). At the

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³⁷ Sinterklaas: Legendary figure Saint Nicholas—the patron saint of children. On December 6 Sinterklaas is celebrated with a feast and gifts.
end of this school year, and at the age of 15, Johanna was able to write and pass the Grade 8 exams with English proficiency. She was promoted to high school.

Beginning high school Johanna recalls the anticipation of moving forward in a Canadian context because now she was getting closer to that education level she had achieved in Holland. She remembers the excitement of negotiating new trends and ways of growing up. “Gosh you got to go to high school. You have to wear lipstick. I know I didn’t do a whole lot but you know you were busy growing up” (#1, p. 18).

So anyway I took home ec and art. I liked art and we learned how to sew and I still remember that teacher. … And I liked her. … And we got to make a jumper with checkers so we had to line it all up… and we got to make a blouse which I had never done before and she really helped you along doing it. … And I used to make my own skirts. Well they were yards of material and then you put a thread through it and you gathered it and then you sewed the side up and then you put your band around it with a button and a button hole and then you hemmed the bottom and voila… we had bobby socks and saddle shoes and the big skirts and your white blouse to go with it and the little scarf around the neck. … And we thought we looked cool. (#3, pp. 19-20)

In the spring of her first year in high school, Johanna’s parents purchased a dairy farm so once again she changed schools.

After completing Grade 10, Johanna decided to leave high school. She learned about a 1-year nursing program from her church friend Grace who was also considering to apply:

Well actually I quit in Grade 10 because I wanted to take this nursing course and
you only needed to go to Grade 10 and I thought I was getting too old. … Can you imagine? Like I was a year behind because of the immigration and the language so I thought, well, if I take this nursing course in [the city], you only need Grade 10 and then you go there for a year and then I’ll have my nursing certificate you know instead of going 2 more years and it all worked. But now I think I should have finished Grade 12… but I did learn a lot. Like they did have the Grade 10 program… up to Grade 10 in those days. (#1, p. 21)

A year after leaving high school, with government financial assistance, Johanna left her rural setting and moved to the city to take a 1-year Registered Nursing Assistant (RNA) course. She chose the location because she knew of other Dutch immigrant families in the area, could continue to socialize with other young neo-Calvinists, and was able to find accommodation at the YMCA. When she completed her studies and practicum, she returned home to work at the local hospital, boarding with a Dutch immigrant couple who lived next to the hospital. Johanna explains that although perceived as temporary, boarding with a family was very common for single young adults. As she negotiated the independence of adulthood, Johanna also anticipated and looked forward to becoming rooted in her gendered expectations: marriage and family.

**Rooted: Raising a Family**

Johanna shows me a photo of when she was 18. Although black and white, it is evident that her dress, a pink one with small rosebuds, is special and shows a beautiful young woman ready to embrace the world. The photo was taken at her parents 25th wedding anniversary, a momentous party held with family and the church community. Johanna reflects on this event, 4 years after immigrating, a time for celebrating, for
making dreams come true, and for looking forward in a new country. This joy would be short lived. A month after this celebration, Johanna’s older brother died suddenly in an accident. As she says, “Yah, that was a very traumatic experience” (#1, p. 36).

In another photo, we see a young man laughing with friends. Eighteen was also the year Johanna began to date her future husband, Tony. Looking at it, she says,

He was quite a joker. Yah, he was a lot of fun when he was young. I guess I was attracted to him because he was a lot of fun. He was very lively and you know he enjoyed life, you know what I mean. (#2, p. 54)

Tony was 24 years old and while Johanna met him through her church community, he was someone outside of the immediate sphere of her friends in Young Peoples’ group.

He wasn’t a big, big church person, let’s put it that way. He was a cool guy. He was in construction. Like he was 24 and I was only 18 and my parents thought he was way too old for me [laughter]…he was 6 years older. (#4, p. 35)

After her studies, to become a nurse, Johanna became engaged to Tony and began planning her wedding. She was married in her early 20s and continued to work as a nurse until she gave birth to a daughter less than 2 years later. “And then when Jane was born I never did go back to nursing. … The end of my formal nursing career—retired at 22” (#2, p. 19).

And well you know how it was in those days, you looked after your family. That was the end of my nursing career. … I kept up my licence [about 5 years] but I didn’t go back because then we had five children. …You hate to give it up, you worked so hard to get it. (#1, p. 38)

As Johanna indicates, shifting from formal education and a public workspace to stay in
the home was an expectation in marriage and childbearing. This knowledge construct was modeled by her own family as well as the church community and also reinforced by the broader Canadian rural culture. Johanna and her husband looked to their ethnic roots in their decisions about marriage, family, and the construct of home. At this point in her life, Johanna became rooted in conventions that, in her thinking, were natural, stable, and a part of God’s plan for family.

For the first 11 years of their marriage, Johanna’s husband would shift from construction work to farming and Johanna would be busy with a young family and supporting her husband on the farm when he needed her. They moved five times and then in the early 1970s Tony had the opportunity to purchase his own farm—a dream come true for an immigrant who had come to Canada looking to achieve ownership and economic prosperity.

And then we saw a possibility to buy our own farm... so, we had the great big move with all the cattle and machinery and everything to the farm. And I was so excited. I thought I was moving into a castle because the house was a nice, you know, one of these old brick farmhouses, lots of room. I was so excited. The kids were so excited and Tony was so excited. … The first place we owned—that we bought. (#2, p. 20)

Johanna perceives that the business of farming was primarily in the hands of her husband and while she would help when needed, she interpreted that her husband made all of the decisions related to the business. In a photo, Johanna stands beside a young tree in front of her house, a birthday gift from her husband. In another photo, someone has taken a
landscape photo of the farm; buildings and a field off the roadway. Johanna reminisces that it was a beautiful farm.

**The Dutch Calvinist Church: A Covenant Education**

Johanna’s parents were deeply committed to the Calvinist church, both in Holland (Gerefermeerde Kerk) and then in Canada (Christian Reformed Church). As a young child in Holland, Johanna remembers the wonderment of the routines and physical experience of church; an aesthetic space for learning.

And you got all dressed up in your Sunday best and we got to wear shoes because we wore klompen. … But then on Sundays you got to wear shoes. Isn’t that—it’s a totally different world. But I have such good memories [of the Gerefermeerde Kerk] and I remember sitting in church and looking up in the balcony and there was this beautiful organ and the pipe organ and then the organist would sit behind, you know I would always watch the organist way up there playing the organ. … It was just special and the kids [today] miss out on so much now. (#3, pp. 28-29)

Sunday was always held and practised with unique religious conventions. It was a rest day from the everyday work of the week which was strictly prohibited. Only those jobs that were deemed essential in terms of the church were permitted.

We were brought up so strict. … Not that it bothered me but you felt there was a beauty in that. And on Saturday we cleaned for Sunday. My mom did the meat, the yard was raked, the windows washed; everything was made clean for Sunday, the Sabbath day… you read a book. We loved reading, that was the only time we had to… they would write a letter or visit the neighbour or go for a bike ride or a walk. … Sunday was by far my favourite day. (#3, pp. 27-28)
When Johanna’s family arrived in Canada, an ethnic church would be a point of reference to begin their learning trajectory in a new country. While Johanna’s parents did not assimilate easily to their host culture, for the rest of their lives they remained deeply committed to the CRC church community in their small town. They attended regularly and as much as they could be, provided for its financial needs and were generous to those who had less. Even when there was little money her parents believed in a religious commitment and obligation to give (tithe). Later in life when they retired from the farm, they purchased a home within walking distance of the church. These were the people, like themselves, that had shared in their experiences; war, poverty, rebuilding, diaspora, and would become their dearest and closest friends right up until the end of their lives.

For Johanna, the church evokes profound meaning that is difficult to describe. In our interviews she often conveyed its ethereal essence of meaning, its beauty, its consistency—something she held onto through all the turmoil of negotiating disruptions and difficulties. The church—its community—was always central to a learning trajectory. Johanna discusses and shows me photographs related to her experiences of church. This is where she met her lifelong friends. This is where she socialized in activities like Sunday School, Catechism, and Young Peoples.

At Young Peoples, first you had a Bible study and we had essays… which was good because you had to study that certain subject and then you had to read it and then you had to ask your questions and you really had to know your subject. Everybody had to take a turn and then after recess, what did we do, you know more relaxing things. But I did enjoy it. I always liked the social. … It was a pretty good group, but we had more, the older ones kept going much longer to
Young Peoples than they do today… like in their 20s. Like if you weren’t married they went to Young Peoples still, even if you were way in your 20s. (#3, pp. 20-21)

The Young Peoples would get together with other Young Peoples in the nearby CRC churches linked together by a Classis. These rallies were an opportunity to network with a larger ethnic base. Johanna remembers, “Oh, rallies, they were fun. That is where you find all the boys [laughter]. That was exciting” (#4, p. 35). Johanna recalls how the pastor’s involvement in her experience of Young Peoples had a lasting impression. “He used to entertain the Young People. He did a lot for the young people” (#4, p. 36).

Johanna continued to attend Young Peoples and catechism even when she moved to pursue her nursing diploma and was involved until she was married. As a passage to adulthood, after completing several years of catechism, Johanna did public “Profession of Faith” in the church, declaring her belief in the biblical doctrines and teachings of the church.

And then I had to go in front of the consistory and I still remember the question they asked me: What is your only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. Yah, that was my text—my question from the Heidelberg Catechism. (#4, p. 36)

As a church member, “professing” members were entitled to vote, to take communion, to have their children baptized, and for men, to serve on church council.

Once married with a young family, Johanna became more involved volunteering in the church. She belonged to a drama club that performed productions in various venues to the Dutch CRC community. In the early 60s she would help to initiate the Calvinette

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38 A classis is a group of churches within a geographical area.
(girls club) program and Summer Vacation Bible School. These programs have been a “big part of my life” (#1, p. 40) and even today in her 70s Johanna continues to participate in the annual Summer Vacation Bible School program bringing her grandchildren and hoping for a connection that her own children have abandoned.

About 15 years ago, Johanna joined other members of her CRC church on a mission trip to a community affected by Hurricane Katrina. Showing me a photo album, she recalls several experiences that really struck her as memorable. “Well we painted and cleaned up some houses and we got to visit people and talk to them and you could pray with them, and you know just be there for them” (#4, p. 3).

I’ll never forget going into one lady’s house. She was, you know dark with a southern drawl and we are all “Miss”—Miss J, Miss this—and then we were going to have a visit with her and bring her some cookies and what not. And we were going to knock on the door but there was no glass in it and we would open up the gate and the gate almost fell over—you know a poor little place… in shambles. But she was so grateful—sit down, sit down. And there was one picture of Jesus on the wall like a little post card picture. … And she lived on her own. But some of these people they stick out in your mind. (#4, pp. 4-5)

“I always wanted to do something like that so I did and it—you just felt good that you were actually doing some hands on help” (#4, p. 4).

All of Johanna’s children live nearby in the community they were raised but no longer attend the CRC church. “And my whole life ever since I was little well, church was a huge part of your life and then I think my kids are missing out on so much and now the grandchildren” (#2, p. 42). Johanna feels that they are not receptive to any discussion
concerning the church so it has become something silenced in their relationship and she acknowledges that this is a burden and tension she carries. She explains that she did her best to “bring them up in the Lord” (#2, p. 39), they attended church, were all baptized and participated in church programs (e.g., Sunday School, Cadets, Calvinettes, Young Peoples, Catechism).

And I pray to the Lord about it. I pray for them and then I say, what am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to do something? Like when they come here, they expect me to pray… they expect all that… I don’t know… I just feel—I feel frustrated. (#2, p. 40)

Johanna believes that her children’s participation in hockey may have been the start of pulling away from the church. Hockey had a way of taking over and keeping children away from the church programs, “and then gradually they pull away from the church because they get their hockey friends and it’s exactly what happened… and they don’t feel at home in church anymore and they keep pulling away. It starts very innocent you know” (#1, p. 23). While Johanna believes all of this might have started with their participation in hockey, she also recognizes that this became even more deeply entrenched by marriages that did not begin in the church:

And if you marry someone who has never been raised in the church and that’s been a problem with my children. They married partners who have not been raised in the church. And then they are not strong enough to carry it on. … It is important who you marry. (#3, p. 44)

Johanna reminisces that her experience and knowledge with church will be lost on the next generation saying that in observing the changes in her children and grandchildren, “they live in a different world” (#3, p. 42).
Gendered Learning: A Legacy of Caring

Johanna’s life history is a story of compassionate caring, one that began in the embrace of her mother, a social assumption rationalized and steeped in culture and religiosity, and one that made sense in the trajectory of life’s circumstances.

When I was little I was going to be a nurse and I was going to marry a doctor and I was going to go to Africa [laughter]. And I’ll never forget the first time I saw a Black person—they came to speak—I was 8 maybe and I was so intrigued with that. Well, I wanted to marry a doctor and then we will go to Africa… be a missionary. You didn’t even know what you were talking about. You had that—you just wanted to go help people. (#4, p. 43)

Her mother’s arrival to the paternal farm was marked out of necessity. She was needed because an older widowed woman could no longer effectively carry out her maternal role in the household. With unmarried sons living on the family farm, Johanna’s mother moved in to succeed the gendered role of her mother-in-law: “my mother was very, very, very busy. She had to look after them all because my grandmother couldn’t do much” (#1, p. 1). As Johanna reminisces, the birth of a daughter brought her mother much joy that would be sustained and felt through a lifetime. Just as had been expected of her, Johanna would always be there to carry on the gendered expectations of caring, especially as her parents grew older and more frail. Just like her mother, Johanna would always keep a comfortable home, making a refuge from the difficult situations of everyday life. As she explains, the business of farming was her husband’s vocation and while she could “pitch in,” the family business was not an equal partnership in that
regard. Her obligations to him were fixed on mothering and keeping a well-kept home. As she expressed many times in the interviews, she has no sense of business.

As was typical in CRC communities, as a young teenager, Johanna was sent out to church families to help households through times of illness and childbearing. As Johanna shares, it was a time when you learned about how to run a household, how to cook for a family, and how to care for their children. After completing Grade 10, Johanna was available for this kind of help for a year while she waited to attend nursing school. She would move in temporarily until the family were back on their feet again. “And actually, I learned an awful lot and I went to help people that were sick or had babies. There was always a need out there that they needed someone. … I mean you learned every time” (#4, p. 38). Before beginning her nursing program, Johanna worked one summer at a care facility for “mentally handicapped” children. These experiences set the stage for formal learning in a nursing program. She describes her experience.

The first 3 months I was in a nursing school… it was strictly studying and then you had to write a big exam and you had to visit different facilities. … It was kind of a crash course for 3 months. It was quite hard and you had to study you know your body and everything and then you had a big exam at the end of that and then if you passed it then you got your cap. … We had a green band and then at first you got a green uniform and then your white stockings and your shoes and what not and then you had your name badge and after that you started going on the floor… and then every month you changed floors. (#1, p. 27)

When Johanna finished she came back home and worked at local hospitals for about 2 years before starting a family with her husband. While it was the end of official
“nursing,” she says it was never wasted because she would find, that in the trajectory of her life, those nursing skills would be called upon many times.

Caring would also be integral in Johanna’s marriage. In the first decade, five children were born which Johanna describes as very busy. Nine years after her first five children, Johanna’s youngest son was born. In her late 30s she reflects, “Now today that is not that old but in those days, I was an older mom—considered as older mom in those days because I had all my other children in my 20s” (#2, p. 29). Her father and mother-in-law from the Holland would add to her busyness as they came to Canada and stayed for a number of months each year.

And then every fall they would go in October just before Thanksgiving, they would go home again. … That was in the morning [photo] before the kids went to school. We had to say good-bye to them and they were all sad. And Beppe [grandmother] would be crying. Oh, she could cry but I couldn’t cry because I was kind of happy…No I enjoyed having them but there comes a time. (#2, pp. 49-50)

Johanna explains that they had always wanted to immigrate to Canada but were unable because of her husband’s sister, who was mentally disabled and not accepted by Canadian immigration authorities. Her in-laws came each year to be supportive, to help on the farm, and to stay connected to their expanding family in Canada. Johanna acknowledged the constraints placed upon her and in turn was supportive of their need to stay connected.

In the mid 1980s, amid high interest mortgage rates (15% and higher), financial difficulties began to arise affecting the profitability and sustainability of the family farm. Johanna began working as a housekeeper outside the home to supplement the farm
income. She shares that the pressure of this difficult time was overwhelming, especially for her husband who increasingly turned to alcohol to relieve the economic burden. “We could barely scrape a living together. No, he just got so frustrated and fed up with it all” (#3, p. 35). Cleaning houses about 3 days a week, she worked mostly for “Canadian” seniors. This experience opened new opportunity for Johanna to see Canadian life outside her family and the church.

And they [senior couple] had a big house and I went there every Friday from 9 to 4 because it was that big of a house. I went through it and then I had lunch with them and then I became their kind of companion and they loved to talk. You sit there and have a coffee with them and you talk about this and that. … And he told me some amazing stories. … Anyway it was a hard time, but I didn’t mind it. I didn’t mind it and I met some really nice people through it and it was usually seniors or it was I just got it by word of mouth… and you go there in the morning and you clean. (#4, p. 31)

Johanna continued to tell me stories about the seniors she met and the caring relationships she established. She explained that working with seniors made her realize the great need “out there” which in some ways diverted and diminished her own sense of personal turmoil.

Seventeen years after they had purchased their farm, in spite of their best efforts to keep it, Johanna and her husband sold the farm and bought a house in the village close by. Her husband took a job working for other farmers and Johanna continued doing housekeeping:

It was a beautiful farm and it was hard on the kids too. So anyway that was not a
good time in our life and then I turned 50… I became 50 and then Tony was 56 but he didn’t quit working. ... He thought, if I just work 5 days a week and I don’t have all this pressure and all these bills and all I do is work for the bank. You know because the interest rates they went sky high. … It just broke us. If I can get rid of my debt and I’ll just work out and I don’t have worry about the bills. That was such a weight on him. (#3, p. 35)

Johanna wonders how they (she) could have made better decisions concerning money. Losing their ownership of the farm was life changing.

Five years later, Johanna’s husband had a traumatic accident that would change the family’s course once more. He was in hospital for 2 years before coming home and then passed away. Negotiating this new reality was met with hard and unpredictable lessons, ones that had to be negotiated every day. Nursing and caring skills, “like catheters and oxygen, rolling, how to make a bed with a person in it” (#1, p. 39), all learned in her early 20s, were scaffolded into a new family context. “Well, life happens and you have no choice in it. You have to go along with it. Like, when Tony had his accident, that was so traumatic and your life was just turned upside down” (#1, p. 48). Financially supported by Workman’s Compensation and an insurance policy that had been renewed only 1 week before the accident, the family managed to keep their lives together and respond to the traumatic reality. Again, Johanna sees this as the Lord’s providence over them:

I had no idea in the beginning what lay ahead of me… what to expect, really, no, no. It was the first little while we didn’t know if he was going to live or not, you know. He went home, we didn’t know. And I went there [hospital] every day and
I could stay there for a while at first too. … So they [support workers] were all very good to us. They did the best they could and you get through it somehow. And then when he was home I was a little bit scared… like you were so responsible. … So we made it work and he was a pretty good patient. He would get frustrated too but I’m surprised he did as well as he did because he was kind of an impatient man. … And he learned a lot of patience and like he learned a lot through it and he came closer to the Lord through it all. Like, he was kind of struggling with his faith and everything and he became—he was at peace. You know the Lord gave him a lot of grace and comfort. (#2, pp. 21-22)

Johanna comments that this was a traumatic experience for the whole family, in particular for her youngest son who was still in high school. When she thinks of the experience, she is thankful for the many people that she met to negotiate and manage the circumstances:

So you had to—that was your life then and then him coming home looking after him and everybody coming to the house to help look after him and all the people you meet through that again… and you make a relationship with them and you work together with them and you make decisions with them and then… and to encourage, you know you had to be the encourager too to keep things going. … And then I had to be the mom for everybody too because I couldn’t be breaking down because my kids still needed me too. (#1, p. 48)

Looking through photos of this time, Johanna describes the daily negotiation of living with her husband when he was entirely dependent on the help and support of others. A family photograph that marked their 35th wedding anniversary reminds her of the
exceptional effort it took to celebrate. She conveys that she was determined to mark the occasion.

During this difficult period, Johanna was also caring for her aging parents. First her father passed away with complications of a surgery and then less than 10 years later her mother, having moved into a nursing home, passed away:

She had heart problems and angina and then she got a bit of help at home at first but then she got so that she couldn’t be at home. Then I had to bring her to the nursing home. … I was the only girl. The thing is when you are the only girl, hey… I had to bring her to the hospital. I had to pick her up to bring her to the nursing home. That was the hardest thing to do. … She [mother] was in a nursing home for 4 years. (#4, p. 32)

As her mother succumbed to loss of memory Johanna felt the “hurt” (#4, p. 32) and distancing, a caring connection broken. After all of this profound loss, Johanna immersed herself in her children’s lives. Married with young families, she babysat and provided a space for meals, interaction, and healing. Marriages too became frayed, ending in divorce and sending families into a tailspin. Through it all Johanna continued to be a backbone to her children and especially to her grandchildren.

Recently Johanna remarried a widower from her church. It was someone she had known since young adulthood. While the widower was about a 10 years older, their lives had been interconnected in multiple ways. They were connected by family, they performed in the drama club together, and their children had simultaneously participated in the various activities and events of the church. Shortly after losing his wife to illness, Johanna explains how their relationship began:

It was a Sunday afternoon so I thought well I’ll just drive… and here was Nick
sitting on—in the chair with his red shirt and his red cap on. Two days before that, I had driven by there with my grandsons because I quite often would take this road you know as a short cut. He was sitting in that same chair with his red shirt and his red cap on and just staring into space, so this time I went by and my car just went in here. … He [the Lord] pushed me in here. … He just couldn’t be alone. He was a little bit down—quite a bit down. … Men have a harder time I think. (#2, p. 24)

Compelled by her own experience and emotions of losing a spouse, Johanna stopped to bring some care to a grieving church member. She explains that they sat and talked for a long time. This encounter led to an invitation for dinner:

And he picked a bouquet of flowers from his garden to take home. And he showed me a bunch of pictures and we just kind of hit off right away. Of course I knew him you know. He wasn’t a stranger to me… I’ve known him all my life, yah. And the funny part when we were in this drama club, he was my—I was engaged to him. So we had a big chuckle out of that of course and he said, “Now the drama continues.” (#2, p. 24)

As they developed their relationship, Johanna felt convinced that she wanted to marry again. “I always had this feeling that this is what the Lord wanted me to do. … In fact, I was totally at peace with it. And I just felt this little push all the time” (#2, p. 24).

It [marriage] was important to me. If we were going to have a relationship, for the rest our life, I didn’t want to just move in. I just didn’t want me to live there and him live here and I was ready to take the big step. I had to do a little persuading [laughter]. I didn’t push him into it. … No, I wouldn’t feel right moving in here and not being married. … No, no, no we wanted it all and so we are both glad we
did and Nick is too. But sometimes you like to have a man in your house—in your life too. So, it’s been good. (#2, pp. 26-27)

In becoming married, Johanna realizes that she has new extended family which includes more grandchildren and now great grandchildren. She is actively engaged in their lives, babysitting, making meals, attending their hockey games, hosting family gatherings, and now even attending christenings/baptisms of great grandchildren. She thinks on what it means to be a grandmother and realizes that she transcends her own images of the grandmothers she had in Holland. She contemplates, they were always old: “I remember her sitting in the corner. Isn’t it awful. So that is how I envisioned grandmothers” (#4, p. 41). Today, Johanna is actively engaged with their blended household.

Johanna’s life has been forged with examples of how her learning was directed towards caring for people; when she was a daughter, a mother’s helper, a nurse’s aide, a nurse, a mother, a wife in two marriages, a senior’s housekeeper, and now a grandmother and great grandmother. Caring and nurturing have been integral in the trajectory of lifelong learning. Johanna contemplates that in an ethereal sense she has also been cared for, first, by a faithful paternal God, and second, by the men who were the heads of the various households she has been a part of and contributed to:

Like the men they—the men are the head of the household. There is something about that. And they have to provide for the family. The women don’t have to worry about that. … It feels good to be and to have that. It’s a good feeling to have that border—that border of protection around you—let’s put it that way. … I think our gender—we like to be cared for. … I think deep down—deep down all women like to be protected. (#3, p. 39)
In some ways, this is a reflection of her own gendered ability to care… for the many times, she stepped into the unknown to support and build a border of protection around those who were perceived as needy—including the men in her life.

**Canadian Citizenship: Becoming Canadian**

Johanna officially became a Canadian citizen after having several of her children. Already in her 30s, she reflects that she doesn’t know why she did not do it sooner. She was spurred on by her husband who was already a citizen, and motivated by her husband’s brother, who was boarding with them and in the process of becoming a Canadian citizen. Together they became citizens in a ceremony at the local courthouse taking an oath of citizenship, and receiving a Bible.

Tethered to the Dutch Calvinist culture through church and family, Johanna explored Canadian ways of being. She recalls negotiating “Canadian” things as she attended school. Christmas celebrations and Christmas presents had Canadian implications that were different than her Dutch traditions. Already in the first year of school, she was struck by students’ lunches with their various luxuries.

They were bringing CAKE—that’s only for special occasions… and grapes, wow and you know things like that. … And to me they were a luxury—a little bit luxuries. To them it wasn’t at all. It was just a norm, but to me they were little luxuries. (#3, p. 14)

There was a strangeness about Canadian food. In high school, she became friends with a neighbour and spent time in their family home. Here too, she found strangeness in cultural difference. She recalls, “Isn’t it funny how you remember the little things. And we never had jello with our meal. That was dessert you know, jello and whip cream and
they had that with their main meal [laughter]” (#3, p. 18). In school, Johanna recognized that while the students in her school called themselves Christian, it was not the same as the teachings of her own orthodox church views. Her relationships at school were always distinct from the more intimate ones she made in her church. She would never date a boy from the public high school.

While Johanna always maintained a strong connection to the CRC church, it was as an adult that she gradually began to explore and interrogate the world of her Canadian neighbour. Having a driver’s licence was one means of having a certain freedom to explore. Neither of her parents had a driver’s licence. In particular, Johanna observed that this was typical for most women in church. “That wasn’t a thing to do for the women too in those days” (#4, p. 19). Johanna recalls the upheaval it caused in the church when one newly widowed woman went out and got her licence to drive so that she could have more autonomy in her life. This simple act/disturbance, spurred other women in the church to do the same:

Well you are free. Well I don’t know what I would have done without it because Tony was busy and you had to get groceries and you had to take the kids, here and there and all over. I don’t know what I would do without it. Still—you know I can go here and there and I’ve got my own car and Nick got his. I feel more free having my own vehicle and then I can go—you know to do my own things. … I have a lot of things to go to. But Nick does the main driving you know if we go… he always drives… that’s a man thing. (#4, p. 20)

While there is a lingering sentiment for Johanna that driving is a man’s prerogative, she continues to leverage her vehicle to lead a life where she has the freedom to interact with
the community around her and as time moves on, her reach continues to be outward.

Johanna’s most significant transition from the church community has been through the Women’s Association. As an extension of her own learning, Johanna explains, this women’s group is an organization that teaches women to be good homemakers and that these skills can make a significant difference in the world. Johanna recognizes that her involvement, while becoming more open with the younger women in her church, is quite a distinction from her peers in the CRC church. “There’s not a lot of Dutch people. Like it’s not a religious… it’s not—there are a lot of Christian women that belong to it but it’s not a religious organization, let’s put it that way” (#1, p. 46). Through our interviews it became very clear that she has significant investment and leadership in this organization. When I asked her how she became involved, she recalls that it was amidst those difficult years on the farm:

We were still living on the farm and then I went to a meeting [political town hall] one time and someone asked—invited me to come to a meeting. So I thought, well it’s time I got to know more ladies in the community and I didn’t know too much about it but I thought well I can never lose. So I went to a meeting. I was probably—let me see I’ve been in it, I think I’ve been in it—I must have been about 48 maybe; late 40s. Yah, they called me the little Dutch girl when I came there… I was a newcomer—I was a little Dutch girl. (#3, p. 22)

Joining the Women’s Association was a step into Canadian culture. “It certainly was and I learned a lot through it and I met a lot of wonderful ladies through it. And I learned a lot. You learn confidence and how to lead a meeting you know” (#3, p. 21). “It is a sisterhood” (#3, p. 22).
And I was very involved in the [Women’s Association]. And you know I went there and like my life is full. … And like I’ve gone to conferences and conventions with the girls. It is always with the girls, the women but that was a good fit for me because I was able to do that with other women, you know. (#2, p. 25)

Being involved with women in the community has led to other projects like the museum exhibition. Knowing the local Canadian women involved, she became the liaison between the Dutch immigrant community and the museum. More recently, Johanna has initiated Bible studies and an exercise group for women in her community. She explains that here too she meets Canadian women who have experienced loss and tragedy as she has, women who she has befriended because like herself needed to meet different people to help them negotiate and see a fresh perspective on living.

Johanna reflects that she has travelled most of this country she now calls home. Each time she ventures out, she is in awe of its majesty, its sheer vastness and geography. All of this she attributes to the faithfulness of God whose plan it was for them to come. Through the many experiences of an immigrant life, the God of their homeland had been steadfast on the journey. Thinking on her life, Johanna contemplates, “I am very proud to be Canadian, yah. And I love living in this [community]… I know a lot of people here and I just love living here” (#4, p. 23).

**Cate**

As a young girl, she dreamed of the future; trapped in an uncertain present, she tells her story to herself; she retouches it so as to introduce an aesthetic order, transforming her contingent life into a destiny well before her death. (De Beauvoir, 2011, pp. 670-671)
I have known Cate for a long time. Before conducting my study, she and I had shared our interest in family trees, heritage, and genealogy. When I approached her to see if she might be interested in participating in my study, she thought that it would extend her own work, that together we could scaffold what she had started and help her to continue her commitment to leave a story for her children and grandchildren. She also shared that she was motivated to glean further insight into the mysteries she saw in her own past. In particular, Cate wondered about her experience with post-partum depression and how this has been an ongoing question in her lifelong learning. Today, Cate lives in a suburb of a large urban centre and recently moved into a modest condominium complex from the home she and her husband built almost 40 years ago. Now a widow, the condominium provides easier access to various community resources (e.g., medical, library, food markets) and also to a community of people with whom she shares time over a cup of coffee or tea. Cate is a quiet and, as she describes, reserved person. She has a substantive collection of photos and memorabilia (e.g., report cards, class photos, yearbooks, letters) that she has collected and saved over her lifetime. In particular she shows me letters written by her mother before she was married. She wonders about this young woman with beautiful handwriting—her mother who was minimally educated, destined for a life of hard work, and as Cate sees it, submissive to the various authorities (her father, her husband, her children) that framed her 90 years. For three of the interviews, we met at Cate’s home, the fourth, at her request, was at my home. We had lengthy conversations that included time at lunch, short walks, and even drives. Cate’s story does indeed hold mystery: a story of paradox and yet unwavering loyalty and commitment to her cultural roots.
Cate’s Story

“We were different than our parents, facing a future that we hoped
would not repeat the old story” (Griffin, 1992, p. 358).

When Cate was born shortly after World War II, she perceives that her parents
were already so depleted and preoccupied with 11 other children that she was kind of
forgotten amidst the aftermath of war and the anticipation of emigration. The emotional
distance she describes about her family pervades throughout her life history. Yearning for
something different, Cate’s trajectory of lifelong learning is marked by resistance but not
in the way one might think. Interpreting that her father’s disruptive relationship with the
CRC church was his failure, her resistance is demonstrated in a redemptive pursuit, a
trajectory of making things right in her neo-Calvinist enclave. Cate’s reflection of her
achievements in Canadian schools leaves her wondering today if she should have heeded
her teachers’ recommendations to reach higher (university) in formal education but at the
time she just did not have the knowledge or resources to know how. While her actual
education achievements exceeded her perceived expectations in a neo-Calvinist
worldview, Cate’s lifelong learning represents how she remained solidly committed to a
pillarized worldview and how that has, in some respects, limited her capacity for
learning. Cate’s story unfolds in eight thematic segments illuminating various sites of
learning that have shaped how her life played out.

The Darkest Day of the Year

Shortly after the war, and without fanfare (as Cate interprets it), Cate was born on
a rented farm in the province of Friesland, the 12th living child of a Dutch Calvinist
couple. Her 11 siblings had been born in a 15-year period beginning in the early 1930s.
Born in the season of days with short daylight, Cate reflects, that her birth was on the
darkest day of the year and not really a good day to be born. In the anticipation of Christmas, Cate’s birthday was often forgotten or blended with the religious celebrations. Although she does not remember much about her life in Holland, Cate knows of the trauma of war and the various profound tensions her family negotiated during those occupied years. She stresses, the anxiety of these years as a lifelong thread that would be woven in the trajectory of her life history. She comments, “I don’t know who told me, but the older ones can recall—they remember there were some happy times in Holland. I don’t remember any happy times” (#1, p. 20).

Her father, was gravely injured on the farm during war time and, with no antibiotics available, spent a month in hospital recovering. He would be left with a disability that, while functional, would be a scar that would disfigure him for the remainder of his life. Even more telling, was Cate’s mother who with a newborn, her seventh child, had to manage the farm with the help of a farmhand and her nearby family:

So here she [mother] is, she is home alone with seven kids including a newborn and there’s planes flying overhead between Germany and Britain and she heard an explosion one time and of course it nearly scared her half to death because I suppose when bombs would go off it might be miles away but it would be like right in your backyard. (#1, p. 19)

Cate’s maternal grandparents too would die in the midst of all of this chaos. While Cate’s mother represents a certain kind of resilience amidst intense challenges, Cate surmises that her mother did not have much time for her as young child. “I don’t think mom looked after me much. She was busy with everything else and probably too tired from the child bearing” (#1, p. 31). Cate describes her childhood as someone who was overlooked
and concludes that her Calvinist parents were more partial to the older children because they had taken on work responsibilities while the younger children were “kind of in the way” (#1, p. 20). “Like when you are the oldest in a large family you don’t grow up you get kicked up” (#1, p. 3).

After the war, in a mass flood of emigration out of the Netherlands, Cate’s parents and oldest brothers decided to start a new life in Canada. Cate’s oldest sister, who was dating a local young man, was given an ultimatum by her father to get married or go. She decided to stay behind and was married 2 weeks before the family left. As Cate’s primary caregiver, Nel’s (eldest sister) decision to stay behind, left an indelible mark on her life and the family dynamics. When Cate, at the age of 4, left on that boat for Canada, it would be 15 years before she would see her sister again. In that time, Cate would also gradually lose her ability to speak Frisian and thus would be unable to verbally communicate with her sister. “Well we heard Dutch, Frisian, and English and… I guess the Frisian language just came across as really an unpolished language. I don’t know, I just didn’t care to learn it” (#2, p. 7). “I know a few words [Frisian] but I can’t put them together in proper sentences. I communicate with my sister by writing—sending her cards” (#4, p. 43). Cate and Nel never speak to each other on the telephone because they cannot carry on a conversation, “There is something lost in translation” (#4, p. 7). When she visits, she relies on others to translate and weave a relational conversation. Cate has kept several photographs of herself as a young toddler being held by her oldest sister. Over the years, there has been some reflection about whether choosing to separate their family had been a good decision but regardless, Cate experiences it as a profound sorrow in the trajectory of her lifelong learning.
Immigration: The Homeplace

Cate shows me a photograph of her entire family taken just prior to leaving for Canada. She explains that it was her two oldest brothers who initiated the idea of going to Canada:

I asked my older brother Bill what he knew about that and I guess in 52 or 53 my brother Bill and my brother Theo wanted to go to Canada. Well at that time they were maybe 17 or 18… of course for them to go to Canada it would be an adventure… and so Dad had said well, if you are going we are all going so that’s how it started—things got going in motion. (#1, p. 2)

Cate thinks that her parents, who were already in their 40s, had a good life in Holland. They were established and were doing quite well, so they did not do it for themselves, they did it for their children and perhaps more specifically for their boys. Captured by the wave of emigration they saw happening around them after the war, Cate’s family listened to rhetoric from church fieldmen of future possibility and promises of “milk and honey” that awaited them on Canadian shores. At 4 years old, this did not penetrate the experience of a young child. “I remember immigration as a traumatic event. It was not a happy adventure. I remember being fearful and… I had to say good-bye to my caregiver [eldest sister]” (#1, p. 31).

The family sailed out of Rotterdam, on a military ship retrofitted for immigrant passage. The young children spent most of their time in a day care area.

So we had to go into a room where I guess all the kids had to go—kind of like a daycare or something. And I remember being in there with Cor and Grace and Janny and just being upset, like bawling my eyes out. And I remember Janny
trying to comfort us. But I remember the older ones were allowed to go out on
deck. And I don’t know why I was upset but the whole journey was traumatic for
me. (#1, p. 3)

The family landed at Pier 21 in Halifax. Cate’s memory of this is the carbonated orange
drink she was offered. “You know it prickled on your mouth. … It was very good and
sweet” (#1, p. 7). In Halifax, the family boarded a train bound for Western Canada.

When they arrived, Cate perceives that her father was immediately disappointed
because “their Canadian sponsor had fallen through and the promised easier life seemed
to be already escaping them” (Cate’s son’s school essay). While Canada may be a land of
opportunity, it would first be a land of terrible hardship. Reflecting on a later trip back to
visit her brother in Alberta, Cate thinks what it might have been like for her parents:

*It was not a land of milk and honey. … I mean well what a desolate piece of real
estate. … Well, what a wasteland. Oh my goodness, and I think when mom and
dad when they—I mean they must have been just blown away when they saw
what—where they had been dropped off [laughter]. (#4, pp. 25-26)*

Having lived in a small pocket of Holland all of their lives, coming to the vast open
geography of the prairies was something hard to imagine. Everything was different,
everything was new, and they would have to start from scratch. A school essay written by
one of her sons portrays Cate’s memories of this time:

*There were not many Dutch in the village, mostly Canadian Mormons and
Chinese, who had settled here a while ago. It was really hard for my mother’s
parents to adjust to the people around them because they were rarely exposed to
English, except when the children spoke it in the home while learning it. My*
mother thinks that her parents felt threatened by Canadians, perhaps somewhat untrusting and would have preferred to have been at home with their Dutch friends.

Thinking on those early days, Cate remembers poverty and reflects that her father’s unpredictable temper was, in part, the frustration that he was not making any money. She remembers her mother’s ability to stretch a dollar but she always felt like a poor kid that always had to have hand me downs or nothing at all:

I remember being poor. We didn’t have any extras at all and we didn’t get things at Christmas—and I remember in class we could write a Christmas wish list or something. Well, mine was probably a whole page long but anyway, I wouldn’t get ANY of it. But I remember the kids in my class they each brought in a little bit of money and they gave me a bracelet. They bought me a bracelet. I still have it. Let me show it to you. But I remember this bracelet… some girls felt sorry for me and chipped in and—yah. (#4, p. 52)

Cate recalls when one of her older sisters moved out of the home and started a job in the city. “Yes, I remember we liked it that she [sister] went to [the city] and got a job because that Christmas we all got Christmas presents. … I know she brought me something. … Sylvia sewed me a beautiful dress for the wedding [of an older sister]” (#2, p. 13). Cate was impressed with her Grade 3 teacher who dressed and groomed nicely. Throughout her school years, Cate was conscious of her clothing, learning what was trendy, and paying attention to what her classmates and teachers wore even though having these things were out of her own reach. In one school picture she points out how the girls sitting beside her lay their frilly dresses over her knees to hide the capris she is wearing.
She had forgotten that it was picture day. As a way to negotiate her ongoing learning about clothing and style, she developed an interest and capacity for sewing.

In 1956, when Cate was 8 years old, her father was able to rent land from a farmer to plant and harvest his own sugar beets. The family moved into a small dilapidated house on the farm property. Looking at a photo she talks about her experience on this farm:

Yah, the roof was done two different ways. … Well this was it. Like behind there was a tiny little lean to—which was kind of an extra bedroom and behind here was a tiny little porch but basically we lived in… two rooms. This was supposed to be a living room but it was a bedroom because we needed the bedrooms and this was the kitchen… there were two bedrooms… the boys slept in one room and the girls slept in this front room with mom and dad… they didn’t have their own bedroom—no room. (#4, pp. 29-30)

While their own home was a small “shack—a shack out back” (#2, p. 19), the owners of the farm were a large Mormon family and in Cate’s estimation, good landlords. Cate has fond memories of the late 1950s and early 1960s. On the farm there was the main house where the Hanson’s (landlords) lived and there were four other houses rented out to families that Cate describes as a “bit of a United Nations” (#4, p. 27) because they were all of immigrant extraction. Beside her lived a Japanese family; a widowed mother with five or six children. Two girls became Cate’s friends and playmates. On this farm she was allowed to roam freely, play with the children, watch the landlord’s TV, play in barns, and socialize within a Canadian context. These were also the children who went to school with her. “Oh yah, oh yah, we had a lot of fun together” (#4, p. 26).
We played games. We played hop scotch or skipping rope or—there was a big field in front of… all four houses were all kind of together and there was a big field in front. We would play baseball there and track and field. Out in the back we’d—the pens out in the back, they sometimes had pigs. We would ride the pigs [laughter]. We’d put bale twine around them and ride them [laughter]. We would make forts in the stacks of hay bales—I mean I don’t know how we didn’t get killed. Like, because some of those forts were pretty precarious. … Or sometimes it [the barn] would be empty and there would be a big long rope hanging down the centre and so you would take the rope and there would be a loop on the end and we would climb the ladder on the one end of the barn and we would swing from one end of the barn to the other. I remember that being a lot of fun… swing the length of the barn. REALLY when I think about it—I don’t know how I survived childhood. Anyway, I did [laughter] but anyway we had fun. We had fun on that farm. (#4, p. 27)

Recently Cate returned to Hanson family farm with some of her siblings for a reunion of all of the immigrant families who had lived on the farm over the years.

Six years after immigrating, Cate’s father and oldest brother returned to Holland for a 3-month stay. For Cate’s brother it was an opportunity to meet some of the Dutch Gereformeerde (Calvinist) women, with whom he had been corresponding by letter, to see if any would be suitable as a bride and willing to leave Holland to live in Canada. He met a woman on this trip who would immigrate to Canada and become his wife. Cate’s father went to Holland for his parents’ 50th wedding anniversary and to see his daughter who by this time had two small children. Cate explains that her father had been very homesick and missed his daughter as well as his parents and siblings. Since it was winter,
Cate’s older brother managed the farming responsibilities in Canada and supported his mother and younger siblings. Cate recalls that with her father gone, things were less tense in the household and she and her siblings could be more “carefree” (#4, p. 24). Cate’s mother would not return to Holland for 15 years. This would also be the year their daughter would come for her first visit to Canada.

Another significant event that altered the trajectory of Cate’s life and the life of her family was when one of her brothers, who had moved to Ontario, was tragically killed in an accident. With the support of their landlords, Cate’s parents flew to Ontario for the funeral and during that time began contemplating the purchase of a dairy farm. The following spring Cate’s father returned and found a farm for sale. With money he was now able to take out of Holland, he secured the purchase which set the stage for another family move. Cate’s oldest brother, who would be a partner on the farm, moved out to Ontario immediately and Cate’s married sister with her family, who already lived in Ontario, moved temporarily into the farmhouse to transition the work from the farm’s previous owner. Cate’s father and family stayed (7 months) in the prairies until his 5-year land contract was completed. Cate has photographs of the evening the family set out in their vehicle for Ontario. One brother, recently married, stayed behind while the rest embarked on yet another new beginning in Ontario.

Yes, I remember Wilma [sister-in-law] preparing all of these sandwiches and boiled eggs—I don’t remember “what all” for our trip… we drove… we started out on a Tuesday night. … We crammed seven people in one vehicle. … We had food and clothes. It was an adventure and it wasn’t always fun, but I can remember one time I was just laying in the back on the floor at everybody’s feet because there was no room for me—no place for me to sit. I was the smallest.
Henk could drive and dad could drive. So it would be dad, mom, and Henk or Henk, mom, dad in the front and then Janny, Grace, and Cor and myself in the back… so it was pretty squishy… we survived. (#1, p. 11)

After 3 days of driving, the family arrived at their destination. For Cate’s father and brother, it was the realisation of a dream and why they had come to Canada. Eight years after immigrating, they were now farm owners.

Cate became a Canadian citizen shortly after her family moved to Ontario. This was initiated by an older brother who wanted to join the military which required Canadian citizenship. Cate presumes that her parents did it on her behalf. Today Cate and her family identify as Canadian. Her children have never visited the Netherlands. Cate recalls, “I did feel a bit of a stigma about being Dutch. I know when I was little I didn’t like, I didn’t like being non-Canadian. I wanted to be Canadian or North American. I didn’t want to be Dutch” (#3, p. 3).

Canada is a good country to live in. Because it is a democracy and Canada has a lot of Christian underpinnings. There was a lot of Christian structures developed over the years. I mean some of it was kind of skewed Christianity but you are going to get that anywhere. (#4, p. 48)

“Oh, I am very glad that I am Canadian…Canada feels like one of the best places in the world” (#3. p. 6).

**Parenting: A Trajectory of Family Learning and Unlearning**

Cate has a curiosity about her family tree and genealogy, in part as a reflexivity to understand some of the emotions around her own life. She begins with her mother and
father and attempts to make sense of a familial home that seemed, at least in part, ill-fated and unhappy.

I guess when I was a teenager I kind of—well I didn’t like the relationship that mom and dad had because I thought I didn’t like it that basically dad calls all the shots. You know mom is so—SO restricted… she’s not allowed to go anywhere… she was not really allowed to have a life independent of him. (#2, p. 31)

Cate believes that her parents loved each other and their children but questions the family dynamics she experienced and observed as their youngest daughter. She thinks on the challenges they must have faced when as single young adults they informed their families and community that they were already expecting their first child before consummating their marriage vows in the 1930s. Cate reflects that they were poor, they were young, they had limited options before them, and they were scrutinized and judged by the norms of their Calvinist religious beliefs.

As rationalized by biblical scripture (e.g., Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3), Cate’s experience was that her mother interpreted herself as subservient, or second, to her husband:

I can remember thinking when I still lived at home that I thought if I ever get married, and in the back of my mind I always did want to get married. ... I thought if I ever get married I don’t want it to be like this—like the type of relationship she had with dad because I thought this isn’t fair because she’s—well she had as far as I could see very few rights. She was—well second class like you are not equal with a man. (#3, p. 17)
In her marriage, Cate’s mother would serve her husband, later her sons and daughters, and live a life dictated by a Calvinist work ethic. While Cate vowed that she did not want to be dependent and submissive like her mother, she also recognizes the contextual and historical reasons why her mother, an intelligent woman, did not know any different. “But you see that was so much part of my mom’s upbringing. … You know the household that she came from, the men called the shots. Like the women are expected to—you know, keep house, have babies, and serve coffee” (#2, pp. 31-32). In a household where Cate saw her father as authoritarian and emotionally unpredictable she recalls the tension he created when he was nearby. “But I think you know we were afraid of him. I can only speak for myself but I avoided him—yah, I thought I don’t really want to deal with you more than I absolutely have to” (#2, p. 12). Amidst this instability, Cate’s mother too negotiated her anxiety to suppress the tensions of his unpredictable anger and frustration. For example, Cate recounts how the barn chores kept them on “pins and needles”:

Dad went to the barn to do chores and mom had to kind of gage when dad was going to be done chores and when he came in the house the food better be on the table. You know don’t make him wait. So occasionally he would come earlier than expected and she would AHHHHH—oh he’s coming—get the stuff together here. (#2, p. 32)

In moments where Cate’s mother needed to air her frustration, she would do so in the safety of her children’s ears rather than raising them with her husband. Cate recalls this. “And there was sometimes she would complain about dad’s schedule for you know, for coming into the house too early or too late and I wanted to say to her, ‘MOM don’t complain to us, complain to him!’” (#2, p. 32). But of course she would not dare.
Cate describes that in her life time, her mother had plenty to cry about, but it was rare to see her do so:

Mom did not talk about intimate personal things. She just accepted what was, was. And well I think mom… they grew up in a culture where you didn’t talk about those things. [In a Calvinist culture] you can’t be vulnerable. (#4, p. 61)

Cate surmises, her mother’s submission to her circumstances came out of an overbearing grandfather, father, and husband and this too was filtered down to her children. “I mean dad bossed her around so we bossed her around too. … Like this is someone you, boss around” (#2, p. 32). While Cate views her mother as being exceptionally intelligent, someone who would have succeeded in school, this was not accessible to her. Instead Cate sees her mother’s life marked with disruption, pregnancy, hard work, and submission (caring) to others. While Cate wonders about her father’s capacity to be a kinder and caring father and husband in the light of his own trauma and historical context, particularly in relation to undiagnosed mental health, she speculates that he too was lonely, unhappy, and trying to negotiate the overwhelming responsibility of his family’s survival. Cate believes that in the end, in old age, her parents found a certain amount of contentment living in Canada and becoming Canadian citizens. “Well looking back, it was a terrible hardship for my parents and I think in the end they were glad they had come to Canada” (#4, p. 48).

Immigration: The Church

With the post-war immigration wave, Cate’s family became integrated in the growing Dutch Calvinist communities of southern Alberta and Ontario. Cate remarks, church was something you did and central to everyday life.
But they never talked about what they actually believed or how they should live out their beliefs. So I don’t know church was more—I don’t know if it was a cultural thing or just a place to hang out with your buddies or what it was. [Was it a way to stay connected to your homeland?] I think so. I think so. (#2, p. 11)

She grew up attending Sunday services and joining in the various activities the CRC provided for its children and young people. In spite of maintaining a lifelong membership, Cate’s early familial experience with the CRC church was chaotic, beginning with her father whose relationship with the church was always tenuous. Cate presumes that some of this tension may be situated in the Dutch Gereformeerde and Herformde ecclesiastic divide as she recalls that her father would sometimes attend the Reformed church while the rest of the family worshipped in the Christian Reformed Church. “Yah, there were issues there too and dad had a real problem with the pastor of the Christian Reformed Church—this Domine [pastor]” (#2, p. 16). The problem with the pastor, led to her father’s refusal to attend the wedding ceremony of Cate’s sister. Similar tensions would happen again, for Cate’s own wedding. While Cate’s parents never left the church, they continued to be dogged throughout their lives with negotiating the frictions of church order and the judgments and frustrations of everyday life.

Dad had issues with the church. I don’t know what they were about. And he was disciplined by the church so then he would go sporadically. … And I think for quite a long time we didn’t go at all. … I think if dad didn’t go to church, mom didn’t go to church. (#2, p. 10)

In Canada, Cate’s father never held any position of leadership in the church. “No, no he was nothing. He was a rebel—a rebel rouser” (#2, p. 12). Cate concludes that people
found him too intimidating and difficult to work with, a disrupter, and always on the margins. As a result, she felt her parents were “pretty lonely” (#2, p. 11) even within a familiar community. Cate recalls one time that her father received a letter from the church consistory, opened it and proceeded to crumple it up and throw it into the wood burning stove. Cate speculates that it was a letter of discipline prohibiting her father’s participation in communion: “Well you know, one time when I was living at home, one time I asked dad—like you know, what is this all about? He just said, ‘NONE of your business,’ so then you don’t ask again” (#2, p. 18).

Cate participated and socialized in the various activities and education the church offered. Cate remembers learning that there was a clear distinction between church culture and Canadian culture. She says that it was “a bit of a closed life” (#3, p. 4). “You had church friends and you had school friends and the two sets didn’t meet” (#2, p. 11). Cate attended the Calvinette program and then transitioned to the Young Peoples group. She became involved in the leadership of the Classis (several area CRC churches) Young Peoples Board and was appointed as secretary. She also attended catechism classes which culminated in doing Profession of Faith and formally making a public commitment in a Sunday worship service. She was 19. Her father did not attend. When Cate moved off the family farm into the city, she continued her commitment to the CRC.

In the early 1970s, Cate left her rural community and moved to a large city. She lived with her best friend and two other roommates; four young Dutch immigrant women. While living there, Cate met a roommate’s brother and they began dating. He too was a Dutch Calvinist immigrant and attended the CRC. Within 2 years they were married and joined one of the two CRC churches in the community where he lived. She reflects that as
a young couple, they decided not to attend the CRC that Gerrit’s parents attended but rather to begin their lives in the church community that they saw as more youthful and progressive. “It’s not the church my husband went to before we were married. He went to the other church which is a more conservative church” (#3, p. 10). A third CRC church was established (arguably more progressive) where today, one of Cate’s son and his family attend. Cate remembers that there was a time she and her husband contemplated changing their membership to the new church but in the end decided to “hang in” (#3, p. 11) with their old church. Cate recalls that this time was particularly stressful and that her husband, who was in church leadership at the time, really struggled with the dynamics of church dissension:

I know that a number of years ago, we had a pastor and we actually let him go after—I don’t know how long he was there—maybe 2 years. But I know when that happened, I just—I just thought I just wanted to completely wash my hands of church. It is so ridiculous. … But we didn’t, we hung in there. … He [husband] had a real hard time with that pastor. And well having to let him go, it really bothered him—you know that it came to that. Because a lot of people had left the church. It was a very stressful time. I think we hung in there, but I know Gerrit, he kind of wanted to go to [the new church], but I suggested we stay because he was a deacon\textsuperscript{39} in our church. (#3, p. 11)

Cate and her husband raised their children in the CRC church and also made the decision to send them to the local independent neo-Calvinist Christian school associated with the denomination. While both of them had attended Canadian public schools, with

\textsuperscript{39} Deacon: an office of church leadership. Deacons are charged “to be diligent in receiving the gifts of God’s people, prudent and cheerful in the distribution of the same, sympathetic and self-denying in the ministry of Christian mercy” (CPC, 1976, pp. 176-177).
the establishment of Christian schools, there was growing sentiment and historical
cultural pressure that children would be better educated in schools with Christian parental
influence and control. Cate saw that her husband’s family were already involved and so
they too became a part of the school fabric. Cate conveys that being involved meant
substantial economic and time commitments:

I don’t know. I guess we just decided that we wanted our kids to go to the
Christian school and they also went to Christian secondary school… but
sometimes I wish we had sent them to public high school. But one thing is two of
our children found their spouses at the Christian high school… that was a good
thing. (#1, p. 26)

All the children attended public university. Cate perceives that this was a place where
their religious ideas and upbringing were tested. Cate explains the experience of one of
her sons:

I mean they went to public universities and you know the Christian Reformed
Church, I don’t know whether he thought it was too narrow or things like. …
When he went to church, practically everybody that went was of Dutch extraction
and also everybody in the school was of Dutch extraction. His secular friends at
university called the Christian Reformed Church the Dutch mafia [laughter], you
know. I think you know, when he went to university he said, my friends they
really engaged me about faith and church and I don’t know… it can also be sort of
a habit, once you fall away to get back into it. But now he’s a dad, I think he sees
the benefits… yah, a sense of community and the Christian worldview. Like I
mean, they’ve learned the Christian worldview and they see the benefits to
society. (#4, pp. 30-31)
Cate’s sons have married and have small children. One family remain members of the CRC church and their children attend the associated Christian school. Cate’s other children do not attend church regularly but she observes that they remain open to the values of their religious (faith) upbringing and education. She does not delineate what she perceives as a Christian worldview or the values her children have learned.

As Cate grows older she continues to grapple with the transitions she sees happening in the church. In the interviews she discusses and critiques the challenges of membership, financial support, and preaching. She struggles with the shift to what she feels is Christian entertainment as opposed to preaching that is simple and Bible centred. Cate argues,

There is no substance to it, none at all. … Like me—I like solid biblical teaching. That’s what I like—you know, explain the Bible, read a chapter of the Bible, explain it. What does it mean? How is it relevant for today? But I don’t hear much of that. It’s—I don’t know, it’s all about being a pal, having Jesus as our pal. … It should be about conveying what the Bible is saying. … [So why do you keep going do you think?] I guess because I’m basically a Christian because of this church so I don’t know whether I want to make change at this point. To me it’s not that big of a deal where I have my membership—like to me I’m a member of the larger church. But I mean I certainly have, particularly since Gerrit died I’ve done a lot of reflecting on you know, why do I go to this church specifically if sometimes I get a lot more out of TV church. (#3, p. 10)

Currently, Cate continues to attend the CRC where she has raised her children and while she has connected with other Christian organizations and grappled with various views of
Christianity, she continues to be most at home with this ethnic community. Cate contemplates that through her lifelong history, the church has been an integral aspect of her family… the church is her family. When her husband was sick, the members of her congregation were very supportive; volunteering to drive to appointments, make meals, and give Cate time to go out to do errands and have some very needed respite from the profound worries and strains of a terminally ill husband. After her husband’s death the church continued to support her through her grief by providing ongoing professional counselling services to help her negotiate the profound sadness of her lifelong learning experience.

**School: Crossing Borders**

Born to farmers, Cate’s parents both had minimal formal education in Holland. In a Dutch Calvinist framework, physical labour was valued more highly than formal school learning. Cate viewed her mother as intelligent and someone who should have had the opportunity to continue her education but being a girl in a Calvinist household and the oldest, Cate’s mother was sometimes kept home from school to help on the farm. With a complete set of class pictures of her own, she points out that her mother would not be found in class pictures because on those days, she was required to stay home. Class pictures and school outings were frivolous so, in strict Calvinist form, time was better spent working in the house and in the barn. Once finished with Grade 6 or 7, Cate’s mother lifelong learning focused on household tasks and farming chores. In the early 1930s, at 21 years of age, she married Cate’s father, the son of another local farmer. She was already pregnant with their first child.

When Cate thinks of her older siblings, the genealogical threads of minimal education and pragmatic work continue to be imprinted in the lifelong learning decisions
of education. Cate’s oldest sister, with the constraints of war, like her mother only completed her basic schooling and was often kept home to help with the work in the large household. Another sister attended *huishoudschool*, a 2-year program after Grade 6 or 7 that focused on learning about household management. Sons of a farmer, Cate’s oldest brothers choose a trajectory of agriculture school (*landbouwschool*) after completing basic schooling. Although Cate’s oldest siblings did not attend school in Canada, younger ones did and, with the exception of her youngest brother, achieved no more than a Grade 10 education.

Immigrating to Canada at the age of 4, Cate began school in 1953 attending kindergarten for 2 years. She perceives that the reason she went to kindergarten for 2 years was that she “failed” her first year because she was unable to speak English. “I remember feeling pretty lost there. I didn’t know anybody and couldn’t understand the language… I think there was one or more occasions that one of the older ones, kind of had to come to the kindergarten room to kind of comfort me because I was crying” (#1, p. 8). “Well, I didn’t know the language—certainly it was a problem when we first came. Yah, it was just the immigration experience, I think I was a bit traumatized by it” (#4, p. 51). “And also I was not an outgoing person. You know, I was fearful. I was reserved. I was cautious” (#4, p. 52). Cate feels that her older siblings had an easier time adjusting to school. It would be Grade 3 before she felt comfortable:

The thing is when you are 6 or 7 or 8, you don’t really have insight into the bigger picture. You are just surviving. You listen to the teacher and you try to follow her directions and you try and fit in and um, but yah, you are not looking back and trying to analyse the situation. You are just in there for survival. (#4, pp. 68-69)
It was Cate’s Grade 3 teacher who would play a significant role in reconceptualizing the meaning of school for her. Cate noticed how she was well dressed and pretty and had a warm and caring personality:

Yah, I remember liking all my teachers, but I especially liked this one [class photo]. I don’t know whether she had a—she was just a very friendly, happy—very pleasant person. Not all teachers were very pleasant. Some were kind of stern but she was very—she seemed to know—just seemed to be born to be a teacher.

(#2, p. 20)

Looking at class photographs, Cate reflects that her teachers were generally all good, mostly Christian, and central to a positive and empowering school experience.

Cate completed Grade 6 in the Prairies and then, shortly after beginning Grade 7, she moved to Ontario where she continued in a new public school. “I don’t remember it being really upsetting but yes, of course it was different. I was frightened at first but it wasn’t—I think I adjusted pretty quickly. Some of the stuff I was taking I already had taken in the year before in Alberta in Grade 6” (#1, p.12). In Grade 8, Cate was met with the decision of what program to pursue in high school. Here she experienced tension between family history and expectations and what her teachers were telling her:

Well, even when I was in Grade 8, even when I had to decide about high school program, my teacher in Grade 8 encouraged me to get into a 5-year program and take Grade 13 because I had good marks. He said, “I think that you can do that okay.” But my dad he wanted me to take a 2-year basic program so that I would be done after Grade 10. (#1, p. 13)

In negotiating these disparate messages, she saw an opportunity to resist the cultural
assumptions of her immigrant family. As she acknowledges, in school she worked hard to make her immigrant identity invisible and tried to grapple with the Canadian ways as demonstrated by her teachers and classmates. As a reserved and cautious person, she found this difficult. “Like I kind of grew up with that [I’m not smart enough]. Just being an immigrant, yah, I think you don’t measure up to the people that were already here that were established” (#4, p. 47). As an added contradiction, at home and church, away from the eyes and scrutiny of school, Cate’s life continued to be engaged in and shaped by her immigrant and religious culture. While her father’s disenfranchisement of the church was palpable, it did not deter her own resistance to distance herself from his wielding the same sentiment on her. As shown by her life, the church stood as a pillar and important in any lifelong decisions.

Cate listened closely to her teachers and felt surprised, curious, and empowered by what they were telling her and yet, as an unknown, she was uncertain and cautious of how to enter into the world that they were suggesting. Both her parents advised that, like her older sisters, she should take the 2-year program and leave high school after Grade 10. “Yah, like to me that was positive encouragement because that was not coming from my family. … You know like, from the family it was kind of well, you know this is your lot in life—live with it” (#4, p. 13). “Like dad was of the mindset that women don’t have careers outside the home. Their work is inside the home—taking care of children, making meals, gardening” (#4, p. 53). “See mom was really reluctant to challenge dad on anything. I do recall she said take home ec you know something to do with managing a household” (#2, p. 29). “Well I think like observing Janny and Grace—I think too—I thought—I want more options than this. I don’t want to be stuck just housecleaning or
you know being a nurse’s aide or whatever” (#4, p. 44). Unable to fathom how she would be able to financially support going to university, Cate decided to take the middle road and took a 4-year business program. This exceeded and resisted her parents’ expectations and was an educational trajectory that would ensure a job that was different than her sisters:

The business program means a job and a job means income now, as opposed to income 5 years down the road. Because if I was going to go to university I would need someone to support me because I couldn’t support myself. Like, I can’t study and work at the same time. … Yah, and in those days I don’t think they had student loans. (#4, p. 45)

Cate was motivated by a desire to be independent, move away from the farm, and make money. She reflects, “I think, well it [the 4-year business program] was a practical thing to have and you didn’t have to study for long, long time to achieve it” (#4, p. 44). Just a year ahead, Cate’s older brother’s was also on a track to complete his Grade 12 high school diploma, the first in his family to do so.

In Grade 9, the school continued to put pressure on Cate to reach higher. As soon as I had one term finished in Grade 9… I was hauled into the guidance counsellor. [He said], “What are you doing in this program? Why aren’t you in the 5-year program?” Because I was acing everything… but anyways I didn’t change courses. I didn’t change programs. I graduated Grade 12 and got a job right away. (#1, p. 13)

In hindsight, Cate wonders if she should have listened more closely to her teachers. She consistently had excellent grades and had the highest average in her 4-year program. Cate
shows me her report cards that she has saved that memorializes this achievement in her life. She points out a photograph of a culminating school trip she made to Montreal to experience Expo with her high school friends. This was a phenomenal moment in the trajectory of lifelong learning. Travelling independently outside the boundaries of her neo-Calvinist sphere, she would find courage to strike out on her own, moving to the city, and travelling to Europe. After completing her Grade 12, while working full-time, she immediately began taking night courses that included Grade 13 credits for university. While she was genuinely interested in the courses she took, she acknowledges that her teachers’ message was always in the back of her mind. Cate also decided to get her driver’s licence. “I’m sure my parents didn’t encourage me to get my licence. I think I just decided myself, I needed to learn how to drive” (#3, p. 18). It was not long after that, she moved off the family farm and moved into the city. The week after she graduated from Grade 12, Cate began working in an office for a company she had been employed by in the previous summer.

After working for 2 years and having saved enough money—17 years after she had left—Cate returned to Holland. Once in Holland, she would meet up with two friends (both Dutch CRC immigrants to Canada) and with the purchase of a Euro-rail pass, travelled through Europe for a good part of the summer:

I went by boat… went to England [Liverpool] and then I travelled down to London and I got on a boat to Holland and my brother Henk was in the army in Germany and he picked me up in Holland, drove me to Nel’s [eldest sister]. So then I was in Holland for a bit and then I met up with two friends from Toronto and we travelled all through Europe for July and August. (#1, p. 14)
Cate admits this trip was a turning point and the beginning of her interest in learning more about her Dutch heritage and family genealogy.

When Cate returned, she moved to a larger city, lived in an apartment with three Dutch Calvinist immigrant roommates, and worked in the sales office for the same company she had worked for in her hometown community. This was an exciting and independent time for Cate. Most of her friends had moved away to other places or were in school. Her best friend, who she had gone to Europe with, was a roommate. “It wasn’t a step up work wise, no, but it was a step up as far as social development. Like, I mean I was going to move where my best friend was” (#3, p. 18). Cate felt she made enough money to meet the needs of her living situation. She says that they split the apartment rent and pooled resources for food and utility expenses. The apartment had a pool—a novelty—and was accessible to resources that would broaden Cate’s social perspective. This included her contact with students through CRC services at a large university. She continued to take Grade 13 courses in night school. In the early 1970s Cate met her future husband and the trajectory of her lifelong learning would take a turn.

**The Helpmate**

“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone.
I will make a helper suitable for him.’” (Genesis 2:18)

On an evening in the early 1970s, Gerrit, a brother of one of Cate’s roommates, called on the telephone and thinking that he was calling for his sister, Cate was ready to pass the phone when he made it clear that he was calling to talk to her and to ask if she would be interested in getting together:

Well, I wasn’t impressed with him at first but then, um, yah he kind of grew on me… I really liked his car before I liked him. … I thought that’s pretty cool to
drive a 68 Cougar. … That shows how shallow I was… I liked him—then I liked him a lot. … He was quiet… I think he kind of—um, he kind of broke down my defenses. I think I wasn’t really trusting of people and I always had a guard up and he kind of broke down those barriers down a bit. I guess I went through a time too where I thought men couldn’t really be trusted or you know. Are there any good reliable men out there? And he kind of restored that… that there are men in the world that can be trusted and I could count on them. And if he says he is going to be someplace at a certain place at a certain time he actually shows up. He’s there and he’s on time… I guess I need structure. He was an organized person too. (#4, pp. 58-59)

Smiling, Cate recalls how it was only the second or third date before he indicated that he was interested in marriage. “He said, ‘I want to get married’… I didn’t really want to commit just yet [laughter]… so we just kept going together and we got engaged in November and married the following May” (#3, p. 21).

**Wedding Vignette**

In her journal, Cate writes that she bought her wedding dress from Princess Formals and exclaims, “It fits perfectly!” While this was a special moment in her wedding preparations, many of her memories of this occasion cause her a sense of aggravation and sadness. Thinking about the pressures that swallowed this turning point, Cate reflects that this was yet another occasion for her father to resist and make an unforgiveable scene. In hindsight, she realizes that much of the clash with her father was most likely her reluctance to communicate but as she admits, she avoided this because her experience with him was unpredictable and irritable.
Maybe dad felt threatened because we never really discussed these things with him beforehand and thinking back, I probably should have. But you know I was always afraid of dad and um—because you, kind of had to get him on a good day—like when he was in a compliant mood. And anyway it just—when this discussion came up about our wedding invitations—when we were going to get married and who was going to marry us; it just, it went really downhill. (#4, p. 20)

In spite of the fact that the couple paid and planned for their own wedding, as tradition would have it, Cate conceded to her father’s demands that the wedding be rearranged for 7:00 p.m., so that milking could be completed and that they would have an alternate pastor conduct their wedding ceremony. “Dad completely lost it… we were going to have a pastor from [local community] marry us—and dad just went ballistic. He said, ‘Well if he is there, I’m not going to be there.’ We got a pastor from [another CRC community]” (#4, p. 20).

But anyway, he couldn’t stop the wedding. I mean, we went home and we were both so upset. Like, I was so upset I thought for Pete’s sake I don’t need—I’m 23 years old, I don’t need his blessing to get married. I’ll get married without him. I was just so—oh I was just so distraught. I was glad when it was over. … But I know I went to the doctor the day before or 2 days before and got some tranquilizers—to get me through the day [laughter]. …Yes, because I was so stressed out about it. You shouldn’t have to, you know, it shouldn’t be a time to smooth over a family crisis you know. She [mother] didn’t really say much… I sent them a letter to just kind of explain how we wanted things—that I wanted him [dad] to walk me down the aisle like he had done for my sisters and the
wedding was going to be at 7:00 o’clock and we were going to get a pastor from [another CRC community]. And uh, yah—and it was fine, but I mean he never apologized. (#4, pp. 21-22)

Cate asked her roommates and Gerrit’s sisters to stand up for her at the wedding. She contemplates that it should have been her own sisters that she asked but says that she was never really close to any of them, she was close to these people. She had developed a bond with her husband’s family while distancing herself from her own.

When Cate thinks about her husband, she is clear to say that he “saved her.” She laughs when she reflects,

My husband, he saved me from myself. Yah, he was a high school drop-out, but he was not dumb. When he did go to school, he did well in school. But yah, he was also shaped by the attitudes of his parents. …He quit after Grade 10. … He worked for his dad for a year [on a dairy farm] and then he moved. … So he worked; he did some odd jobs and he worked for a farmer for a while and then he got into construction. …He kind of got a licence before all those rules [apprenticeship] came in. Yah, he did get a licence. I do have that certificate somewhere… because he had so many years of experience already, he didn’t have to go to school. (#4, pp. 57-58)

When Cate married she resigned her position at work in the city and moved into the suburbs and, as a married couple, they bought their first home. Her new job at a local hospital was a significant pay reduction. She recalls that while the position was not particularly challenging, she had already decided that she would leave her position in the
city. Working in a male dominated industry, where she managed the “girls in the office,” she did not see any advancement for herself.

If I hadn’t gotten married I think I probably would’ve tried to change jobs or go back to school or something… I didn’t think this job was really going to go anywhere… and I was trying to, you know, broaden out a little bit more. (#3, p. 21)

Cate worked for the hospital until her first child was born, and then became a “stay at home mom”:

Initially I looked forward to getting a break from working but after being home full time with a baby then I… well I didn’t like it that I lost a paycheque. I liked having—I liked having a paycheque… well I knew that the income is family income… and it is for everybody but… it took me a while to realize that his paycheque was also my paycheque. (#3, p. 22)

Within 6 years two more children were added to the family. She explains that during this time she often weighed the advantages and disadvantages of going back to work or staying home. Cate concluded that no matter how much a woman does outside the home, she was still expected to be the home manager. “Like if you don’t clean the house yourself, you’re in charge of arranging for someone to clean it. If you don’t look after the children yourself, you are in charge of looking after who’s going to look after the children” (#3, p. 23). While Cate admits that she missed her independence, lack of income, and her workplace identity, it always seemed there were far more pragmatic reasons to stay home:

Yah, but you know those days, women didn’t get a year maternity leave.
Maternity leave was coming into practice because I did get some maternity leave like 17 weeks or so but that wasn’t enough. So I just yah, I quit my job because I was home with the baby. Yah I tossed these things around like working um, you know, I wanted to work part-time you know maybe 1 day a week or even 2 days a week like outside the home away from my family but you know those opportunities they weren’t that great and then you had the problem of child care. So who would look after the kids? I certainly couldn’t expect my parents to look after the kids and Gerrit’s parents weren’t going to look after them because they were old. They had already umpteen grandchildren so they were getting tired of it. … If you only have a part-time income, it might barely be enough to pay the babysitters so you know. And does that mean you are going to have a second vehicle? So if you are working just to put a second vehicle on the road is it worth it? So I kept weighing these things. (#4, pp. 53-54)

Being a “stay at home mom” was not an easy choice for Cate. She speaks of income tax time as an example of how staying at home was valued substantially below what the actual cost it would be to pay someone for the work she did. “I found it demeaning and at different times I thought, ‘If I’m worth something why am I not paid?’ So I can see that housewives could get—you know really struggles with self-esteem” (#3, p. 22).

As Cate negotiated motherhood, she did occasional jobs to help out the family income and to help out those who needed some temporary support. For example, she filled in for the church secretary to cover for vacation time. She helped out a number of years for an accountant during the busy tax season. She did some housecleaning. She typed university and college essays. During this time Cate also volunteered at her church
and children’s school. She admits that going back to her career once all of her children were in school or off to university seemed daunting and that even though she had achieved an exceptional level of competency before leaving her work, over time she felt as if she had lost her skills and not kept up with the change of progress/knowledge. “But I think by that time, well, yah—I didn’t really have the energy. Um, yah maybe once I got into my 50s sometimes I think I was depressed at times” (#4, p. 54).

I don’t know if I was really depressed. It was just a very busy time because we were sandwiched between kids going off to university and you know the transition with that and then his parents and my parents being sick. [Within a 5-year period both sets of parents passed away.] You are pulled between your kids and looking after sick people. It was just kind of a stressful time. (#4, pp. 59-60)

When her husband started his own construction business in the mid 1980s, Cate took a computer course to help with keeping the financial books and the administrative tasks of the business:

No, it [business] wasn’t really equal. Like we were—it was a partnership on paper but um, I mean basically I was his paper shuffler. You know, I paid the bills and you know put all the data on the computer—dealt with the accountant and all that kind of stuff. I was kind of his office administrator but I didn’t do any of the hands on work or the you know the pricing or… I mean he would ask my advice on how to type something or how to print something. …Yah, or how to say it when he was making contracts with people. But I was not on the job with him. Sometimes if a house was just about finished, I might clean the windows or clean the floor or something. (#4, pp. 54-55)
Cate continued to help her husband in his business until he passed away.

Today, Cate volunteers in various ways. She perceives that she has adequate finances and does not need to work for an income but contemplates that she will continue to do volunteer work. Currently she works at a Christian ministry that serves dinners for those in the community at risk and food insecure. The initiative is a collaboration of several local churches including her own. She says that after her experience with her husband, she would be interested in volunteering at the hospital:

I still like to be working but volunteer work so that I can set my own hours… or yah, even to be able to do more visiting—to visit people more… than I have been able to. Like I went to visit my family last week. Well, I hadn’t been there since last fall and I couldn’t just get there because it was busy with the kids—the grandkids. (#4, p. 56)

As Cate engages in her life history and family genealogy project, she is attempting to become reconnected with her siblings who have become distanced over the years, to better understand out how and why her life played out the way that it did and comprehend how the experience of displacement shaped the person she became.

**Mothering and Grandmothering**

When Cate became a mother her parents already had more than 40 grandchildren so it seemed to her, like her own birth, they were already worn-out of their grandparenting role. Cate expresses that she never yearned for her mother’s help (she views as traditional) in the initial care of her new baby:

But I never, when I had children of my own, I never yearned to have my mother help me out. … Like some women do but I never did because I don’t know—
mom—I never felt well… she never confided in me and do I didn’t confide in her. Like, I don’t know how to describe the relationship but you know she’s your mother but there’s just so many things that you know like I would like to talk about but I just can’t imagine talking about those things with my mother. (#2, p. 31)

With the birth of Cate’s second child she experienced post-partum health challenges that affected the quality of her life for about 2 years:

It took me a long time to feel—to kind of pull myself into shape. … If a new mom is in poor health, it’s pretty hard to cope with the demands of little kids… I mean little kids are challenging anyway but if you feel like crap—I can’t get up in the morning… these kids are driving you nuts… and little kids, if mommy and daddy are uptight, little kids are uptight, you know. (#1, p. 18)

She explains that everything just seemed to take so much longer and mustering enough energy to negotiate a newborn and a 2-year old most days was out of her reach. “When that happened to me then I could really understand what Anna [sister-in-law] was experiencing, that you don’t—you don’t get off the couch because you can’t get off the couch. It’s that bad” (#4, p. 65).

Experiencing post-partum challenges reminded Cate of her experience still living on the farm when her sister-in-law, who also lived on the farm, experienced significant post-partum difficulties after the birth of one of her children:

I was still living on the farm when Anna had her nervous breakdown… and I remember thinking when Anna was going through this breakdown like you know she kind of sat around and didn’t do anything and I can remember thinking,
“Well, why don’t get off that couch and do something? You know how hard can it be? Get off that couch and do something.” … The situation that they lived with on the farm didn’t help anything because there was always tension between Theo and Anna and mom and dad or between dad and Anna. I know dad when she was having this breakdown, dad called her a selfish bitch. So I thought, yah, that really helps—that really helped. Yah, she is a selfish bitch. Because she is suffering a breakdown, so she is a selfish bitch. (#4, pp. 65-66)

While Cate is close to her children, she admits that motherhood also presented some challenging years where at times she felt “trapped” (#2, p. 33) and “quite often I thought I was a terrible parent. I’m just thinking, I’m doing way too much yelling, way too much yelling” (#2, p. 33).

Currently, Cate has eight grandchildren, some of them close by who she babysits and with whom she spends regular time. Cate also travels to see her other grandchildren keeping in touch with them as they grow up. Cate recognizes how her husband saved her as a co-parent. She describes her husband’s deep investment not only in his boys’ lives but also later in his grandchildren’s lives. The year that Gerrit passed, three new grandchildren were born. This is a confounding sadness for Cate, that her husband did not have the chance to grow old with his grandchildren:

Oh yes, he was a really good dad. He was real hands on—you know come in and pitch in. … Yah, he helped the kids with dinner and with clean up and helped with bath and helped—you know- read the stories, get them to bed. Yah, I had no problem leaving the kids with him… he was really engaged with his kids. (#2, p. 33)
The only thing is, like Gerrit passed away and I don’t want to be a single grandmother, you know. Because sometimes when I’m with the kids and looking after them, like I want an extra pair of hands—particularly with four kids—I need an extra pair of hands. And the thing is, Gerrit would have LOVED that. I mean he just loved going over there and the kids were all over him and I miss that. I’m always on my own—so that is hard. But no, I have a good relationship with my grandkids, yah. (#4, p. 36)

Lifelong Learning and Loss

After her husband’s death, Cate sold the family home he had built and moved into a condominium where she knew people from her CRC congregation. As time passes, Cate wonders about the life she has been dealt. On losing her husband at a young age, she finds herself asking deep questions about her own identity. Losing her husband was a “pretty lonely process” (#4, p. 38). Her children, all with newborn babies, while there to help in tangible ways (e.g., helped with moving, fixing things up) were unable to provide strong emotional support:

No, because so much of my identity is linked to my husband and he’s gone so you know… what am I? Or who am I? What am I even here for? I know for a while I, yah, I didn’t really want to live anymore. I thought you know… I just wanted to say, “God, why don’t you finish me off too,” but yet you can’t do that. I mean, I have to go on for the sake of my kids and grandkids. (#4, p. 38)

Recognizing that she needed help (to learn how to negotiate grief), Cate accessed professional counselling services through the CRC church. Along with being mentally
overwhelmed and saddened by her circumstances, Cate also experienced some specific physical health issues which took a lengthy time to diagnose and recover from:

I think I was getting the problems because I had a weakened immune system so I couldn’t fight anything. [So why did you have a weakened immune system?] Yah, so why did I? I don’t know, I mean it could be from grief, from emotional stuff. I mean I had to deal with an awful lot in a short space of time. You know my husband got sick. He died. There was a funeral. I fixed up the house. I sold the house. I moved twice [laughter]. I’m just going, going, going, and… No, so I had to deal with a lot of major changes in a short period of time. … This is a permanent change. (#4, p. 38)

Cate continues to be sensitive to the potential for a reoccurrence and so she is very mindful of what she eats and how she lives her life. Through her family project; doing research in the local library, visiting family, and reaching for new opportunities, Cate has a renewed spirit to bring a certain coherence to her life and the life of her family.

**Summary of the Life Histories: A Cross-Case Interpretation**

In this section, I summarize a cross-case analysis of the three life histories represented, demonstrating how these lives—lived in parallel time and as a peculiar culture in Canada—were connected and congruent (or incongruent) in a trajectory of lifelong learning. Gouthro (2005) demonstrates that the trajectory of women’s lifelong learning can be delineated by identity formation, the relationships negotiated, and engagement of labour. Using her framework, I examine in a cross case analysis how identity, relationships, and labour are significant in shaping the trajectory of lifelong learning for these immigrant women.
Beginning as a lower class farmhand family in the Netherlands, Kali’s identity formation was influenced by her parents’ immigration focus and intent of educating their children as a pursuit for success and an improvement of their economic and social status. In spite of what appears to be an unremarkable experience in K-12 schooling, Kali, in a most unlikely way (she was not a high achieving student), followed in the trajectory of her older brothers (who all had Canadian university degrees), attended 4 years of college, graduated with a degree, and began a lifetime of meaningful work/labour and learning in Canada’s public correctional and judiciary system. Now in her 70s, she speculates that she will continue to provide labour in the public sphere, stating that she does not understand the concept of retirement in relation to living and learning. Her lifelong learning has been dynamically focused on engagement in the public sphere which is distinct from Cate and Johanna’s trajectories of learning in the private sphere. Unlike them, she has never married, and yet she has learned about mothering and grandmothering in relation to her adopted racialized refugee daughter and grandchildren and is committed to them in her trajectory of lifelong learning.

While she remains close to her siblings and extended family, Kali’s most intimate relationships are with people outside the neo-Calvinist community—colleagues at work and people who she has met along the way in her curiosity of negotiating meaning outside the religious border of an immigrant enclave. This disposition she attributes to her father, who she admires, and has left an indelible mark on her trajectory of lifelong learning. A significant tipping point is Kali’s exposure to the Black culture early in her college experience. As an intersection of her Dutch neo-Calvinist identity, she demonstrates her propensity to develop cultural relationships different than her own (e.g.,
friendships, sexual partnerships, family). In the trajectory of lifelong learning, Kali has come to realize that, while she expected (like Cate and Johanna), to marry and have a family, when she did not she had the capacity to engage a fulsome life that demonstrated a woman’s ability to learn in ways that are dynamic and in her words, surprising. While formal schooling may have set the stage, in a peculiar family dynamic and a particular theory of context (historical, political, cultural), her learning demonstrates a nonconforming outcome that reveals an integration in a Canadian context that differs quite notably from Cate and Johanna.

When Cate looked at a family photo, that was taken just before leaving the Netherlands, she reflected on how the photo was so well constructed; everyone looking just right, no hair askew, faces clean, clothing properly fitted, and everyone looking straight at the camera. She questioned, how this could be of a family filled with so much mishap, bad luck, and trepidation? Cate’s identity is shaped by resistance. Her parents, who came from a long line of farm renters in the Netherlands, immigrated to Canada in hopes of owning a farm so that Cate’s brothers would have new-found opportunity to continue in the family’s line/knowledge of labour. For the most part, farming would be irrelevant to Cate’s trajectory of lifelong learning.

Unlike Kali and outside the boundaries of her family relationships which are distant, Cate’s associations made in public schooling gave her a sense of self-esteem and agency, albeit still limited by perceived cultural constraints. In spite of her perceived parents’ lack of interest of her, after a tentative beginning and the encouragement of her teachers, she thrived in her school learning environment. Her achievement was exceptional and distinguished in relation to the minimal formal education of her overall
family history. As evidence of this time she has saved her report cards, school photographs, and other relevant school memorabilia to memorialize her achievement of her past. After studying business in high school Cate found an office job, travelled to Europe, moved into the city, and looked forward to what she would experience and learn outside the constraints and challenges of her family home. Today, in the context of what she knows now, she wonders with some regret about her decision not to strive for more in a trajectory of lifelong learning.

While Cate’s labour in the public sphere continued to be gendered (office administration/management for men), she used formal schooling to move past the kind of labour (housekeeping, care giver) that she saw modelled in her older sisters. This trajectory of learning was short lived when she met and married a fellow CRC immigrant man, had children, left the workplace and withdrew under the canopy of an ethnic enclave. As Cate explains, in spite of her determination to learn and achieve something different, at the same time and perhaps paradoxically, she always imagined that she would marry and have children. In her words, her husband “saved her” and in their relationship she gradually found herself becoming his helpmate relinquishing an individual trajectory of learning to parallel her husband. She rationalized, as a ruling relation, that her labour in the household (private sphere) was better served for her family and, later, her husband’s business. As she delineates in her story—while she cannot explain it—beginning with the birth of her second child, as life went on, she found that her energy became diminished, and she felt intermittent depression and disillusionment. Her participation in this life history research study was motivated by a critical need to find answers to the underlying problems that makes her feel at times drained and unable
to negotiate learning. While she finds it difficult to mother and grand-mother without her partner, she identifies that she must prevail in a commitment to them. Unlike her father’s resistance to the church, over her lifetime Cate has been faithful to her long standing relationship with the CRC church. As Cate negotiates widowhood and loss, she also reaches out to new learning resources and experiences which include, perhaps tentatively, relationships and volunteer labour opportunities outside the neo-Calvinist community. She is hopeful for transformation.

While Johanna comes from a genealogy of farm owners, her father was unsuccessful in his bid to own a farm in the Netherlands thus the family, with a large number of boys, immigrated to Canada. Johanna, the only girl in the family, experienced school in Canada as a distinct cultural difference. Uprooted from an emerging adolescent identity, she was 14 when she arrived in Canada, had been in high school already for 2 years; happy and expectant in being recommended for the MULO—the first in her family. In Canada this trajectory would be abated where in a one-room school house with Grades 1 to 8, her learning began with pictures cut out of a catalogue glued into a notebook with English words. At the age of 17, she inferred that she was too old to continue in high school, finished Grade 10, attended a 1-year program to become a registered nursing assistant, and continued a lifelong trajectory of gendered caring for others.

As an extension of her propensity to develop caring relationships, Johanna also anticipated that she would marry and have children. She married a fellow CRC immigrant, had children and became a “stay at home” mom and, like her mother, the “good” wife of a farmer. In her late 40s, with disruption and turmoil in the homeplace,
she turned to labour outside the borders of her neo-Calvinist community. Here she would not have to confront and negotiate the ideological scrutiny of her family situation in a relationship with those in the church. As a housekeeper for Canadian seniors the trajectory of her lifelong learning would open up an opportunity to join and volunteer in the Women’s Association; a place to work out her private issues. Here she found a sisterhood outside the church walls and a new Canadian interpretation of life. While Johanna continues a solid relationship with the CRC immigrant community and living out the traditions and beliefs of her neo-Calvinist ideology/culture, her learning trajectory has also made her look outward where she finds herself, volunteering and providing leadership in a Canadian context. As an intersection between two cultures, Johanna’s negotiation of learning has also transcended into the communities she serves; constructing a space for relationship that brings them together.

Identity, relationship, and labour demonstrate how the life histories of these three Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women come together to represent their experiences of lifelong learning. Connected by time and space, these women bring to the fore their points of reference, their various lived experiences, the perceived risks they took, and how they negotiated their personal agency within the context of an immigrant community in an effort to find meaning in a Canadian context. As immigrant women, Cate, Kali, and Johanna reveal that education/learning took place within the tensions/contradictions found in the school, church, family home, and the workplace. These experiences, throughout the lifespan, shaped their decisions and learning capacity in diverse ways. As Davis (2004), Wheatley (2006), and Smith (2005) assert, the negotiation of meaning/learning is dynamic and unique to each knower but also subject to the text
(ruling relations) in a particular time and place. As such, there is a coherence in their life histories, an imagination that when brought together facilitates an understanding of how a trajectory of learning plays out in the intersection of an immigrant and host culture.

**Conclusion**

“The story of one life cannot be told separately from the story of other lives…. All the lives that surround us are in us” (Griffin, 1992, p. 168).

There was a certain kind of solidity in constructing the life stories of Kali, Johanna, and Cate, as if I was reaching into the broader community of other Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women, including myself—that this was OUR story. In the process of listening to, organizing, and analyzing participants’ stories, I was struck that what was happening historically in their stories was also happening simultaneously in my own and it revealed for me many surprises and explanations that added to meaning related to my own lifelong learning. This made me realize how much our stories are framed by our circumstance, our cultural and historical context, the people that we know, the experiences we live, the labour we do, and that upon inquiry, the life histories of Kali, Johanna, and Cate reverberated into my own life and extended my own point of reference and lifelong learning.

In Chapter 5, I presented my findings for the research question: In the context of lifelong learning what are the remembered experiences of schooling and learning for Dutch neo-Calvinist women who immigrated to Canada post World War II? By narrating three life histories, as told by Kali, Johanna, and Cate, I represent their learning experiences of immigration and negotiation of two cultures. Each story examines the participants’ trajectory of lifelong learning in the various sites of lived experience. In summarizing a participant’s identity, her relationships, and labour, the stories convey the
various assumptions and tensions of being an immigrant woman and how they played out in a trajectory of lifelong learning. Chapter 6 briefly reviews the study including a description of four sites of learning relevant to the participants’ lifelong learning. In life history methodology, I am interested in hearing the individual’s story but want to make sense of it by juxtaposing it to the historical, political, and cultural context. In a critical feminist perspective, a dialectic method was employed to delineate seven cross-cutting tensions/contradictions that, in light of a theory of context, were evident in the participants’ lived experience. I consider some applications for further research relevant to lifelong learning and I finish with some final thoughts concerning the experience of my own lifelong learning.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION—TENSIONS, CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

“Existence is always unfinished—its end is always “not yet” in sight. There is not absolute salvation or redemption… the dream of the best life constantly glimmers anew as humanity reflects on what it has ignored” (Bronner, 2017, p. 71).

As Dorothy Smith (1999, 2005) conceives of it, the social arises in people’s activities and through the ongoing and purposeful concerting and coordinating of those activities. Ruling or social relations of everyday life actually organizes what goes on. It is an interplay of people’s own decisions and actions and how they are coordinated with outside events that are part of social relations (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). Analytically in life history, there are two sites of interest: the local setting where life is lived, experienced, and remembered by actual people; and the contextual (cultural, political, historical) site that is outside the boundaries of one’s everyday experience. Likewise, Gouthro (2014) points out that the researcher is interested in hearing the individual’s story, but seeks to make sense of it by considering the historical, political, and cultural context of the participant’s life. Under an analytical gaze, “day-to-day experiences, taken-for-granted assumptions, and routine activities may provide insights into how society is structured, how learning occurs, and how people make sense of their own lives” (Gouthro, 2014, p. 89).

In particular, Smith’s (1999, 2005) approach to understanding the text (ruling relations) is enormously useful. It opens up empirical investigation into the power constructs operating in the everyday life that otherwise lie hidden. For immigrant women, when attention is paid to the ways in which they enact and embody dominant values and assumptions in their daily habits and routines, it also brings awareness to the invisible
ways in which women compare with dominant ways of being (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). A focus on ruling relations also enables researchers to inquire about how people (women) are related to each other in predetermined social ways, even when they do not know each other and have never met. The power of the text to coordinate and concert embraces/confines/controls people, even in a disposition of resistance or contradiction, to act in particular and coherent ways. As such, the text is woven in the narratives of Cate, Johanna, and Kali and while their lives demonstrate that they are individual, unique, and sometimes contradictory, they are at the same time relational and connected through the power of the text in time and space.

In this chapter, the discussion brings together a narrative (lived experience and contextual influences) to better understand the gendered experiences of immigration for Dutch neo-Calvinist women and the implications in their trajectory of lifelong learning. The chapter begins with a brief review of the study; how the research took place, its purpose, and methodology. As an inquiry of immigrant women’s negotiation of ruling relations, the chapter proceeds with a brief description of four sites of learning (the family home, the church, the school, the workplace/volunteer place) that were evident in the women’s life histories. With this discussion as a background, I apply a critical dialectic method with a feminist interpretation that delineates and makes visible the various cross-cutting tensions/ruling relations that arose within the sites of learning. To conclude, I summarize the chapter and raise a number of implications for further research to be explored. I finish with some final thoughts concerning the experience of my own lifelong learning.

**Summary of the Study**

Addressing an historical and scholarly gap, the purpose of my life history research was an analysis of the lifelong learning of three Dutch neo-Calvinist women who
immigrated to Canada shortly after World War II. Employing a critical feminist theoretical framework, the research examined the experiences and memories of these immigrant women as a sociocultural critique of the institutional relations (schooling, religious, family, vocation) that shaped their trajectory of lifelong learning (Gouthro, 2002, 2009a, 2014; Grace, 2013). Central to the study was an interrogation of their educational experience, in the context of an immigrant family life, their pillarized Dutch culture, and Calvinist religiosity.

Three Dutch immigrant women (Johanna, Cate, and Kali) participated in the research study. They arrived as children with their families in Canada in the early 1950s, identified as members of a Dutch neo-Calvinist ethnicity, and attended formal public schooling. Although lifelong learning encompasses all forms of education/learning (formal, informal, non-formal, incidental), the participants’ engagement and negotiation of Canadian schooling was integral to telling their life history. Here participants had the opportunity to discuss various influences of their schooling, including family, church, and social experiences. In this way life history methodology provided an extended space to explore important learning throughout a lifespan that occurs both inside and outside of formal schooling contexts.

Johanna, Cate, and Kali were recruited for the research study from three different Christian Reformed communities in Ontario. In a year-long collaboration, they were interviewed for the purpose of co-constructing their life history. Goodson (2013) asserts the data in life history methodology represent a set of intimate and often fragmentary glimpses of ordinary people’s lives that need to be organized, theorized, and constructed into a phenomenal whole. With this in mind, as a way to organize and put together the
life history, a chronological timeline was recursively assembled with the data collection after each interview. The participants reviewed and provided feedback for each iteration of the timeline’s expansion and increasing refinement. Using the timeline, the data for each participant were analyzed and organized into themes (e.g., Helpmate, Caring, Immigrant Church, A Trajectory of Family Learning and Unlearning, Uprooted) that theorized their lifelong learning and delineated particular learning sites. A cross-case analysis was conducted to conceptualize how the themes drawn from each participant were connected and congruent (or incongruent) to the narrative of the other participants, and how these data, in turn, were juxtaposed to a particular theory of context. By employing a dialectic method, I identified various tensions located in sites of learning (the private home, the church, school, and the workplace/volunteer place) thus conducting a sociocultural critique of the institutional ruling relations that shaped and influenced the trajectory of these women’s lifelong learning.

**Sites of Learning**

Lifelong learning may be emerging as the common thread that connects all learning in the diverse formal, informal, and non-formal spaces and contexts in which it now occurs. Thus it is all the more important that we conceive lifelong learning broadly in contextual and relational terms. (Grace, 2013, p. 40)

Groen and Kawalilak (2014) assert that lifelong learning encompasses diverse learning pursued and experienced in many different ways throughout a lifetime. Grace (2013) also conveys this deeper meaning of education advocating for a critical practice of lifelong learning—a holistic view that attends to human instrumental, social, and cultural needs. Gouthro (2005) adds that a critical practice also challenges taken-for-granted
assumptions of what constitutes important learning and in particular raises issues of gendered differences.

In his historical analysis and critique, Grace (2013) asserts that in contrast to his own claim, the construct of lifelong learning has predominantly upheld neoliberal values aimed at strengthening economic/marketplace output. Such legitimacy, he argues, begins in children’s schooling and continues in formalized continuing adult education. In his historical analysis of the inception of the common school, Osborne (2001) explains that industrial capitalism of the 19th century called for increased knowledge and habits of mind relevant to the workplace thus the mandate of the common school shifted from what was classical education for the elite in private schools to an educative mechanism that could engage a broader economy. With the emergence of neoliberalism in the 20th century, education values became increasingly aimed at strengthening economic output while at the same time interpreted to achieve social benefits for the good of society (Grace, 2013).

Gouthro (2005, 2006) argues the influence of the marketplace in education produces inequalities for many people, including women. She asserts that when a neoliberal lens pays attention to learning associated to an overzealous devotion to money, it distorts learning process and in particular becomes dismissive of learning spaces relevant to women whose lives, in a masculine binary, may be less connected to the economy. Cate’s father expressed this very sentiment when he discouraged his daughter from advancing beyond a Grade 10 education, asserting that school education was a “waste” for women who will ultimately settle into gendered roles in the homeplace. Gouthro questions, like Grace (2013), the dominance of neoliberal ruling relations in
learning institutions and advocates that all forms of learning (formal, informal, non-formal, incidental) have vital roles to play especially in the context of gender. In particular, she asserts that further examination of these various learning sites is warranted to better understand the lifelong learning of women. In that vein, extrapolated from the participants’ life histories, four learning sites (school, church, family home, workplace/volunteer place) are described here to position a dialectic inquiry into the tensions of cultural difference relevant to a critique of ruling relations linked to an immigrant woman’s lifelong learning.

Schools

Wotherspoon (2009) argues, in relation to formal schooling, a neoliberal/liberal system mirrors a wider society which paradoxically imposes control while at the same time advocates autonomy. The way public education has been conceptualized—what is taught, how it is transmitted, and what is conveyed—reflects the intrinsic constructs of power that operate within the educational system. Dei and Karumanchery (2001) concur adding, “Although appearing consistent with liberal democratic values, the deeply ingrained ideology of meritocracy belies the truth of oppression and social advantage” (p. 189). As Freire (2010) argues, it is difficult to conceive the model of common schooling as problematic when it is inherently connected to a greater system perspective. While it purports to provide autonomy to individuals to reflect critically and contemplate diverse ideas and alternatives, it also is a powerful tool for integration and cultural reproduction (McGraw, 2015). The tension in the paradox can also be delineated in Cate, Kali, and Johanna’s experience of school.

As an inquiry into lifelong learning, attending a Canadian public school was a
central criterion for this life history study. As their families negotiated settling in a new country, Cate, Kali, and Johanna grappled with the challenges of attending a number of public schools. While each experience may have differed, at the same time, school was a stability amidst all of the other family transition. For immigrant children, attending a public school first served as a mediation into a Canadian culture. As the participants point out, it was here that they learned about differences in food, dress, language, religion, and customs. For Cate, school was a place where she knew a sense of poverty and deficiency, where she wore hand-me-down clothes and spoke an “unpolished” language. While she was touched by the generous spirit of her teachers and classmates, it also accentuated how she had less and how she wanted to be more like them. As a young teen, she worked hard in school so that one day she would mirror its Canadian assumptions and expectations. Like Cate, Johanna was also aware of the “luxuries” her classmates took as common. In the early years she remembers going to school with inappropriate clothing and footwear for a Canadian winter. Johanna was older, in a one-room school house with students who were all younger than herself. Kali also remembers this awkwardness of schooling with her older sister who began attending school after first working for a short time when they arrived in Canada to provide financial support for the family. Kali’s experience with her refugee family is also relevant here, pointing out the proclivity for a dominant society to behave as if immigrant children lack cognitive capacity and have parents who do not adequately support their children’s learning. In this research, the experience of schooling, especially in the early years of immigration, demonstrates the exceptional demand of cognitive resources needed for immigrant children to negotiate meaning in a Canadian learning institution. In those first years of school, Johanna, Cate,
and Kali demonstrated a resilience that enabled them to be successful in terms of school expectations.

With time, the intensity of duplicity became diminished such that Johanna, Cate, and Kali were able to negotiate the cultural distinctions of a Canadian context and feel a certain sense of belonging while at the same time maintaining a separate neo-Calvinist identity in the homeplace. Johanna speaks of how, as a teenager, she found herself taking on the parental role to negotiate and interpret the Canadian institution for herself and her younger brothers, explaining that her parents were unfamiliar with the English language and Canadian culture. Likewise, in high school, Cate made her own determination about the program she would follow. Both leveraged their school learning in relation to their neo-Calvinist homeplace. Their experience promoted a certain kind of confidence and agency in relation to other sites of learning.

While Van Arragon Hutten (2001) and Fallon (2000) argue that it was difficult for neo-Calvinists to feel at home in a public school, Cate, Johanna, and Kali demonstrate that even though they negotiated various boundaries around their experiences (e.g., they did not date boys from school, they did not attend dances) overall they expressed a positive experience and one that was integral to a trajectory of lifelong learning and integration into a Canadian society. The life histories present both reflections of cultural reproduction and individual agency. For example, like all of her peers, Johanna spoke of how she was excited to sew and wear a blouse and skirt that demonstrated her knowledge of what was trendy as a teenager in a public school. Cate too was interested in clothing and hairstyle trends that she saw represented in school. School also became a place where she could reflect on vocational options that were unavailable to her at home. It was in
school that Kali began to contemplate social work as a meaningful vocation. The merits and experience of formal schooling represented a certain achievement in the lifelong learning for each of the participants. These were milestones that were relevant to their access to the workplace (short or long lived), their personal growth and development, and also useful for knowledge that would be relevant in the private sphere (e.g., nursing skills, accounting skills, administrative skills, sewing).

As children and teens, Kali, Cate, and Johanna spoke of Canadian friends they had made at school, who were also neighbours and playmates who took the bus and shared a common childhood experience. As Cate expressed, the diversity represented in friendships outside of church were fun and exciting. She recounted the enjoyment she had with children living on the farm and how in high school she went to Expo in Montreal. While meaningful and significant, these “Canadian” friendships would still be distinct and separate from those made at church. For Cate and Johanna, friends made at church were their closest and lifelong friendships while Kali found her most meaningful relationships outside of the church. Even as she headed off to a Calvinist college, Kali immediately became friends with a Black American woman who exposed her to learning environments she had not known before. Kali became actively involved in a non-profit program to support education for racialized and at-risk children and teens. This experience set the stage for her lifelong work and relationships with marginalized, struggling, and oppressed people.

A key similarity for Cate, Johanna, and Kali was their exposure and connection to an independent neo-Calvinist school system. Johanna attended a Calvinist school in the Netherlands which was normative and supported by the government. When she came to
Canada, this kind of school system was not accessible, so she went to a public school. Today, with a Christian school established in her community and connected to her CRC church she volunteers and interacts with the students. Her growing concern over an increasingly less Christian public school system sees this school as an alternative for her grandchildren but she knows that since her children are no longer involved with the church they will not choose it as a schooling option. Both Cate and her husband attended public school but when they had their own children they saw other CRC families make a commitment to Calvinist Christian schooling and so they did the same. One of Cate’s sons continues the tradition and Cate herself also volunteers. Two of Cate’s children found their spouses in Christian high school. Once Kali’s family moved to a larger urban centre with an established Christian school, Kali attended for 3 years before going to a public high school. She also chose to go to a neo-Calvinist college in the United States for her university degree. All three participants expressed various educative concerns (e.g., poor teaching, dismissive of Christian faith, lack of family connection) with their experience of the public school system, not so much in the past (their own experience), but more so in the present as an abstract rationale for alternative schooling options.

**The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and Religiosity**

Kali, Cate, and Johanna expressed that the CRC church was a significant site of learning that was both positive and convincing. While this has changed for Kali, her earlier experiences in the CRC continue to scaffold a new spiritual alternative for her to consider and reflect on. Currently, she also participates in the religious traditions of her adopted Muslim family. Cate too has been more reflective since her husband has passed away and has found new spiritual resources in television and literature.
At the onset of immigration, in addition to providing for spiritual learning needs, the CRC church community was integral to each family’s ability to negotiate the necessity for work, housing, and social belonging. In a trajectory of lifelong learning, the church mediated and provided tools for immigrants to transition/transplant from one culture into another. Once established, the church became the centre of an all-encompassing pillarized mentalism and just as it had in the Netherlands provided parallel social programs for its youth, young adults, families, and seniors to minimize socializing with Canadians outside the church (Post, 1989; Schryer, 1998; Teeuwsen, 2016; Van Arragon Hutten, 2001). For example, young girls did not go to Brownies or Guides; they attended Calvinettes, and young boys attended Cadets. As an endogamous mechanism, the Young Peoples program was integral for keeping young adults actively engaged in the enclave (Teeuwsen, 2016). Its various educative and social activities with other CRC churches ensured a greater possibility of finding one’s spouse thus a continued commitment to a neo-Calvinist worldview and church community. Johanna and Cate have clear recollections, throughout their lifetime of their participation in the various church activities throughout the week. Both married spouses from the CRC community and raised their children in the church. Kali, struggles to remember these various activities of her youth even though she interprets her family was “steeped” in church life.

Around the age of 18, like Johanna and Cate, Kali recalls attending catechism classes prior to leaving for college. Catechism classes brought hermeneutical depth and breadth to biblical and doctrinal understanding and demonstrated the church’s educative commitment for having young people (traditionally before they left the family home) make a “free will” (within ruling relations) decision to join its’ membership through a
formal and public profession of faith. All three participants attended catechism classes, made a formal profession of faith as young adults, and became official members of the church. Cate explained that she was a Christian because of her membership in the CRC; an interpretation that her identity as a Christian was tied to being a member of a peculiar kind of community. The education in the church did not provide alternative religious views and as Kali explains, there was an underlying elitist covenantal (Fallon, 2000; Van Arragon Hutten, 2001) understanding that other churches were not as theologically correct even though the differences were never discussed or critiqued. Marx contemplates that religiosity and the church are marked by obsessive obedience (Rühle, 1929/2011) and “one dimensional” reasoning, thus the capacity to be critical is constrained. As an integral aspect of their homeplace, as they grow older, Cate and Johanna demonstrate their capacity to be reflective of their relationship to the church community.

Traditionally, the CRC church has maintained clear gender distinctions biblically rationalized and monitored. Until the 1990s church leadership was exclusively male. Women, while they had the right to vote (granted in the 1950s) for men in church leadership, they were strictly prohibited from serving as an deacon, elder, or minister. J. VanderVliet (1994) asserts that women’s roles in the church reflected the work they performed at home which gave them a certain degree of agency but these roles while valuable and necessary were not authoritative in any institutional sense. Johanna describes her mother as actively engaged in the church Ladies Aid Society (managed care for those in need, served food, organized fundraisers). She herself continues to fulfill some of these functions. While the church has undergone slow ecclesiastical change and transitioned its thinking about its patriarchal social structures, Cate and Johanna, while
accepting of the changes, have not actively shifted their gendered assumptions or roles in the church. Kali, in relation to her own spiritual learning, finds it difficult to comprehend that patriarchal assumptions and beliefs still prevail in some churches.

The Family Home

Schalk (2012) concludes in her study of Dutch post-war immigrants that the need to belong to a family unit was integral to Calvinist identity: “Their families became the axis around which their lives revolved and the members of the families provided a sense of security, continuity and belonging which they all so deeply needed” (p. 86). As immigrants, the family home was a shelter from the dominator culture (hooks, 2009); a shelter against forces of deficiency and failure. It was a place to restore dignity.

Gouthro (2005) asserts that attitudes towards learning, assessment of personal capacity, and decisions about life paths are often shaped by influences from the homeplace. Women who have grown up in abusive or dysfunctional families may have difficulties articulating their experience and lack of confidence in their capacity to learn, while women who have been encouraged sense a greater agency to develop more sophisticated learning processes. As they grew up Cate, Kali, and Johanna experienced and established knowledge around their family genealogies, their historical neo-Calvinist assumptions, rituals, and beliefs, as well as the negotiation of their familial immigration experience. The families were steeped in the Calvinist ethic (Weber, 2003) to work hard and to aspire for better. As the youngest, Kali and Cate viewed that their older siblings had taken the brunt of the hard work to immigrate. Kali’s older siblings all went to work before returning to school. Cate and Johanna’s older siblings also went to work and with minimal education never returned to formal schooling. Assessing, critically, that their
mothers were exceptionally intelligent and had been culturally constrained, Cate, Johanna, and Kali aspired for a life that was less isolating and had more opportunities for women than they had witnessed for their mothers. In Canada, they leveraged their formal schooling in ways that opened more options for them. Anticipating their future, they expected to be educated, to find meaningful employment, and to be married and have families.

It was the boys (each participant had several brothers) in the family who spurred on the idea of leaving Holland and coming to Canada for better economic opportunity. It was the male who immigrated; the women and girls were secondary (Castles et al., 2014). Those opportunities were framed by their parents: ownership of a farm and education. In Canada, Cate and Johanna’s father and brothers realized their dream of owning their own farms and Kali’s parents saw their children (especially the boys) educated. In the trajectory of their lifelong learning, Johanna, Cate, and Kali would in some ways mirror their parents’ vision for a better life in Canada. Inspired by her mother’s lifelong positive determination, resilience, and learning in the homeplace, Johanna’s trajectory of lifelong learning demonstrates her pursuit to be a good housewife and mother, and an active member of the church. As the only girl, she expresses that in her family she always felt special and not secondary. She does not resist traditional masculine values and believes that every woman, deep down wants to be protected by a man. Today, in spite of her trajectory of lifelong learning, Johanna is confounded by what she interprets as a failure to keeping her family in the neo-Calvinist fold. All of them have left the church and married “outside” the church. As she had observed in her father, Kali would not be timid to explore alternative and contradictory (to a Neo-Calvinism) ways of thinking and being. She interpreted that unlike her mother, her father was a feminist. Kali speaks about the
closeness and significant relationship she had with her father and brothers. As the youngest child, Cate’s family experience made her resistant and determined not to follow in her parent’s footsteps. She did not abandon her immigrant ideology but rather negotiated a parallel neo-Calvinist life where she could live out a certain kind of redemption for their failings in the homeplace. Through the trajectory of her lifelong learning, she has distanced herself from her siblings and it has only been in last number of years that she has tentatively reached out to them to reclaim a familial connection.

**The Work and Volunteer Place**

Kali, Cate, and Johanna began working intermittently (part time) for a wage while they were still students in school. Once they completed their formal education, Johanna and Cate worked in the labour force for a short time before becoming mothers, thus shifting their workplace labour into unpaid labour in their homes; dependent on their husband’s paycheque, raising children and eventually supporting their husbands in their small family businesses. Cate interprets that after the birth of her children, she weighed the value of returning to the workplace but pragmatically and economically it did not seem to bring them “ahead financially” so she made the decision to stay at home. She explains that she did work casually when she was needed for her skills or when extra money was useful to supplement her husband’s income. While she did not consider herself an equal partner in the family business, she did contribute in various ways to ensure her husband’s success. Johanna always assumed that she would follow cultural convention; mothering would be her first priority. She stayed at home on the farm raising her six children. When the family farm began to have financial struggles, she discerned a need and quietly went back to the workplace to supplement her husband’s income.
Lobbezoo (2014) argues, there were exceptional circumstances whereby married women with children in a neo-Calvinist church could rationalize working in the public sphere. Cate and Johanna demonstrate their compliance to these assumptions when they entered the workplace in times of extreme need, when their children were in school, or under the auspices of a family business. Kali, unmarried, moved through a series of occupations to financially support herself over her life. She purchased her own home. Her formal education credentials have fostered a professional life but her experience and learning through a diverse number of workplaces has also been significant in her learning trajectory in her current work.

While both Cate and Johanna have lost their husbands’ workplace income, they interpret they have adequate money (savings, government pension, insurance) to sustain a modest lifestyle. As such their unpaid work is now invested in their children and grandchildren. Johanna, and to a lesser degree, Cate both engage in volunteer labour in various church and community organizations. Johanna has had a long trajectory of volunteering (including leadership) both in her church (e.g., Calvinettes, Vacation Bible School) and in her community (e.g., Women’s Association). In her 70s, Kali continues to work in paid position in the workplace saying that she cannot imagine a stereotypical retired life. Like Johanna and Cate, she actively volunteers her time and labour in relation to family (children and grandchildren). Like Johanna, Kali has a long trajectory of volunteering beginning with her involvement with Reach Upward, a program for at risk racialized city children, followed by taking in those who needed a home and support during vulnerable periods of their lives. In their volunteer labour, these women
demonstrate a deep devotion to learning how to build relationship with others—a commitment of caring.

**Conclusion**

Four sites of learning delineate where the participants negotiated meaning in a trajectory of lifelong learning. It is important to emphasize that learning occurs in many places and lived experiences. By examining the school, the church, the home, and the work/volunteer place as sites of learning I expand a narrow neo-liberal view of lifelong learning and consider other values in education, particularly as they relate to women immigrants. Employing a critical dialectic method with a feminist interpretation, I grapple with the lived experience of Cate, Kali, and Johanna in these four sites of learning and juxtaposed to a political, cultural, and historical context raise the cultural contradictions that a Dutch neo-Calvinist woman negotiates in learning. Seven tensions in lifelong learning arose in my research: pillarization and a Canadian context; thesis and antithesis; neo-Calvinist homeplace and Canadian public; temptation and curiosity; consent and coercion; isolation and citizenship; loss and transformation.

**Tensions and Ruling Relations**

In a critical feminist perspective, I conceptualize the dialectic relationship of thesis and antithesis not as dichotomous or as oppositions but rather as two sides that stand in a relationship of “unity and struggle” (Hassanpour, 2015, p. 253) dependent on each other for their existence and a necessary tension for learning. In other words, the purpose in a dialectic method is not to establish a polarization or binary, as highlighted in a masculine view, but rather for the concepts to speak to each other; to make sense of both at the same time. Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) assert that a dialectic approach
allows for “the preservation of the complexity of similarities and differences” (p. 60) and appreciates the fluidity and multilayered complexity of the human experience. In this analysis I argue that within the relationship of thesis and antithesis lies a space between; a space of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence that is not marked by hierarchy but rather is a space of construction that is inclusive of the “multiplicity and flux” (Martin, 1992, p. 130) inherent in the complexity of an immigrant experience. Martin (1992) claims, when dissimilarities are framed as binary oppositions, the analysis “can reveal how these oppositions undercut and destabilize each other” (p. 138) rather than conceive of and bring coherence to multiple plausible interpretations. In a Habermasian perspective, the dialectic creates a space of rationality—the potential for communicative action. In the analysis of the tensions posed, I consider how three neo-Calvinist immigrant women interpreted and negotiated the complexity and the ambiguity they experienced in their lifelong trajectory of learning.

**Pillarization and a Canadian Context**

Carpenter and Mojab (2013) argue that to understand a phenomenon dialectically is to see it “through a lens of historical emergence” (p. 161) in relation to how it appears and is experienced in lived reality. In a historical point of reference, Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women negotiated the contradictions posed by a Canadian context:

> We are talking about a vision developed on turf other than our own, an imported theology and philosophy that was lugged along onto this continent by die-hard immigrant faithful. A world and life view that is an intellectual paradigm.

(Schaap, 1998, p. 401)

Welton (2005) conveys in relation to lifelong learning, “We are creatures of culture who
create sacred canopies over our own societies. Human beings learn but not under circumstances of their own making” (p. 20). Breems (1991) argues, one is born not only into all the shaping circumstances of the present but also into an inheritance of the past. It [neo-Calvinism] may be a faith that is presumed inherited, but it still functions to order the lives of the people who adhere to it. It binds together the various aspects and interpretations which have been presented. Worldviews are complex. This one, too, bears the scars of struggles, amendments, accommodations and misrepresentations, but it is the pivot around which life in the Dutch Calvinist community is organized. (pp. 222-223)

When Cate, Johanna, Kali and their families came to Canada their first experiences set the tone and tension of their transition. First they were disappointed and left vulnerable by a Canadian sponsorship that fell through, and second they survived the uncertainty and unpredictability of immigration by connecting with the growing Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant community. These were the people who met them, took them in, and made sure they had what they were in need of. In other words, the Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant enclave was their entry point into a Canadian culture. Regardless that they did not know each other, the participants in the study shared an immigration story, a worldview language, and a peculiar religious and cultural grammar40 that was embedded in the neo-Calvinist culture.

As Johanna’s story describes, before immigrating to Canada, Dutch neo-Calvinists lived and negotiated their religious lives in a socially and politically pillarized nation (Post, 1989). In contrast, Canada’s historical and social vision was not organized

40 “But ethnicity is a grammar, a way of ordering distinctions” (Breems, 1991, p. 53).
with this political framework and worldview. Various scholars (Breems, 1991; Fallon, 2000; Horn, 1997; Van Arragon Hutten, 2001) argue that in the 1950s this distinction was not recognized by Canadian government officials as a problematic tension for neo-Calvinist immigrant integration into Canadian culture and yet in subsequent analysis there are questions concerning how these immigrants had cultural attributes that made them impervious to assimilation (Petersen, 1955); arguably an ethnic enclave that actively and openly resisted their host culture (Fallon, 2000). The tension that was raised for Dutch neo-Calvinists was carefully negotiated in what Breems and Horn equate to as a silence or invisibility where aside from their economic integration into Canadian society, Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants were able to hide their ethnic inner proclivities in a private or separate sphere. Here, unconscious beliefs/knowledge, attitudes, and actions would not be evident and would also elude Canadian political policy.

Already at the onset of arriving in Canada, participants’ and their families demonstrated a separation from their host. While various members of the family engaged in the public economy to financially provide for their families and young children went to a public school, there was an overriding commitment to the homeplace or private sphere which maintained the ideology and redundancies of their home culture and religiosity. Cate and Johanna demonstrate this already as young children where they interpret that their lives and relationships in public school were quite separate from their lives in the homeplace. With a patriarchal view, the binary of public and private supported a psychological distinction between a “covenant” people (Fallon, 2000) and a Canadian public.
As conceived historically in the Netherlands, neo-Calvinism, was a comprehensive religiously based worldview which was shaped and reproduced politically and socially by the social phenomenon of pillarization predominant prior to World War II. In his historical analysis of Dutch society, Post (1998) clarifies that pillarization can exist in democratic mostly homogenous societies where there is a mix in terms of worldview and, as the Netherlands demonstrates, where people can live out their distinctions separately and equitably without the tension of political interference or intrusion of citizens from other pillars (e.g., Catholic, Neutral/Socialist). As Post (1998) asserts, “A pillar is a multitude, an integrated complex of social organizations of institutions” (p. 14) that are based on a distinct worldview. This is achieved by an institutional completeness, where each pillar establishes the necessary institutions (e.g., schools, banks, newspapers, hospitals, political parties, unions, churches, businesses) needed to live apart from the other social pillars. Breems (1991) points out that the well-defined boundaries, smooth organization, and stability of enclosed institutions have a strong attraction and are “warm nests” (p. 384) for people who have experienced the turmoil and disruption of war and immigration. Post argues that, historically, pillars came out of a struggle for emancipation which gave a strong stimulus for very close cooperation with people of the same creed—a tension that drove and continues to drive solidarity. “One does not leave a group easily with which one has shared love, sorrow, and a sense of history” (Breems, p. 384). The various institutions established by neo-Calvinists keep them in concert with a particular structural and psychological vision and also separate them socially from other worldviews.
When Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants came to Canada, they negotiated their uncertain circumstances with a deeply embedded and lived worldview that had been forged by pillarization. In a personal memoir, Rekker (2000) explains that emigration societies, organized along pillar lines, came together thinking that like previous immigration waves, they would be able to immigrate to Canada as a distinctive group but this did not comply with immigration policy. It was up to each individual family to negotiate a commitment to staying together as an ethnic enclave. With this mindset, immigrants (Kali’s father circumvented the government’s plan for him to settle in northern Ontario) came with a clear intent to settle together in communities that could quickly establish structural social institutions such as Christian Reformed churches, Calvinist schools, banks (DUCA Credit Union), media publications (Calvinist Contact), unions (Christian Labour Association of Canada, Christian Farmers Federation), healthcare agencies (Shalem Mental Health Network, Christian Horizons), and retirement homes (Holland Christian Homes). This demonstrated a certain staunchness to parallel a political pillarized mentalism (Schaap, 1998; VanderMey, 1983).

The immigrants’ pursuit to establish independent social institutions was also derived from Abraham Kuyper’s *Sphere of Sovereignty* doctrine which viewed the relationship of God and church quite differently than in the traditional or secular sense. While God is sovereign, Kuyper views the position and relationship of church as equal or horizontal to all the other life/cultural spheres—family, education, state, economics (Mouw, 2011) and therefore a Christian perspective is at the core of all social institutions; all lived experience and learning. Cate, Kali, and Johanna lived out a knowledge of this doctrine of Sphere of Sovereignty particularly in their experience of independent neo-
Calvinist schools. For example, in my own experience when I attended Calvin College, I was able to live out a neo-Calvinist worldview (that I had negotiated and learned in the homeplace) and critique my learning through its lens. Regardless of the subject area, I could speak a neo-Calvinist grammar that others understood, where I could socialize, dine, participate in recreational activities, attend church, and seek support from those who were like minded. It was an all-encompassing existence, an “insider’s total vision and conception of everything” (Fallon, 2000, p. 40). In contrast to the disassociation I felt in a public school, as a young adult the education and learning in this Calvinist education institution was congruent with my cultural upbringing and thus in a trajectory of lifelong learning further instilled in me a foundation from which to see and interpret the world around me. As a holistic experience it was conceived as an emerging utopic vision of how the world ideally should be. It was a learning discourse centred on strategies of how to make the world the way it ought to be (Fallon, 2000).

The life histories also reflect the neo-Calvinist deliberation and choices that participants and their families made. Many of the participants’ institutional preferences aligned with those established within the pillarized enclave. They attended a neo-Calvinist church. When it was possible, they choose Calvinist schooling. When she needed mental health services, Cate chose from a CRC healthcare network. When Kali’s parents retired, they choose a neo-Calvinist senior’s retirement home. There is a palpable tension between the ruling relations that shape a neo-Calvinist institution and a public Canadian context—resistant ruling relations (historically legitimized in a home country) that evoke the need to “guard” and protect a particular world view against predominant ruling relations that appear to be dismissive or unaware of peculiar worldview values.
While Schaap (1998) and Breems (1991) wonder about the longevity of institutions formed from a worldview mentalism they also consider the possibility that the boundaries around them might also be evolving and transitioning in a Canadian context—that in this dialectic tension, the synthesis becomes less about binary options and more about an openness to how institutions can engage in mutual discourse, finding common ground.

Finlayson (2005) argues that in a critical perspective worldview ideologies are essentially “false” beliefs that are assumed to be true by virtually all members of a particular society who somehow are made to believe them. He asserts they are functional, socially necessary, and are maintained by the social institutions and relations of domination they support. While its institutions are alterable, they appear fixed and natural such that if everyone believes, for example, that particular expectations are divinely pre-ordained, then its members are more likely to uncritically accept those assumptions rather than see them as structural injustice and in need of reform. Gouthro (2009a) also asserts that a worldview is something that can be so encompassing, it is difficult to view the world otherwise; she argues that as a problematic, adherence to a worldview can “provide justification for social practices that perpetuate inequality, but are so pervasive that people often do not recognize what is happening, and/or they are uncomfortable or feel incapable of challenging the taken-for-granted norms they endorse” (pp. 161-162). Halse (2010) adds that humans placed in complex institutional ruling relations are regulated by mechanisms by which subjects are disciplined, construct their relationships, and limit their possibilities for particular thoughts and actions. Cate, Johanna, and Kali were born into an inheritance of culture/knowledge that juxtaposed to their experience of immigration to Canada dynamically shaped the trajectory of their lifelong learning. For
Cate and Johanna, the ruling relations associated with the mentalism of pillarization has sustained their neo-Calvinist worldview such that it remains central to the decisions they make about relationships concerning their learning.

**Thesis and Antithesis**

For Descartes, there are only two possibilities: absolute certainty or epistemological chaos; that is, purity or corruption. ... When the universe becomes unmanageable, human beings become absolutists. We create a world without ambiguity in order to escape, as Dewey puts it, "from the vicissitudes of experience" to impose order on what is experienced as without organic order of its own. (Boler, 1999, p. 175)

In a critical perspective the Marxist/Hegelian view of thesis and antithesis (synthesis) is conceived as a participatory and liberating mechanism for lifelong learning. Here what is “known” or “believed” is juxtaposed to a seemingly opposing or contradictory idea or experience. The dialectic intersection of thesis and antithesis evokes a constructive tension to work out or imagine a synthesis in a way that new knowledge can be conceptualized and understood. Abraham Kuyper, whose Calvinist movement set out to resist secular Enlightenment thinking, opposed this idea and proposed, in the vein of Calvin, a reconceptualized meaning of thesis and antithesis which has peculiar implications for how Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants negotiated assimilation in Canada. Post (1989) explains that for Kuyper, “The notion is best known as a device for distinguishing between Christians and paganists” (p. 35). While a contradiction, much like Descartes, Kuyper presumed there were two realities and two kinds of people; those who were Christian (certainty) and those who were non-Christian or pagan (chaos)
Schaap (1998) explains that the neo-Calvinist sees clearly two
different worlds (binary): the light of God and the darkness (the fall) of humanity.

Viewing the secular as a pagan entity, the neo-Calvinist is instructed to avoid
“worldly” engagement and instead focus their attention on seeking the light of God
through instrumental action delineated through various prescribed redundant
relationships, symbols, doctrines, and rituals.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the
love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of the
sinful man [sic], the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—
come not from the Father but from the world. (1 John 2:15-16, The Bible, NIV)

Kuyper’s conceptualization of thesis and antithesis promoted yet another reason for
separate institutions and ethnic isolation. Consistent with Kuyper’s conclusion that a
synthesis between thesis and antithesis was incommensurable, he used the term antithesis
as a separating line, such that neo-Calvinists should keep themselves separate and guard
themselves from the pagan world.

That emphasis on an antithesis between regenerate and unregenerate life and
thought makes good theological sense to Calvinists. And some followers of John
Calvin are content to let the antithesis be the last word on the question of how we
are to understand the implications of the insistence on the reality of “two kinds of
people” in the world. This attitude shows up in the very practical sort of
Christianity that draws very sharp distinctions between “worldly” thought and
practice and the way of “holy living” to which Christians are called. (Mouw,
2011, p. 62)
Kuyper contemplates in a positivist sense, when we put trust in secular thinking, “Our ‘world and life view’… is shaped and guided by our rebellious spirits. It is only when God redirects our wills back toward him that we can begin to correct our ways of knowing” (Mouw, 2011, pp. 61-62).

Negotiating the political and ideological framework of a host nation brought new realities to interpreting a worldview. For example, the Kuyperian view of antithesis had both clear and ambiguous implications for how the Dutch neo-Calvinists negotiated the “unregenerate” in a secular public school. As Johanna demonstrates, immigrant parents who grew up in a pillarized society were unfamiliar with a Canadian system and often depended on their children to independently interpret how to conduct themselves in a secular institution. For example, in spite of being seen as “worldly” immigrant children made significant friendships in school, but they were kept quite separate and distinct from friendships made in the church. The negotiation of how to conduct oneself was further complicated or perhaps strengthened by the predominance of a Canadian version of Christian language and messaging in public schools. As remembered by Cate, Johanna, Kali, and myself, most schools in the 1950s and 1960s provided Bible instruction by local pastors (e.g., United, Presbyterian). As a contrast to the CRC, the classes at school provided a Canadian perspective and a small affirmation and connection to a particular ethnic religious instruction at church. Even though they were sometimes met with skepticism, these classes were important as a mediation to Canadian culture; a common cultural place for learning. Later, when policies were implemented disallowing Bible instruction, there was a further sense of separation and dismissiveness that, as Johanna conveys today, permeated a deeper distrust with the institution of public schooling. In particular, public school made a clear distinction that did not align with Sphere of
Sovereignty doctrine and made itself vulnerable to an antithetical construct. As public education became increasingly understood to be a place where students were educated apart from their religious convictions, for neo-Calvinists, the effect was subtly and sometimes not so subtly to teach students that education and religious beliefs and practices were a distinct sphere of life outside the legitimacy of public discourse. This also furthered a neo-Calvinist commitment to establish their own independent schools.

The increased cultural tension of thesis and antithesis in public schools may on the one hand have spurred immigrant learning capacity or it may have developed a wariness towards learning in ways that lessened educative choices and opportunities. While Cate, Johanna, and Kali negotiated public schooling in ways that were both positive and limited, they were also aware of and grappled with this sense of separation; a pull between a sacred construct and a secular one. With independent Calvinist alternatives for schooling, the outcome of how they interpreted the concept of antithesis in their experiences of public schooling varied over their lifespan. While they did not interpret it for themselves, for Johanna and Cate, the experience of public schooling posed an antithetical risk for their children and grandchildren who they feared would abandon the neo-Calvinist/Christian faith. They interpreted that public schools furthered the separation between a neo-Calvinist worldview and a secular one and within the purview of the public sphere that there was no space or discourse available to work out the differences.

**Temptation and Curiosity**

Boler (1999) argues that the relationship between a person and their lifelong learning is fraught with different emotions and histories and they are inseparable from
actions and relations in lived experience. Emotions are always present in learning environments:

Thoughts, emotions, beliefs, desires, and actions may appear as the very fabric and constitution of a coherent identity, but they are socially organized and governed. This is precisely why we argue that attending to the emotions associated with these beliefs and values one is able to begin to problematize the complex of practices and assemblages within which identities are fabricated, and which presuppose and enjoin particular privileges and emotional habits. (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 126)

As Boler and Zembylas (2003) assert, by examining emotions associated with beliefs and values one is able to problematize life experiences and epistemic reasoning. A central epistemic focus is to recognize how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see (Boler, 1999). In relation to learning, two emotions related to negotiating neo-Calvinist reasoning in a Canadian context were temptation and curiosity.

The Biblical allegory of Eve’s temptation/curiosity to eat from the Tree of Knowledge demonstrates for neo-Calvinists that Adam and Eve exhibited a free will when they succumbed to evil—that human autonomy is at the same time vulnerable to the construct of sin or evil. By disobeying God’s command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge they felt temptation and guilt. This is in emotional contrast to a critical view of thesis and antithesis where the tension is better aligned with feelings of curiosity and delight. Essentially Kuyper is arguing that the tension inherent in a critical dialectic method, is to be negotiated as a secular and evil temptation and thus avoided and suppressed; otherwise one falls away from truth. In relation to lifelong learning, instead
of leaning into curiosity, the neo-Calvinist is compelled to turn their gaze inward to prevent temptation. hooks (2009) reflects on how temptation evokes the emotion of “fear” to compel compliance. “Even if they were by chance neighborly, we were taught to mistrust their kindness. We were taught to see their friendliness as simply a gesture aimed at luring us into a trap” (p. 53).

In contrast to Cate and Johanna, and perhaps empowered by her father’s pursuit of educative interests outside the church, Kali was open to engaging with people and ideas outside the presumed learning boundaries of a neo-Calvinist culture. As she explains, this began already in her childhood friendships, and continued with her engagement and work in an educational program for racialized children, dating and living with partners outside the church, yoga, and exploration of alternative spiritual ideas, all of which would have been considered risky (temptation) behaviour in a neo-Calvinist view. Likewise, while I was implicitly aware of the risk, my parents encouraged us to attend our school friend’s churches. We were allowed to attend school friends’ birthday parties and school dances. We played on school sports teams. My father and brothers became involved in the local hockey organization. My parents joined a community square dance club. Once our family was engaged in secular lifelong activities, the interpretation and authority of the church began to dissipate and curiosity and delight, in contrast to temptation and risk taking, became the compelling emotion that drove our learning and participation. This kind of crossing the line however did have negative consequences for my father whose behaviour was judged as “worldly” and thus excluded from leadership positions in the church. Johanna also speaks of a similar experience for her husband who became involved in local hockey with his boys. She interprets that it was hockey that pulled her children (and
her husband) away from church life and for that she has profound regret. Both Cate and Johanna discuss how marriage to someone within the enclave (endogamy) was significant to maintaining a commitment to a worldview. Cate is thankful that two of her children found their spouses in a Calvinist Christian school while Johanna feels some despair that none of her children married spouses within the church. Prinsen (2000) argues that those who remain steadfast in their spiritual commitment to a neo-Calvinist view demonstrate redundancies as opposed to learning and growth: “Their world and life view remains as it were when they are living in Holland. The difficulty these people face is seeing their children grow up facing ‘worldly ideas and lifestyles’” (p. 176).

The premise of temptation and the fear of falling away is a counter construct to lifelong learning. As an emotional response, it acts to constrain experience and thus lifelong learning, placing tight boundaries on individual autonomy (free will) and creative thinking. Boler and Zembylas (2003) point out that inscribed cultural and emotional terrains found in ethnic enclaves are occupied less by choice and more by virtue of hegemony and self-control. A neo-Calvinist perspective of learning demonstrates a positivist epistemology, that knowledge resides out there (reified within the institution) and, to resist falling away from truth, learning must be narrowly focused within the institution. Berger (1967) argues that when consciousness is alienated, it becomes undialectical and diminishes the capacity for lifelong learning: “The social world then ceases to be an open arena in which the individual expands his being in meaningful activity, becomes instead a closed aggregate of reifications divorced from present or future activity” (p. 86).

In an Habermasian view, in contrast to communicative rationality, the
predominant ruling relations that shape a neo-Calvinist interpretation of learning represents *instrumental reasoning and action*. “Habermas argues that there are two criteria of instrumental action: that the end of the action is determined antecedently and independently of the means of its realization, and that it is realized by a causal intervention in the objective world” (Finlayson, 2005, p. 48). One is made to comply because the option to refuse cannot be taken seriously, thus one is caused or coerced to comply to an external idea. This differs from communicative action because in contrast, the recognition and acceptance of a validity claim “cannot be determined independently of the vehicle of its realization” and “is not something that could be brought about causally” (Finlayson, 2005, p. 48). Here we see the emotional contrast between a causally driven sense of objective temptation and an independent realization met through subjective curiosity. In this study, Kali’s lifelong learning trajectory demonstrates her ability to transition from a position of instrumental action to a communicative one. In doing so, she opens up new possibilities to negotiate meaning in her world. She is not held back rather she is leans forward. Kali recognizes that the trajectory of lifelong learning might cause concern for those in her family who still ascribe to neo-Calvinist thinking that she has lost her way—that she is need of redemptive prayer. In small ways, Johanna too is curious about life outside the church and while she remains careful to maintain her connection to a neo-Calvinist worldview, in the trajectory of her lifelong learning, she courageously and curiously crosses a border to participate in the Women’s Association.

The CRC Homeplace and the Canadian Public Sphere

As theorized by Habermas, the lifeworld, composed of a private (nuclear family)
and public sphere (political participation), is the background consensus of our everyday lives and organized through communicative and instrumental consent (Gouthro, 2005). As an application to Habermas’s theory, Gouthro’s conception of the homeplace is useful as a core aspect of the lifeworld. She clarifies that as a concept it can have variable meaning and is dependent on a person’s unique life circumstance. The homeplace is defined by personal lived experience, family, and cultural background and it can be inclusive of community, neighbours, and larger cultural setting. It is with this conceptualization in mind that constitutes a neo-Calvinist context as a homeplace.

Because the church and family learning sites are so closely integrated for the immigrant and also ideologically separated from the Canadian public, there is an accentuated connection between these institutions; there is a kind of worldview perception of lived oneness. Epp (2008) also speaks of this relationship with Mennonite families, saying, “As such, the family could not really be considered for a privatized realm totally separate from other spheres of governance” (p. 61). Representing a private and a public sphere as a masculine binary, the added cultural distinction of a neo-Calvinist immigrant raises additional tensions relevant to a gendered trajectory of lifelong learning.

As a cultural historical background to Cate and Johanna’s homeplace experience, Radford Reuther (2012) analyzes Calvin’s 16th century view of women:

Calvin rejects the misogynist view of woman as a “necessary evil,” insisting that “woman is given as a companion and an associate to the man, to assist him to live well.” For Calvin, this helping relation is decidedly one of dominant and subordinate “partners,” even though each has obligations to the other. (p. 100)

In marriage the woman was to be her husband’s companion and assistant—a helpmate
(Genesis 2:18)—to ensure that he lived well and was supported in his responsibilities as the head of the family. As scripturally rationalized (e.g., Ephesians 5:22-24) neo-Calvinist theology is concerned with male headship both in the home and in the church.

For the home which marriage establishes the Lord ordained that the man should be the head of the wife even as Christ is the Head of the Church, and that he should protect her and provide for her in love, a love which, if exercised in the spirit and after the example of Christ, will be conducive to mutual happiness. God also ordained that the wife should be subject to the husband in all things that are according to His Word, showing him deference even as the Church to Christ.

(Christian Reformed Church, 1976, p. 282)

As such women are interpreted as complementary but unequal partners in the marriage.

In the interest of a harmonious relationship, women are to subsume their own interests and accept a “divinely appointed order” (Radford Reuther, p. 100), and in her consent she cultivates the benefits of a holy and peaceful relationship.

Calvin also believed that women were to be silent and excluded from public leadership both in society and in the church. This thinking was justified by various Biblical texts (e.g., Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:34; Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 3:16).

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

(1 Timothy 2:11-15, The Bible, NIV)
The female attributes of submission, obedience, and silence all have limiting implications for lifelong learning. The implication of silence also demonstrates how previous literature about Dutch neo-Calvinist immigration experience speaks predominantly through the masculine voice.

Both Cate and Johanna, in their marriages, demonstrate an overall compliance to church thinking. While Cate was determined not to have a marriage like her parents where her mother “had no say,” her lived experience aligns with church assumptions concerning her complementary role in the family. After a brief independent adult life, Johanna and Cate married in their early twenties and shortly after left their positions in the workplace (Canadian public sphere) to raise their families. Unlike Kali who remained unmarried, the trajectory of their lifelong learning transitioned from a focus of paid work in the public sphere to a cultural continuation of learning that was focused on how to be good housewives and mothers in the homeplace. Cate and Johanna were busy with children and household management and did not necessarily view their domestic position as secondary but rather as natural and necessary separated from the conventions of the workplace and the public. For Cate, it was not until completing income tax returns (public) that she was reminded, in political/public terms, that she was unequal in the household because her contribution had little monetary value.

When Johanna and Cate assessed their roles as partners in their husbands’ businesses they did not see themselves as equal workplace partners but rather as auxiliary and supportive. Cate clarifies even though on paper their business partnership was equal, in reality it was not. She did not value her contribution (administrative, cleaning) as equally valuable to the operation of the business. Johanna explains that she was not
interested in the business and operation side of the family farm but she too “pitched in” where she was needed and directed by her husband. De Beauvoir (2011) captures the essence of a gendered unequal relationship situated in the homeplace and workplace.

It is man who labors in the fields, who builds cathedrals, who fights with the sword, who explores the world, who acts, who undertakes. God’s plans are accomplished on earth through him. Woman is merely an auxiliary. She is the one who stays in place, who waits. (p. 242)

Gouthro (2002) argues that the homeplace plays an important role in shaping one’s identity. It may be a site where women derive comfort and support, raise children, nurture husbands, and connect in a particular way to the community but it also reinforces power constructs framed by and only accessible through patriarchy. By constructing a binary between the private and public spheres, gender learning differences are rationalized in relation to the economy. De Beauvoir (2011) asserts, “Since he is the producer, it is he who goes beyond family interest to the interest of society and who opens a future to her by cooperating in the construction of the collective future” (p. 443).

As demonstrated in the lives of Cate and Johanna, once they became mothers they engaged in paid public work that was permissible and acceptable in a neo-Calvinist context (Lobbezoo, 2014). They worked part-time, in time of need, when the children were in school, and under the auspices of a family business or their husband’s work. As Cate comments, choosing to work outside the homeplace was met with pragmatic constraints (ruling relations) regarding childcare and housekeeping. In her decision making, she did not take into consideration her own learning capacity and interest to participate in the public sphere. In addition to maintaining their designated roles in the
home and church, it was also understood that wives were not to usurp or compromise their husband’s ability to be viewed as the primary income earner. During the financially challenging years on the farm, Johanna quietly went out to work, cleaning Canadian homes; she did not mind.

Once they were married and had a family, Cate and Johanna’s lives were almost completely centred around their relationships in the domestic home and the various activities connected to CRC church. Lobbezzoo (2014) argues that neo-Calvinist women ideologically confined to the homeplace help build and maintain an insular, isolated community for themselves. They learn an ordained life purpose in negotiating and constructing a space that is safe and secure and separate from the public sphere; a refuge, a warm nest, a “haven in a heartless world” (Fraser, 2013, p. 27). In a predominantly female sphere, they were the gatekeepers of the homeplace and the neo-Calvinist relations that bound the community together. Welton (2005) asserts that women are historically constituted as managers of the homeplace. They nurture and perpetuate the necessary stories to knit the various strands of living into a coherent pattern for negotiating life’s pathways. Kali comments that this is also her experience with women in Muslim communities who monitor, scrutinize, and self-regulate the social conventions related to appropriate cultural dressing, ritual observance, and behaviour. As gatekeepers (cultural redundancies) of a neo-Calvinist homeplace, women are further isolated from the knowledge constructs of the Canadian public sphere and thus potential lifelong learning.

Gouthro (2009a) points out, women who have responsibilities and connections to the homeplace, are also prompted to have different lifelong learning trajectories then men. Gouthro adds, “Overlooking and devaluing labour in the homeplace reinforces
gendered values that diminish the significance of responsibilities that many women learners attend to, and exclude the possibility that important learning may occur within the home” (p. 168). Focusing lifelong learning with the vision to create a gezellig\textsuperscript{41} environment (home) for the family included learning related to cleaning, cooking, decorating, sewing, telling stories, and care giving; integral skills and knowledge relevant to producing a comfortable and relaxed homeplace. Johanna speaks of how, in spite of a transient beginning in Canada, her mother’s quick determination to make a warm and cozy home provided stability in the homeplace. De Beauvoir (2011) depicts this overall mystical/sacred mentalism:

In the human world… she maintains life, she reigns over the zones of immanence; she transports the warmth and the intimacy of the womb into the home; she watches over and enlivens the dwelling where the past is kept, where the future is presaged; she engenders the future generation, and she nourishes children already born; thanks to her, the existence that man expends throughout the world by his work and his activity is re-centered by delving into her immanence: when he comes home at night, he is anchored to the earth; the wife assures the days’ continuity; whatever risks he faces in the outside world, she guarantees the stability of his meals and sleep; she repairs whatever has been damaged or worn out by activity; she prepares the tired worker’s food, she cares for him if he is ill, she mends and washes. … She is the soul of the house, the family, and the home, as well as larger groups. (pp. 194-195)

\textsuperscript{41} Gezellig: the term encompasses the heart of Dutch culture (gezelligheid)—coziness, sociable, belonging, relaxed—attributes that define a gezellig environment
While there is an idyllic and aesthetic sentiment represented—one that delineates a profound gender vision for caring and work in the homeplace and a vision that the women in the study anticipated for their lives—de Beauvoir (2011) also demonstrates how the sentiment is posed in masculine terms where women find fulfillment in tasks of servitude for him. Her fulfillment is met through the relationship she has with men who brave the public sphere to sustain her and the family. As Johanna expresses, in turn for their unpaid labour and commitment to them, women want men to care and guard them; surround them with a wall of protection. In other words, the ideology of protectionism, as represented in neo-Calvinist thinking, begets the belief that violence (sin) is always present (in the Canadian public sphere). Thus the power situated in the protective capital, that men are perceived to provide, constrains and confines women to an identity that is an imprint of the relationship of violence and protection, keeping them guarded in the safety of the homeplace and thus limiting lifelong learning opportunities.

In a critical feminist analysis, Gouthro (2009a) argues that the security and stability women construct in the homeplace is purchased at the price of loss of status, independence, and autonomy: “If we are to understand why it is that women still struggle with equity issues as workers, learners and citizens, we must look at the patriarchal worldview perpetuated in connection with the homeplace” (p. 162). For example, in a neoliberal, capitalist society, power is significantly derived from the economy. Once Cate and Johanna leave the workplace, they can only access economic power through the relationship they have with their husbands. As Cate contemplates, when she stopped working in the workplace, it took her some time to realize that her husband’s money was her money too, but she also realizes that she no longer has freedom to spend it the way
she wants as she did when she was single. In terms of money she relinquishes autonomy, independence, and status. De Beauvoir (2011) argues, “But precisely because she receives, takes, and demands, she is poorer” (p. 522). Kali comments that she cannot fathom having a spouse telling her that there is no money available or that her economic and learning choices are not valid.

Gouthro (2005, 2009a), in speaking of a public/private dichotomy argues how capitalism and neoliberalism have shaped a dual consciousness that creates a false dichotomy reinforcing structural forms of inequity between the public and private spheres. Outside the purview of the Canadian public sphere, the neo Calvinist homeplace is mostly invisible to Canadian public discourse and is neatly tucked away, isolating women in terms of the fullness of lifelong learning options. In particular, Gouthro points out that when gendered roles and responsibilities are treated as private, they are not made accessible as issues for public debate and thus inaccessible for communicative action. Being invisible, oppressive and exploitive gender relations that might bind women to the homeplace constrain women from being full and equal participants in public spaces. The cultural separation of the public (Canadian) and private (homeplace) spheres is a patriarchal mechanism that is a gender divide that also appears to be an alienated relation. Bronner (2017) argues that alienation leaves women increasingly separated from the workings of a holistic and connected world and increasingly strips them of their learning capacity and resources.

**Consent and Coercion**

hooks (2000), speaking of patriarchal culture and marriage, asserts that love is linked to a paradigm of domination and submission. Women, being the gender associated
with caring emotions would give men love, and in return men, being in touch with power, would provide and protect. Tong (2014) argues that in the vein of a Marxist feminist perspective, men seek relief from *alienation* through their relations with women; yet for women there is no relief, for these very intimate relations are the very ones that are essential for oppression. Likewise, Mojab (2015) adds, gender hierarchy is exercised by both *coercion* and *consent*—consent being created through family, religion, ideology, and other cultural institutions. She argues, the relational mutuality and understanding ideally diminishes the potential attributes of exploitation in a gender hierarchy, as each gender, consents/submits to the various perceived (biblical) needs and roles within a family relationship. While women subsume/alienate their individual identities to parallel their spouse, they do not necessarily feel coerced or oppressed rather they faithfully negotiate what they believe are pre-ordained natural responsibilities of their particular gender (Lobbezoo, 2014; VanderVliet, 1994).

Alienation, however, is a profoundly fragmenting experience where things that should be connected are viewed and perceived as separate (Tong, 2014). When women experience themselves as others (husbands and children), their alienation from self is a deadening process that has significant implications for lifelong learning. As an example, Cate speaks of her mother’s life as representative of submission to the demands of her husband and children. As Cate witnesses, her unemotional mother relinquished her own autonomy as it related to lifelong learning—she denies herself—focusing instead on negotiating the needs of others and mediating conflict and disruption in the homeplace. As Cate interprets, this was a woman who you could bully and have authority over someone whose life was dictated by the gendered relations of a neo-Calvinist worldview.
but also instrumentally determined by the interpretations and behaviours of the people and circumstances in her life. In negotiating family dysfunction, it was not the gendered ruling relations of a neo-Calvinist worldview that Cate would resist, but instead as an adult, she would demonstrate her resistance through distancing herself from the personal relationship she had with an intimidating father. By alienating the resistance into a personal family dynamic she maintained her compliance to religious social relations that rationalized a gendered disposition of harmony and submission.

Each participant in the study, after being educated in school, were for a time independent adult women employed in a workplace located in the Canadian public sphere and living on their own with adequate economic resources to provide for their needs. While they engaged in the workplace, they also anticipated marriage and children and, as they had seen modeled in both Canadian and neo-Calvinist cultures, already expected they would give up or shift their relationships in the public sphere for their roles in the private sphere (wives and mothers). In addition to a neo-Calvinist assumption where marriage is a pre-ordained order, De Beauvoir (2011) adds that women also perceive a greater leverage for themselves in relation to men’s power in the workplace:

Even when she is more emancipated, the economic advantage held by males forces her to prefer marriage over career: she will look for a husband whose situation is superior to her own, a husband she hopes will “get ahead” faster and further than she could. It is still accepted that the love act is a service she renders to the man; he takes his pleasure, and he owes compensation in return. … It is understandable that she is tempted by this easy solution, especially as women’s
professions are so unrewarding and badly paid; marriage is a more beneficial career than many others. (pp. 443-444)

With this view in mind, Kali’s aunt wondered why she would continue her education and not go to work (like her sister) until she married. Even though both Cate and Johanna achieved more formal education than their husbands, they perceived (and perhaps experienced) that the men, as heads of the family, would have greater economic capacity in the workplace. Over time, as their husbands negotiated the challenges to run successful businesses, they began to experience the limitations of their thinking and negotiated ways (supplemented the income) to “cover up” neo-Calvinist inconsistencies.

Kali concludes that the trajectory of her life did not conform with her upbringing or what she expected. Her learning trajectory in the workplace demonstrates how her varied professional choices were founded on her economic need and what was available to her. As she continued to anticipate the possibility of marriage she engaged in continuing adult education that opened new ways for her to think in relation to both her private and public spheres. Arguably, Kali’s trajectory of learning also positioned her to reconceptualise the constructs and meaning of marriage shaping her decisions about marriage. For example, unlike Cate and Johanna, Kali was comfortable with living with a partner without the boundary of marriage. Remaining unmarried Kali perceives that her life was more open to learning possibility where in that tension of consent and coercion she was able to leverage the relations of consent (Thayer Bacon, 2006) in a life that included a more holistic lived experience of the private and public spheres including mothering and grandmothering roles. Perhaps somewhat to her surprise, Kali also learned that in a trajectory of lifelong learning, that did not conform with neo-Calvinist tradition,
she had the capacity to leverage the public sphere for her economic needs and could live “well” as an independent woman and was fully capable of living without the headship of a father or husband. An interesting point is her relationship with her father and brothers and how her lifelong learning was shaped by their participation in her life.

**Isolation and Citizenship**

Elliott (2000) argues that in speaking of citizenship, the distinctions of the public-private divide are important for women because the assumption about citizenship tends to be historically bound and closely associated with the public sphere. Fraser (2013) points out that the idea of the model citizen as the defender of the polity and protection of those who cannot protect themselves, also raises the perception of women’s vulnerability in the homeplace and her lack of capacity for citizenship. Preece (2002) furthers the argument by explaining that citizenship must then be understood as a gendered concept since the historical trajectory of women’s relationship to the predominantly male public sphere has demonstrated an ongoing campaign for access and equality.

When citizenship is viewed through an economic lens, it obscures the social importance of unpaid caring labour in the homeplace (Gouthro, 2009b). Gouthro (2002) argues that traditionally women hold the main responsibility for the work done in the homeplace which has been perceived as irrelevant to citizenship because it remains distinct (binary) of the public sphere; “This means that women will only be considered “equal” to men if they do all of the work that men do plus all of the work women do. And they must do it in silence without complaint, without visibility or acknowledgement or recognition” (p. 11). Likewise, Elliott asserts that the very linking of citizenship to a patriarchal public sphere, disadvantages women simply on the basis that women’s access
to equitable citizenship is inherently linked to their ability to cross boundaries, navigate, and negotiate within the patriarchal power structures all the while maintaining responsibilities that are not tied to the advantages of citizenship. Gouthro (2009a) also argues that the all-consuming demands of the private sphere, also prohibit and limit women from being involved in the educational and civic opportunities. Women’s interpretations of citizenship, Gouthro says, indicates that gendered differences in social structural expectations and responsibilities consistently impact on women’s decisions and trajectory of learning.

As Canadian citizens, Johanna, Cate, and Kali have experienced and interpreted their neo-Calvinist isolation and Canadian citizenship in multi-faceted ways. As immigrants, their integration into a Canadian society began in public school where they negotiated Canadian curriculum, teachers, and school friends. Each participant had achieved a capacity to negotiate and apply formally learned skills and knowledge relevant to the Canadian public sphere and the marketplace. In marriage and childrearing Cate and Johanna withdrew into their ethnic enclave and with growing families, exclusive socialization, and responsibilities in the homeplace they were isolated and perhaps as Fraser (2013) suggests, “ghettoized” (p. 28) in the CRC community. Yet even in neo-Calvinist isolation, Cate and Johanna express a value for being Canadian citizens. They define their citizenship through the privilege to vote in political elections, to support candidates that represent their Christian values, and to feel an organic belonging to the physical land of their Canadian communities which they now call home. Kali’s lifetime work has had direct connections to the public sphere thus her interpretation of citizenship is drawn from the function of her responsibilities and interests. She recognizes, through
her work, the political frameworks on which citizenship hinges. Like Cate and Johanna, she expresses a citizenship responsibility to vote in political elections as well as engage in political discourse. She reflects, critically, the implications of citizenship for newcomers coming into Canada. All three of the participants expressed a positive sentiment of being Canadian citizens, that Canada was a good country to make home. At the same time, they also continue to maintain connections to their home country through relationships with family. Johanna expresses that part of her is still a “Dutch citizen” but that she does not find it necessary to choose because she feels equally Canadian. As Cate reflects, this duality is no longer relevant to her children. They view themselves as Canadian; they have never been motivated to (re)claim a citizenship of the past.

Held in a neo-Calvinist worldview, it appears as if there is an ongoing emergence of Johanna and Cate’s Canadian citizenship. When they actively engage outside of their enclave, one can identify particular transitions they have made toward participating in Canadian society. For example, Johanna’s curiosity about stepping outside the boundaries of her ethnic enclave and participating in her Canadian neighbourhood began in her later adult life. With struggles in the homeplace, in her trajectory of lifelong learning Johanna found meaning with Canadian women who, outside the neo-Calvinist scrutiny, would open new learning opportunities and empowerment. Since her husband’s death, Cate has moved away from the family home, has met and tentatively socialized with women in her new community, and begun to search for answers outside of her neo-Calvinist framework. Kali’s transition from isolation in a neo-Calvinist ethnic enclave to a Canadian society has been the most provocative, beginning at a young age, demonstrating a willingness and curiosity to engage in experiences outside the Calvinist framework. In this way she
demonstrates an unusual but necessary assertiveness that gives her confidence in her ability to develop knowledge and skills that she realizes over time are necessary as a single Canadian woman. She no longer isolates herself in an immigrant enclave, and fully works, socializes, and continues an open robust inquiry into the possibilities that life presents to her. As a Canadian citizen, she has opportunity to equitably engage in public discourse and to make a difference in her community.

Clarkson (2014) argues that in citizenship, the immigrant woman must insert themselves into the world. Speaking out in public means leaving one’s private world and entering a public one; allowing oneself to take a risk and participating on par with others in dialogue. In a predominantly masculine public sphere, Gouthro (2009b) and Fraser (1995) assert that this might be at odds with women: “Many women feel constrained to participate vocally as citizens in public spaces as they are not comfortable with garnering attention to themselves and their work” (Gouthro, 2009b, p. 30). Clarkson, referring to Hannah Arendt, says that there is a kind of courage that must be rallied by women, a willingness to act and speak. Arendt points out, citizenship is never possible in isolation; “to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act” (Clarkson, 2014, p. 60). While they may be small and incremental steps, Cate, Johanna, and Kali are all forging a trajectory of lifelong learning from a position of immigrant isolation to participatory citizenship.

**Loss and Transformation**

A colony [ethnic enclave] lacks the spiritual energy to rise above routine, and… it lacks this energy because it does not adequately believe in itself. … It sets the great good place not in its present, nor in its past nor in its future, but somewhere
outside its own borders, somewhere beyond its own possibilities. (E. K. Brown, as cited in Atwood, 2002, p. 1)

Boler (1999) asserts that the energy harnessed in human emotion is an integral construct of learning. As their life stories reveal, Cate, Johanna, and Kali have experienced deep emotional loss in their lives: a homeland; husbands, partners, siblings, parents and friends; and perhaps most compelling, a slowly dissipating neo-Calvinist aesthetic myth (Schaap, 1998). After all, “Ethnic communities are formed, grow, and disappear; they go through a life cycle. …With time—and it might be quite long—the ethnic organizations will themselves disappear or lose their ethnic identity, completing a life cycle of the community” (Breton, 1964, p. 205). Schaap (1998) argues that as time goes on, it becomes more difficult to understand what it is that holds the neo-Calvinist community together: “We are moving away from a fellowship whose foundation was once established by a common ethnic and theological past. For better or for worse, we have become more North American [Canadian]” (p. 398). Each of the life histories delineated here demonstrate transformations that are interpreted with both affirmation and discouragement. For example, Johanna finds affirmation in her new relationships with “Canadian” women while at the same time feels discouraged by her children who have forged relationships with Canadians through hockey and marriage. Kali interprets that her transformation is an aspect of the dynamic nature of lifelong learning and her human capacity but she knows that there are those in her family who might “wince” at what she has learned.

Schryer (1998) points out that the neo-Calvinist enclave that arrived in Canada just over 50 years ago is an example of the ever-changing nature of ethnic enclaves.
While this life history study captures an historic moment in time it demonstrates that immigrant enclaves are not homogenous (except perhaps in our minds). “All ethnic groups display internal diversity and have fuzzy boundaries” (Schryer, 1998, p. 314). Castles et al. (2014) add that a host culture might see migrant cultures as static and regressive, but immigrants are learners and demonstrate “dynamic multiple or hybrid identities” (p. 64). In dialectic reasoning, Prigogene speaks of the necessity of “giving up” for transformation; a new creative order (Capra, 2002; Doll, 1993).

As a historical materialism, Cate, Johanna, and Kali demonstrate a determination and resilience to negotiate loss while at the same time negotiate new meaning in transformation. For example, with the loss of her husband, Cate has moved away from the family home to engage with a new community, participate in new and uncertain activities that cross over her neo-Calvinist boundaries. As she reflects on meaning and relevance of church (through television, literature, and meeting people from other churches), she has become more open to a faith beyond Dutch neo-Calvinism. Johanna speaks of her children and grandchildren’s loss of an aesthetic culture and religiosity that she mystically embraces but at the same time she recently attended the christening of a great-grandchild, signalling that the monopoly she interprets of the CRC church is perhaps, out of necessity, shifting. The circle of her Canadian community has a greater diameter as she engages in more and more leadership outside the church amongst her Canadian neighbours. Kali’s commitment to transformation is clear but as she participated in the study, she too was open to examine her neo-Calvinist past. Out of curiosity she attended a CRC church service to remember and perhaps access its change.

For Cate, Johanna, and Kali, participating in the study was an act of lifelong
learning; an inquiry into a past to negotiate their present, and anticipate their future.

Dialectically, the tensions raised within cultural difference (neo-Calvinist and Canadian) and the ruling relations that perpetuate differing cultural assumptions also demonstrate, in a seemingly ambiguous space, the capacity for synthesis; the capacity for new understanding. Likewise, as neo-Calvinist immigrants transform their identity, Canadians, as the dominant culture, too should not dismiss the indelible mark and transformation that immigrant groups, transplanted in Canada, has had and continues to have on Canadian society. In this process, one acknowledges profound interconnections with others, and how emotions, beliefs, and actions are collaboratively co-implicated and how the tension of loss and transformation can bring people together. After all, Canadians too experience loss and transformation.

**Conclusion**

Employing a life history methodology, I began the research as an inquiry into the remembered experiences of schooling and learning for Dutch neo-Calvinist women who immigrated to Canada after the second World War. The research focused on institutional ruling relations (school, religion, family) that were evidenced in those remembered experiences and how they had shaped the trajectory of these women’s lifelong learning. In a critical feminist perspective, I examined how neo-Calvinist immigrant women understood the relationship of gender to their lifelong learning. Applying a critical feminist dialectic method, I conducted an analysis of seven tensions/contradictions that were evoked in the participants’ narratives in relation to a theory of context (political, historical, cultural). To conclude, as qualitative research, I raise three points that I conceptualize as significantly important and drawn from the immigrant’s experience of
learning in a host country. First, a feminist perspective of employing a dialectic method brought to the surface various ambiguities present in the complexity of negotiating meaning for Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women. This was an ambiguity that demonstrated the fluidity of similarities and differences, made sense of both at the same time (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Hassanpour, 2015; Martin, 1992), and created a space of rationality where meaning, could be negotiated in a trajectory of lifelong learning.

Second, the complexity of negotiating meaning in lifelong learning was drawn out by the dynamic contradiction of individual autonomy (valued in liberal education) and the relational power and influence of an immigrant community. As the research demonstrates, the contradiction also holds gendered implications. While some might argue that learning in an ethnic enclave or relational community might be indoctrinating and coercive as opposed to, autonomous and consenting, Ferracioli and Terlazzo (2014) point out that we must also be critically reflective of the mentalism that is constructed around the attribute of autonomy in a liberal/neoliberal framework. They argue, autonomy might better be constructed as an attribute with certain instrumental value but not as a binary to relational belonging and learning. Thayer Bacon (2006) argues, “Liberalism abstracts human beings from their social setting… as absolutely autonomous individuals… that deprives [humans] of the potential strength of mutuality, cooperation, and common being” (p. 16). Liberalism, Thayer-Bacon argues, “lacks a theory of citizenship” (p. 16) and the development of an identity always involves a dimension or relation of coercion which liberalism and neo-liberalism makes invisible. Understanding autonomy as a feminist construct changes perception in learning, where the binary of homeplace and public are dismantled and learning is equally distributed and validated
across all sites of lived experience.

In the same vein, a third point concerns Gouthro’s (2005, 2009a) argument that the epistemic values of lifelong learning must reach far beyond neoliberal marketplace values and a masculine interpretation of the private/public lifeworld. She encourages the researcher to look in peculiar places and to be surprised by knowledge and learning that is not always transparent or visible. To further the argument that Grace (2013) and Gouthro pose, re-conceptualizing how one understands the capacity of education (beyond formal schooling) may shift the values of a dominant culture which, arguably, in a masculine public/private framework, are dismissive of migrant values (Shan, 2015) to being more inclusive of meaning/knowledge that immigrants bring. As an historical parallel, Canadians focused on a liberal/neo-liberal educational agenda, are perhaps just beginning to understand what has been missed in negating the knowledge of First Nations people hundreds of years ago (Kymlicka, 2003; Osborne, 2001). As the participants demonstrate, there remains, in various ways, an underlying coherence to their ethnic Dutch neo-Calvinist thinking that continues to keep them emotionally respectful of a particular point of reference even in a dominant culture that predominantly acts as if cultural difference were irrelevant (hooks, 2009)—that soon this neo-Calvinist enclave will vanish under the weight of its own presumed redundancies. As Walter Benjamin contemplates, critique recalls what history forgets by rummaging around the ruins to find useful debris to spark an imagination (Bronner, 2017).

Implications for Further Research

The research provides a number of implications for further research. First, it encourages the telling of multiple life stories to better understand the multiplicity and flux that lived experience reveals. Nigerian novelist and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi
Adichie (2009) speaks of the human’s propensity to construct a single (absolute) story and warns of the dangers of clinging to stereotypes and “one dimensional” assumptions. She aspires all of us to listen—really listen—to diversity, complexity and possibility. She conveys, the more she listens, the more interesting and truthful her life becomes. This is something I have learned for myself in this research…how evocatively impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story and yet there always lies the capacity, as a researcher, to be analytical (Taber, 2018). The research was motivated by the idea of the single story of the immigrant, an abject person/woman, in the circumstances of war, waiting to be saved by a generous host (Coskan-Johnson, 2015). Adichie claims that a single story cannot survive. A story must be told over and over, reinterpreted and reimagined; an artifact of a particular time and space yet profoundly integral to a past, present, and future. I think about all of the literature that I have read about Dutch neo-Calvinism, about immigration, about learning; evidence that the past changes in the present—and transforms how we see and anticipate the future. In a similar feminist vein, Coskan-Johnson (2015) argues, the task of academia is “to seek relationships of solidarity” (p. 59). She contemplates that those who have been marginalized have always been speaking but the dominant “just keep interrupting” (p. 59).

Perhaps the greatest fear for the immigrant is loss—in their displacement—the loss of their identity and their connection to a peculiar knowledge that shapes them. A single story emphasizes hierarchical difference and when that single story is told over and over again in the same way it flattens experience. The single story robs people of their dignity and makes difficult the recognition of equality. In telling multiple stories, a confidence is raised, through ambiguity and diversity, bringing about lifelong learning and transformation. Smith (1999, 2005) argues that the social arises in people’s everyday
experience and stories and when we tell stories there is new insight into how society is structured, how learning occurs, and how people make sense of their lives. An implication for the research is that there are many more stories to tell.

While Canada has had a constructive history of integrating immigrants into its national fabric, currently, the issues of global migration (the movement of populations from one place to another; Guo, 2013) of asylum seekers has become front and centre for many developed countries, including Canada. Like the European Union (EU), where more than one million migrants have crossed into its borders ("Migrant Crisis,” 2016), currently the United States is reportedly so overwhelmed in its over-taxed government migrant detention centres, that it cannot detain the swelling numbers pushing on the Mexico/U.S. border ("New $1B Border Strategy,” 2019). Here too in Canada there has been a surge of irregular border crossings and amidst a growing anti-immigrant sentiment, the Federal government negotiates how to commit to the rising costs of processing asylum claims, housing, legal assistance, and “beefing up border security” to maintain national control over an influx of people entering Canada outside regular channels (Grant, 2018; “New $1B Border Strategy,” 2019). While Canada purports to be open to immigrants and immigration, the question is raised whether a citizenship truly grasps the complexity and weight of negotiating the various historical, political, and cultural contexts that people bring with them.

As Canada negotiates the increasing entry of diverse people inside their borders, it will produce complex tensions to both immigrants to Canada and to Canadians themselves (Homer-Dixon, 2006). For many, the arrival of immigrants poses problematic disruptions and issues that are not easily comprehended and often misunderstood. By
examining the trajectory of lifelong learning, immigrant stories bring crucial knowledge about lived experiences and understanding in the various sites of learning (including schools) throughout their lifespan. hooks (2009) reminds us that a refusal on the part of dominator culture to acknowledge the humanity and validity of immigrant people, dismisses them and keeps them at the margins or separated from Canadians. In contrast to “suspicious” separation, Welton (2005) argues that essential to the intersection of immigrant and host is trust: “Without the capacity to trust, the individual will not be able to be present with voice and openness in the learning encounters continually present in daily life” (p. 204). It is not enough for a host country to provide space for token multiculturalism. In her introduction to Arendt’s (1998) *The Human Condition*, Margaret Canovan asserts,

> Only the experience of sharing a common human world with others who look at it from different perspectives can enable us to see reality in the round and to develop a shared common sense. Without it, we are each driven back on our own subjective experience, in which only our feelings, wants, and desires have reality. (p. xiii)

There must be real dialogic intercourse that grapples with the complexity, paradox, and uncertainty of immigrant lifelong learning.

A critical feminist perspective (Fraser, 2013; Gouthro, 2005, 2009a; hooks, 2013; Weiler, 2001) demonstrates that in a patriarchal society, there is a gender difference in how a woman negotiates and experiences both immigration and lifelong learning and thus there is a scholarly gap in research that examines women’s experiences as told and understood by women. For example, Van Dyken (2015) examines how neo-Calvinist
immigrant women in the 1960s challenged the theological patriarchal foundations of the CRC church. In her historical analysis, the church issue of women’s ordination for ecclesiastical positions of leadership and authority was initiated, not by feminist scholars but, by ordinary immigrant women who were critically resisting the lived experience of their faith. In a feminist movement that began in the 1960s, almost 50 years later (Synod, 2007), the word male was deleted from Church Order (Article 3) thereby eliminating all impediments to women serving in any of the offices of the church. Van Dyken also notes that the inclusion of women in CRC leadership has also had a transforming effect on church discourse with an increasing attention towards social justice issues. Van Dyken’s analysis is an example of research that delineates a new attention to gender inclusion and lifelong learning and its implications for ruling relations that are re-inscribed for institutional change. Likewise, in her historical analysis of Mennonite women in Canada, Epp (2008) finds that in their peculiar ethnic relations, women carve out spaces for themselves within the structures that constrain them and negotiate ways to successfully subvert those structures. While “feminism” may not be the guiding movement, a feminist curiosity energizes ways of overcoming their invisibility.

When Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants arrived in Canada, they were encouraged to quickly assimilate into Canadian culture. The current transnational trends reveal implications for lifelong learning and citizenship for Canadian immigrants. In particular, newcomers to Canada have conveyed ideological differences with their host country, who, like Dutch neo-Calvinists in the 1950s, find are incompatible and not negotiable. Social institutions like formal public schools continue to be at the centre of those

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42 Synod: The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church is the broadest assembly of the denomination where delegates from each Classis meets annually in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
differences. Castles (2004) conveys concerns about the impact transnational trends might have on immigrant children and young adults in schools, especially those who find patriarchal assumptions of cultural superiority, leave them disoriented and lacking in self-esteem. Banks (2008) cautions that these kinds of tensions weaken citizen attachments and identity to the nation state. Currently, there have been protests by newcomers from some religious faiths (e.g., Sikh, Muslim) who publicly oppose school curriculum materials (e.g., the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum, 2015) that they argue are ideologically and morally counter to their cultural and religious beliefs. In an article in the *Globe and Mail* titled “Some Students Falling Through the Cracks After Sex-Ed Shuffle,” Selena Ross (2016) discusses the number of students in the Toronto District School Board who have been intentionally removed by their parents from their public school classrooms; some of them attending independent religious schools, others being homeschooled. In an interview with one family, Ross demonstrates the choice of and accessibility of transnational resources.

Manahil Arshad Khalil, a 12-year-old with glasses and an impish smile, sits in her Toronto bedroom, at a computer. When she finishes scribbling a math equation, she holds it up to the screen and watches a Skype window framing the face of a young woman in Pakistan—her teacher. (pp. 1, 14)

While the parallel to the historical Dutch neo-Calvinist case is strangely similar, a contemporary transnational (political, historical, and cultural) context also reveals new challenges for Canada. For example, the Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants established exclusive social institutions (e.g., churches, schools) that shaped lifelong learning and also kept them isolated or separated from their host. An implication for this research is
further inquiry that examines the role of immigrant institutions in lifelong learning related to immigration, integration, and citizenship.

**Final Thoughts**

“At the end of the voyage, if you are lucky, you catch a glimpse of a lighthouse, and you are grateful. Life, after all, is bountiful” (Behar, 1996, p. 3).

In a visit to the Netherlands this past year, I gazed out on the Atlantic Ocean and thought about the thousands of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant women commencing on their journey to a new homeland; a photograph of a family walking onto an awaiting ship, where most likely other family members and friends stood not far off, gathered to say their good-byes. I am struck by the image, as Johanna describes, of the ship moving away and everyone vigorously waving good-bye until, upon the horizon, the ship and the land can no longer by seen. This is a profound phenomenal moment. In speaking of Habermas’s interpretation of the lifeworld, Finlayson (2005) provides a parallel image to understand the solidity and ambiguity that an immigrant ethnic life history study achieves:

These unregulated spheres of sociality provide a repository of shared meanings and understandings, and a social horizon [italics added] for everyday encounters with other people. This horizon is the background against which communicative action takes place. The phenomenological metaphor of the horizon is instructive. An horizon designates the limit of a human being’s field of vision under normal conditions. The field of vision is unified, but is not a totality, since it cannot be apprehended all at once. We cannot get the whole horizon into view, because we can only see in one direction at a time. An horizon is also perspectival: the boundary shifts, albeit little by little, when we move. (pp. 51-52)
He explains that contents of the lifeworld can be critically thematized and brought into view but not all at once, that shared meanings and understandings of the lifeworld form a unity, but not a totality. Freire (2010) reminds us of this when he dialectically speaks of a “limit-situation” and a “limit-act.” In a binary sense, the limit-situation may be interpreted with a certain absolutist hopelessness but that is the limitation of positivist reasoning. In a critical feminist perspective, the limit-situations are not the impassible boundaries where possibilities end but rather the real boundaries where all possibilities begin. It is in this light, the contents of the lifeworld are open, communicatively, to revision and change, for in principle there is no reason why, eventually, every part of the lifeworld will be revised or replaced—but then this is life itself.

Bringing the research project to a close has been the most challenging part of my overall experience. In a disposition of care and commitment (hooks, 2009), I have read, reread, and reread some more. I have drawn a number of evolving and emerging conceptual maps that evoke a certain aesthetic order and coherence. I have pulled down from my shelves over and over again the various literature that I have collected to speak into my work, but this always seems to be unfinished, leading me to new resources, new leads, and new ideas. In some ways I have felt the need for deep down courage to disseminate something that is so near to me—that while I am a critical feminist conducting a sociocultural critique, the juxtaposition of my genealogy as a Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrant raises tensions or a space of ambiguity that requires substantial rationality and discernment for negotiation of learning. Thinking on Westover’s (2018) and Gouthro’s (2005) earlier insight, there is a certain risk one takes for someone whose gendered identity is established in a network of relationships in a peculiar ethnic
immigrant enclave and where engagement in learning can lead to transformation that makes those relationships untenable. I reflect on the trajectory of lifelong learning for the participants of my study and realize that my discomfort may only be a remnant of my own redundancy, that this is not a binary moment but rather one of unity and struggle (Hassanpour, 2015), one where loss is not about rejection but rather an opportunity to become re-inscribed and transformed. All of these experiences remind me once again of learning’s infinite and hopeful capacity and that for the most part we live day by day oblivious to how it is working in us, nurturing us, changing us—how it is setting a path before us of lifelong learning.
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Appendix A

Certificate of Ethics Clearance

The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 12/14/2017 to 12/1/2018.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;

b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;

c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;

d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved: ________________________
Ann-Marie DiBiase, Chair
Social Science Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

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 research at that site.
Appendix B

Interview Questions

Questions for Interview #1
1. Tell me about when and where you were born.
2. What is your family background? Tell me something about your family/family life.
3. What do you know about the country you lived in before immigrating to Canada?
4. You immigrated to Canada after World War II. What do you remember/know about that time in the Netherlands?
5. What was your parents’ occupation in the Netherlands? In Canada?
6. Why did your family emigrate from the Netherlands? What do you remember about first coming to Canada? How did you arrive? Where did you live?
7. Tell me what you remember about going to school. Did you have siblings that went to school with you? Who do you remember as your friends? What kind of teachers did you have?
8. What do you remember about your childhood?
9. As a young girl, tell me about what you remember about the community you socialized in. What activities did you do? Who were the people in that community? Did those people continue to be a part of your life as you grew up and became an adult?
10. Tell me about your education experiences and how they have influenced your life into adulthood.
11. What occupation(s) have you had? What do you remember about those experiences?
12. Tell me about what your family is doing currently.
13. What does citizenship mean to you? Have you become a citizen of Canada? What does that mean to you?
14. In your life, what are you most interested in?
15. Thinking ahead, what interests you about future ambitions or aspirations?

Questions for Interview #2 (Schooling experiences)
1. Let’s think about your school experiences in Canada. Tell me about what you remember about entering into school and the experiences you had over your life trajectory.
2. Do you think being an immigrant to Canada influenced your experiences in Canadian schools? Did being an immigrant influence your perception as a learner?
3. How do you think your Canadian schooling experiences have influenced your decisions in life?

Questions for Interview #3 (Lifelong learning and citizenship)
1. Tell me about significant experiences in your life. What do you think you learned from them?
2. In addition to your experience in Canadian schools, are there other places or ways that you have experienced learning?
3. Do you think your lifelong learning experiences (formal, informal, non-formal) have shaped your sense of Canadian citizenship?
4. Tell me about how you see yourself as a Canadian citizen.