"IT WASN'T THE END THAT I WAS SO MUCH INTERESTED IN, IT WAS THE

JOURNEY": STORIES OF WOMEN WHO PURSUED A PHD LATER IN LIFE

LOIS KAMENITZ

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EDUCATION

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

June 2021

ABSTRACT

This study provides an exploratory analysis of the experiences of seven women over 50 years of age who returned to an Ontario university to pursue a PhD in early to mid-2000 and who graduated between 2010 and 2018. Using a life course perspective framed within a feminist theory and research, political economy standpoint, I examined the socio-cultural, economic and ageing factors that pulled these women back into university. I looked at how their pursuit of a PhD shaped their sense of self, their personal identities, their life goals; the factors which impeded and facilitated their progress through their doctoral program; and how they used their individual and collective agency to grapple with structural barriers. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather the women's stories. The findings showed that while all the women came from modest beginnings at a time when opportunities for girls were limited they held fast to their dream of a PhD. When time and material means made a return to university possible they returned. Through resistance and persistence, and with the transferable personal and career skills and knowledge they brought to their studies, they realized their dream. The findings also showed that age is not necessarily a barrier to pursuing a rigorous academic degree; age was in fact the catalyst that pulled the women back to university and the facilitator of their success. And the findings revealed the importance to the women of contributing their accumulated knowledge and their new knowledge to the university and society at large.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother Manya Levy. My grandmother changed her name to Mary when they came to Canada but to me she will always be Manya for her name links her to a people and place. It connects her to a home and a way of life destroyed in the Holocaust, a home, and a way of life I know little of. She died at just 70 years of age, having shared little of her life with me. I will never know what her early life was like in Poland and in Canada. I will never know what events shaped the woman she became, the woman I knew. I will never know of her hurts, hopes, desires, disappointments, fears, moments of joy, for she existed then, as she exists now, only in fragments and traces. What she shared with me and what remains as her legacy, was her passion for reading, for words and ideas, for the big questions of life, and for social justice. It is my hope that my dissertation honours her legacy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I embarked on my doctoral journey guided by my awesome supervisor Dr. Theresa Shanahan. She and I were co-travellers over five years from my entry into the program to my dissertation defence. She steered me through the process, shared her ideas freely, listened attentively and respectfully to my ideas, always provided detailed, constructive feedback, applauded my successes, and smoothed out the inevitable bumps in the road. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to be supervised by her. To my dissertation committee members, Dr. Nancy Mandell and Dr. Aparna Mishra Tarc, my thanks for their support, careful reading of my work, and thoughtful and insightful feedback. And a thank you to my external examiners, Dr. Brad Meisner and Dr. Kim Wilson for taking the time to read and engage with my work

I wish to acknowledge the administrative staff as well, the unsung heroes who were always there to answer my myriad questions about forms, finances, policies, procedures, deadlines, office space and keys, and much more. They too played an important role in my success.

And I wish to thank and express my heartfelt gratitude to the seven women who participated in the study's interviews. I felt privileged to hear their stories and I am honoured to share them with you my readers.

To Neomi, my friend of over 70 years and my dissertation doula who also obtained her PhD later in life, thank you for your friendship and for sharing so generously of your wisdom, experience, skills, and knowledge as you mentored me on my own doctoral journey. The time I spent in my "writer's get away" apartment in Montreal afforded me an amazing opportunity to focus on my writing and reconnect with you. It was a gift I will always cherish. To Neomi's sister Jackie whose technological wizardry turned an idea into a diagram on a page, many thanks. A thank you as well to the five older women learners in my peer support group. Since the group convened in the Fall of 2018, their ongoing friendship and scholarly support has added so much to my doctoral studies and my research. They brought lightness and laughter and a steadying hand as we journeyed together through our doctoral programs. They acted as critical friends for my writing; celebrated my successes (pre-COVID with wine and fine food), and they provided encouragement when times got tough. They exemplified in person and through text, email, snail mail and Zoom the power in community.

To Paula, my partner in life, my love and deepest gratitude. For 30 plus years you have been my rock and "the wind beneath my wings." Your love and support, your caring, forbearance, joyfulness, and quiet strength have made it possible for me to soar. And finally to Ruby cat, rescued from the cold streets of Toronto in December 2006, injured and small for her age, who in spite of her troubled early life, remains in her old age, playful, affectionate, and independent. She is both an inspiration and a comfort as we age together.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ix

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

POEM FOR THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CLASS OF 1825,

BOWDOIN COLLEGE

. . . What then? Shall we sit idly down and say The night hath come; it is no longer day? The night hath not yet come; we are not quite Cut off from labor by the failing light; Something remains for us to do or dare. . . . For age is opportunity no less Than youth itself, though in another dress, And as the evening twilight fades away The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day. (Longfellow, 2009, n.p.)

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Locating Myself in the Research

Feminism demands that those who have been objectified now be able to define themselves, to tell their own stories. This is essentially a claim that each human being occupies a legitimate position from which to experience, interpret and constitute the world. Since there is no distinct separation between person and life world, the relationship between investigator and field becomes a subject-subject connection. (Stivers, 1993, p. 411)

My dissertation focuses on the stories of older adult learners, women 50 and older who returned to university to pursue a PhD in early- to mid-2000 and successfully defended their dissertation between 2010 and 2018. Their stories, as they looked back on their life and specifically what brought them back to graduate school to pursue a PhD, contributes not only to our understanding of older adult learners and their doctoral student experience but also to our understanding of growth in later life.

As a feminist researcher my work is grounded in my life experiences. And like the stories my participants shared, my story contributes to our understanding of the structures which shape women's lives and how in turn individual, collective, and institutional, agency shapes those structures. Locating myself in my research provides the reader with a window into my life and some of those forces that both shaped me and contributed to my desire to pursue this research. As a child growing up, books and stories became my companions; they brought me comfort and introduced me to worlds outside of myself. Through reading the stories of other people, I learned that I was not alone. And through the act of writing stories, I become visible to myself. I sought solace in my books, ideas, and intellectual adventures. I come, therefore, to the writing of this dissertation guided by a belief in the transformative power of stories to shape and give voice to who we are.

Family

I am first-generation Canadian. I was born in Montreal in 1946 and grew up an only child in a multi-generational Eastern European Jewish family. We were poor, but our home was rich in music, books, culture, and religion. It was a household where family members were keenly aware of classism, anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, and homophobia. These issues were the substance of many passionate kitchen table discussions, and all the adults took an active interest in politics, social justice causes, and union work. An education beyond high school was held up as an ideal, a goal to which one aspires. But "for people like us" it was an unattainable goal financially and, perhaps more importantly, it was an unattainable goal because universities were not seen by my family as a place that welcomed us. We did not belong there. My mother was my inspiration and guide into a world of ideas, and at this she succeeded wonderfully. She was beautiful, intense, and fiercely intelligent, with an eclectic circle of friends that included several gay men and lesbians and many single women who lived independent and adventurous lives. In my mind's eye, she is sitting in her favourite chair reading a book and smoking a cigarette with a cup of coffee on the table beside her. She had a strong spiritual belief in dreams and life beyond death, which she shared with me in many bedtime conversations. As I got older, she also shared her favourite books, and our conversations then centred on the books we were reading.

Upon reflection, I realize that the stories I heard from and talked about with my mother were the stories of the people who lived in the books we read or of her friends who visited often. Rarely did I hear family stories, and never did I hear from her stories about her life in Poland. My family was enigmatic; secrets and a sense of fear, anger, disappointment, and sadness were ever present. The world outside home, immediate family, close friends, and the broader Jewish community was unwelcoming, even dangerous.

Early Schooling

School was one such unwelcoming place. The social, economic, religious, and political views of the dominant culture were imposed on me by those who wielded the power, and I was an outsider. They determined what was good and right and what was considered knowledge. I refer to that period in my life as "school daze circa 1951–1962."

> When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, dis-abled, female, or speak with a different accent than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. (Rich, 1986).

My teachers' words resonate still: "That is an unsatisfactory book report. You picked a book from the wrong side of the library. You are not old enough to be reading that book."; "Yours is the best essay but we don't believe you wrote it, so the prize goes to Maureen!"; "Jews speak in sing song voices. Learn to speak properly or you will never get ahead."; "Stop asking so many questions and just read the problem. It's simple math."; "Fifty-four percent on your Provincial High School Leaving Exams! Someone as gifted as you obviously wanted to fail, or you would not have done so poorly."

I felt like a guest, and an unwelcome one at that, in someone else's house. I felt estranged from myself and others. I felt like an alien residing in an alien universe. Some kinds of education can indeed be worse than no education. Teachers play an important role in children's lives. It is not always the content that they teach that lasts a lifetime rather it is the relationship. As an educator, that those words still resonate some sixty years later serves as a reminder to me that I have a duty of care to do better. Young children rely on the adults in their life to advocate for

them but not all adults are able or willing to act on a child's behalf. The reasons are complicated. Yes I had some positive experiences, I made lifelong friends, I loved learning, but for me those positive memories are overshadowed by the negative. At the same time I am strong, I am resilient. As an adult I built support networks overcame challenges. and found my way back to formal education.

Health Challenges

As a young child I was diagnosed with a bleeding disorder that prevented me from participating in physical education classes and limited my leisure activities to sedentary pursuits. In my early teens another disease surfaced, which affected my joints, although I did not receive a diagnosis of juvenile arthritis. Doctors thought I had mononucleosis, and when that could not be confirmed they ran out of ideas. In my early 20s I finally received a diagnosis of rheumatoid-like psoriatic arthritis, specifically arthritis mutilans, a severe, deforming, and destructive form of the disease. It destroyed my hands, feet, and cervical spine as well as caused damage to other parts of my body. The drugs available at that time managed the symptoms to some extent, but the disease did not go into remission. Worse, the medications caused serious gastrointestinal issues and were ototoxic, so I now have a bilateral high frequency hearing loss. After neurosurgery to fuse my upper cervical spine and with the advent of a new class of biologic drugs, in 2000 my disease finally quieted, and in the years 2011 to 2013 I had reconstructive surgery, which made my hands more functional. All the while, from the time I was a child I also struggled with significant emotional and later mental health challenges unrelated to my physical health issues and unrelated later in life to my coming out, which was a positive, growth enhancing experience. With the support of professionals at St. Michael's Hospital and the Centre for Addiction and

Mental Health (CAMH), whose skills were matched only by their compassion, I ushered in a new decade in 2010 stronger and more whole. They were my urban angels. A return to university was something I could now seriously consider.

Mature Student

I entered university (Atkinson College) as a part-time, undergraduate, mature student in the early 1970s and fell in love all over again with learning. Hoult (2012) calls mature students the "firebirds of the education system" (p. 1), resilient adult learners who find their way back to formal education through resistance and persistence. Like many women of my generation, I took a circuitous route to my goal of pursuing a doctorate. I completed a bachelor's degree in 1978 followed by a graduate diploma in Child Study, Assessment and Counselling in 1983. I took master's level courses, ABD, at the Alfred Adler Institute (now Adler University) in 1980–1984, received a Master of Library and Information Studies in 1993, and a master's degree in Environmental Studies in 2015. All the while, and in spite of my many health challenges, I built a career in primary to post-secondary special education as a teacher, consultant, educational psychologist, and student and family counsellor and, more recently, a consumer health librarian. My career spanned more than four decades, three provinces, and urban and rural settings. In 2016 at age 70, I began doctoral studies.

Why did I wait until I was 70 to apply for admission to a PhD program? What blocked me from applying sooner, and what propelled me to apply in 2015? What role did my own internalized ageism play in my delaying, by a week, the submission of my completed application? What was I thinking, I asked myself, taking on such a commitment at my age? What would friends and colleagues say? What would the admissions committee think when they saw my application and realized from my work history how old I was? And what was I planning to

do with a PhD at my age? The answer in part can be found in a story to which many women can relate.

Marriage, Divorce, and Coming Out

At age 20 I married or, to be more precise, I "drifted" like a "sleepwalker" into marriage. Very soon I found that I was "giving up bits and pieces of myself in such small increments (an ambition here, a fantasy there) that I was startled awake one day to discover that I was almost entirely gone" (Bordo et al., 1994, p. 80). For me that awakening came in my mid-late 30s. Emboldened by the activism of the 1960s and 1970s, empowered by the stories coming out of the consciousness raising groups I belonged to, and inspired by Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* I accepted a position as a lecturer for an intersession education course at the University of Regina. The course was only a few weeks long, but it was long enough for me to plan what I called "my great escape." With the help of friends and colleagues at the university, I found permanent work, beginning that September, in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. In 1983 in search of a self I hardly knew, I left Toronto, left my marriage of 16 years, came out, met Paula my life partner and began life anew in Saskatchewan. Like Baba Copper (1988), "I burned my bridges behind me. I believed that in my own way I was a pioneer like my foremothers. I was inventing my life as well as reflecting the movement of women in the 1960s" (p. 5).

Coming to Feminism

As a woman who came to consciousness in the heady days of the 1960s, 1970s my journey as a feminist took many twists and turns. Calixte et al. (2010) likened feminist theory to

a "roadmap" (p. 1). Where I have been on that journey informed the work I did in education and in Saskatchewan with abuse survivors and street-involved youth and women, as well as youth in correctional facilities; where I am today informs the research I undertake.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, I considered myself a radical feminist and lesbian separatist, or lesbian feminist. Radical feminism was about building alliances with women across class and race lines. The focus of theorizing and activism and the central focus of analysis was on "sexuality, control and violence [and] . . . men's power over women . . . in all areas of women's lives" (Calixte et al., 2010, pp. 21). Lesbian feminism emerged out of radical feminism. From the 1990s to today I position myself in the socialist feminist camp, which means I see gender and class as central to my analysis and activism.

Raising Rose

In the 1970s when work was progressing on deinstitutionalizing children, youth, and adults my ex-husband and I were approached by a rabbi in the community involved in outreach to families with children with special needs. He contacted us about adopting or fostering a Jewish child in need of a community placement. That is how Rose (pseudonym) came into our life as a foster child. She was nine, had Down syndrome, and had been placed in care as an infant. She was a crown ward; her parents having relinquished their parental rights shortly after she was institutionalized. Rose was beautiful inside and out. She had the dark hair and olive complexion that reflected her North African heritage, and she had the most amazing deep blue eyes. She arrived uncared for and abused by her caretakers, with little to no verbal language and a few signs. She blossomed in a very short time into a strong, loving young woman with verbal language skills that amazed. She enjoyed attending synagogue where she "talked to God"; she loved "her chicken restaurant," Special Olympics, hockey, baseball with "father" (my husband at

the time), and lunches in Yorkville with "mother" (which was me). When my mother died, she attended the funeral in Montreal and could tell people that "mother-mother [grandmother] died, come back no more." When my husband and I separated, she lived out west with me and attended school there. However, she was not happy and missed her life in Toronto, a testament to how far she had come and how much progress she had made. So she returned to Toronto, to live with my ex-husband and at age 21 she moved into an adult setting. Today Rose lives with two other women in an apartment with in-residence supervision.

Arriving for a Life Once Only Dreamed About

Now in my 70s I feel I have arrived, albeit more than a little late, for a life I once could only dream about. I It is never too late friends tell me, and while it does not always feel that way, they are correct. We do not come into the world stamped with a best before date. The personal story I share in "Locating Myself in the Research" is the story of many older women who, in the words of Marge Piercy (1990), participate in a process of "unlearning to not speak" (p. 147). My struggle in elementary and secondary school and then at university was, at its core, a feminist struggle to understand why I, as a first-generation Canadian, working-class woman, and later a single parent, felt excluded from mainstream educational practices and policies and why I saw educational institutions as both sites of exclusion and liberation. Unpacking the power issues that exclude, silence, and control our behaviour continued to be at the forefront of my thinking as I pursued a PhD.

What follows is a story I created and shared many years ago with groups of women who were living in shelters or were precariously housed and later in life were completing their high school equivalency. It never failed to elicit a mix of anger and laughter.

Figure 1.1

Knock, Knock

Knock-knock, knock-knock, knockety-knock, knock, knock...

A woman walks up to someone's home, someone she knows, someone she expects will welcome her into their home. She knocks, but no one answers, so she knocks a second time. Still there is no answer. Then she hears voices inside. "Surely my knock was heard," she says to herself, and she tries again. She knocks a third and a fourth time, still no answer. How could that be, she wonders? They must have heard my knock. "Am I at the wrong house? Am I too early, too late? Did I forget to bring something? Am I dressed wrong?" In her heart of hearts, she can't believe that she is not welcome, so she keeps knocking. She knocks until, knuckles torn and bleeding, she is forced to admit defeat and retreat. Head down, sad, and angry all at the same time, she leaves.

Some of us, I told the women, retreat into silence and never knock again. Others of us share our story. As we share our story, one person, then another, then another says, "That happened to you? It happened to me as well." And we discover we are not alone. Then, one day, someone comes our way and explains who was in the house and why they would not answer our knock. Then we understand. We reclaim our voice, and we go on to tell others who was in that house and why they would not answer our knock. We achieve what Freire (1970) called conscientização and O'Reilly (1972) called the "click." Like Virginia Woolf we unmask our oppressors, and we speak out against sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, classism, ableism, heterosexism—whatever isms of domination keep us out and hold us back. In the late 1930s, when British members of Parliament argued that "[there are] thousands of women doing work which men could do while at the same time there are thousands of qualified men, young and

9

middle-aged, who cannot get a job of any sort," it was Virginia Woolf (1938) who unmasked the oppressor. She spoke out against sexism and patriarchal thinking, albeit tongue in cheek: "The cat is out of the bag" she said, "and it is a tom" (p. 78).

The Writer in the Research

While my dissertation focuses on the stories study participants told of their later life doctoral journey, I believe my own learning trajectory up to the point where I accepted an offer to enter a doctoral program has the potential to contribute to the discussion. I share many experiences with participants in my study because we share a historical context, a place in time that tends to produce common beliefs, behaviours, and similarities in our life course, even with our diversity. As a feminist researcher I understand that I bring myself to everything I do as a researcher. In the words of Miller (2007), "all social research constitutes an autobiography of the researcher (p. 173; see also West et al., 2007). This is so whether or not we elect to include ourselves directly as one of the research participants: "we are human inventors of some questions and repressors of others, shapers of the very contexts we study, coparticipants in our interviews, interpreters of others' stories and narrators of our own" (Fine, 1992, p. 208).

Introduction

Many participants acknowledged that they grew up in an era that was characterized by postwar financial hardship and a social custom that expected individuals to marry, settle down, and to raise and support a family. Enrollment in a university program was beyond the social and financial reach of many people—particularly women—growing up in the 20th century. (Brownie, 2014, p. 733)

Purpose Statement

The purpose of my study was to examine the experiences of a sample of women between age 50-65 who returned to university to pursue a PhD in early- to mid 2000 and successfully defended their dissertation between 2010 and 2018. It is my hope that insights gained from this study would provide encouragement and support to older women currently pursuing a PhD and future students considering late life undergraduate or graduate studies. Grounded in a life course perspective and viewed through a feminist political economy, social reproduction lens, I examined the socio-cultural, economic, and ageing factors that pulled older women back into university and how these factors shaped their accomplishments, sense of self, personal identities, and life goals. I made visible their experience, documented their diversity, showed how there is no basis for either negative or positive stereotypes about later life, and examined the implications for higher education decision making in doctoral education. I also contributed to an expanding literature on gender, ageing, and education.

Central to this examination is a critique of age, gender, and class discrimination and the social, institutional, economic, and political factors influencing older women's positions in society generally and in institutions of higher learning specifically (Bakker, 2015; Biggs et al., 2003; Brown & Brown, 2015; Law Commission of Ontario, 2012; Macdonald & Rich, 2001; Morganroth Gullette, 2013; Shanahan et al., 2015; Statistics Canada 2020b; Thompson, 2018). My study advanced knowledge of the nature and cultural context of older women's experiences and the circumstances leading to social injustice and educational inequities (Biggs et al., 2003; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2013; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Lather, 1992; Olsen, 2011; Sprague, 2016).

Studying older women in post-graduate education is important for two reasons: understanding why they return to school in later life and understanding the obstacles that delayed their return. I summarize the reasons. First, socio-culturally, women's education was not a priority for many Canadian women who are now seniors, nor was paid employment. Second, institutionally, women's child and elder care obligations usually meant they were "time crunched" for a significant portion of their adult lives, resulting in limited time to pursue paid work and education. Without, or at best with limited state-supported child and dependant adult care, family members, usually women, were called upon to fill the gap (Bakker, 2007; Gouthro, 2009, 2010; Mandell et al., 2008). When asked in life course interviews to itemize their biggest regrets, mid-life women mentioned not having achieved sufficient education or the educational level of which they felt they were capable (Mandell et al., 2008; Wendover, 2006).

Research Question

My focal research question was: How did women 50 years of age and older experience their participation in PhD study. From this broad inquiry, I sought answers to several other questions. Why do late life women enter a doctoral program? What do they learn from their experiences, and based on what they learn, how do they think current and future later life doctoral students could be supported and encouraged? What do they hope to achieve with their PhDs? And what does their successful completion of a rigorous academic degree tell us about later life learning and the frequent depictions of old age as a time primarily of loss and decline?

With population ageing, a new market for higher education has opened up (Carrière & Galarneau, 2011; Cruce & Hillman, 2012; Lauzon, 2011). According to a Statistics Canada (2015) report, "for the first time, the number of women and men aged 65 years and older

exceeded the number of children aged 0 to 14 years" (para. 1). They are also better educated and in the paid work force longer (Carrière & Galarneau, 2011; Looker, 2018; Thompson & Foth, 2003; Woodspring, 2018). When presented with the time and material means, some women in later life will choose to return to university to pursue graduate education (Brownie, 2014; Lauzon, 2011; Thompson & Foth, 2003; Wendover, 2006). While the relationship between demographics and culture is complex, Canadian educators and education researchers need to take up the challenge and address the increased need for research on older adult learners (Carrière & Galarneau, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2015; Thompson & Foth, 2003).

I have theoretical, methodological, practical, and personal reasons for taking up this challenge. Theoretically, critical gerontology literature has largely ignored older women. Gender as socially constructed remains an important focus of academic work, yet scholars in general, and feminist scholars in particular, have largely neglected to address gender and old age and explicitly feminist research in higher education (Calasanti et al., 2006; Cruikshank, 2013; Freixas et al., 2012; Rosenthal, 1990). Moreover, what little literature there is on older women often treats them as homogeneous, neglecting to consider the ways that their learning careers are shaped by issues of age, class, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Calasanti & King, 2015). Not only are our learning trajectories influenced by our gendered and aged positioning, but once in school, our educational career paths are influenced by, and intersect with, larger socio-political and socio-cultural norms and expectations around family obligations, gendered achievement, financial concerns, and appropriate age pursuits. Individual experiences are inherently political and deeply embedded in power and privilege (Deutsch & Schmertz, 2011; Frances, 2009; Gouthro, 2009, 2010; Mandell et al., 2008; Oakley, 1981; Rosenthal, 1990; Van Rhijn et al., 2015, 2016; Yamagishi, 2002). By documenting the stories women tell about their

return to university, I positioned women's stories as "legitimate sources of knowledge" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 783). I shed light on the intersection of larger structural forces and women's individual agency by demonstrating the ways in which women use their own agency in later life to grapple with systemic and structural forces.

The second reason for my study was methodological. It arose from a review of the scholarly literature in gerontology, ageing studies, women's studies, lifelong learning, and higher education, specifically doctoral education. In my review of scholarly gerontology literature, it was apparent that studies continue to privilege quantitative, "positivist approaches" to research (Van den Hoonaard, 2018, p. 1). My choice of foregrounding older women's stories and acknowledging them as co-creators of knowledge contributed to "address[ing] past oversights" in gerontology (Kivnick & Pruchno, 2011, p. 144). It also contributed to a shift in the conversation on ageing away from a deficit model of ageing. Research on women and higher education tends to focus on younger students in their 20s up to their late 40s (Davey, 2002; Erikson, 1996; Hoult, 2012; Lauzon, 2011; Maher et al., 2004; Pyhältö et al., 2012; Wendover, 2006), and there is a paucity of literature on the doctoral experiences of older women learners. My research on older women enrolled in Canadian doctoral programs contributed to filling that gap.

Practically, post-graduate students, faculty, and staff study and work under pressures and tensions brought on by neo-liberalism, "human capital formation to serve market needs" (Lauzon, 2011, p. 290), and globalization which have structural, socio-cultural, and personal implications (Bakker, 2007; Bezanson & Luxton, 2006; Canaan & Shumar, 2008; Fallis, 2007; Fisher et al., 2014; Lynch, 2010; Metcalfe, 2010; Mies, 2014a; Mies, 2014b; Phillipson, 2006; Sissel et al., 2001). From the university as a site of "liberal education" to the university as an

"institution of the economy," much has changed (Fallis, 2007, p. 341). Universities, under pressure from fiscal restraints and suffering from "mission drift" (p. 341), struggle to meet student expectations and academic goals.

And finally, the fourth reason was personal. It arose from attempts I have made to understand my own learning journey. What Mandell et al. (2008) said about mid-life women can be said for me and for other women in their 60s and beyond: "Living in the midst of profound social change has forced mid-life women to throw out old blueprints and write new individual ones, leading to some unexpected turns, some disappointments and some new issues to reflect on" (pp. 7–8).

Scope

I limited my study to universities in Ontario, Canada (excluding York University) and to women who were 50 years or older when they began their doctoral journey. My study provided an important exploratory analysis of the older doctoral student's experience. Such knowledge offered a window into how the university is serving this new and growing constituency

Significance

As a researcher and part of the "silver tsunami" to which Cruce and Hillman (2012) refer, I was in a unique position as I interviewed women who, in their 50s and 60s, had embarked on a doctoral journey. My dissertation has the potential to add to the body of literature on older women doctoral students and bring about change for older women pursuing doctoral degrees. It also has the potential to advance a view of ageing and of adult learners that enriches society. "Feminist scholarship, particularly work by feminists in their seventies, eighties, and nineties,

has much to offer in terms of re-framing gerontology as an emancipatory project for current and future cohorts of older people" (Carney & Gray, 2015, p.123). I could not agree more, and I would add that work by older feminist scholars could also "re-frame" post-secondary education as an "emancipatory project." My research has, as well, implications for younger doctoral students, and it has the potential to lead to further studies, all with a view to transforming societal structures and relationships. Given that there is a dearth of scholarly literature on older adult learners in higher education generally and in Canadian doctoral programs specifically (Jones, 2013; McAlpine et al., 2012; Wall, 2008), my dissertation filled gaps in knowledge about older adult learners. It gave university decision-makers, government decision makers and faculty a glimpse of this new group entering the academy. This could impact institutional policy, graduate program supports for older women doctoral students, teaching and learning, as well as graduate supervision practices. By privileging their stories, the women became "legitimate sources of knowledge" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 783), and by engaging my participants as co-researchers and co-participants in the creation of knowledge, I contributed to feminist theory and praxis. In light of the shifting demographics, the time was right for a study such as the one I conducted.

Summary

In this chapter I situated myself in my inquiry—how women 50 and older experience their participation in PhD studies. I provided my purpose and research question, the scope of my study, and its significance. In chapter two I discuss relevant scholarly literature and position my study in relation to the literature on critical feminist gerontology, the doctoral journey, and the doctoral experience of students 50 and older. In chapter three I describe my theoretical

frameworks. The methods used in conducting this study, including my role as a researcher, participant recruitment, confidentiality, data collection, and coding are discussed in chapter four. Chapters five and six contain study findings. In chapter seven I provide an analysis of the findings and a coda, The Researcher's Reflections, and I conclude in chapter eight with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Higher education institutions must now view their mission as the advancement of learning across the lifespan. . . . A critical constituency is the increasing number of adults who pursue learning as a lifelong process and mission statements must reflect their learning needs. (Kasworm et al., 2000, pp. 460–461)

In this chapter I explore the literature pertinent to the three fields of thought that frame my study: critical feminist gerontology, the doctoral journey, and the doctoral student experience of women 50 or older. To achieve the objective of examining the experiences of women who pursued a PhD at age 50 or older, I carried out an extensive search of peer-reviewed articles published in journals on gerontology, ageing studies, women's studies, lifelong learning, higher education, and doctoral education. And I consulted scholarly books and chapters in books on women and ageing, higher education, the doctoral journey, and the doctoral student experience of women 50 or older. The intent of my research effort was to bring together a broad, representative sample of published literature.

A Definitional Dilemma

There is little agreement on what constitutes "old age," especially as people are living longer and in many parts of the world living healthier into advanced old age. Interestingly, in the sources I examined, either age was not specified (Bryant & Jaworski, 2015; McAlpine et al., 2009) or other terms for age were used, sometimes in combination with a chronological age range: "midlife" (Heinrich et al., 1997; Mandell et al., 2008; Wendover, 2006), "[adults] 60 to 75 years of age, referred to as young-old" (Huston, 2011), "women in retirement" (Zhan & Pandey, 2002), "advanced age individuals 62 years and older" (Phillips, 2019), "boomers" (Thompson & Foth, 2003; Woodspring, 2018), "pre-boomers," and "those born before 1946" (Coates, 2018) or

"post retirement" (between 65 and 80) and the "third age," described in popular literature and advertising as a time of relative good health to pursue volunteer and leisure activities. George (2011) pointed out, that whether or not we subscribe to the idea of "a third age" as a distinct life stage is moot since the concept has caught on and therefore it has become real. What she argued was most disconcerting was that scholars again are assuming responsibility for defining roles and activities individuals should pursue in their later years. Moen (2011) suggested we consider the third age as a "project." I prefer to see life as a "project" one in which we actively engage individually and with others until we die. And finally there is the "fourth age," which according to Radtke et al. (2016) starts at about age 80 or 85 and is the final years of life. A standard definition I use is one which defines the young old as 60/65-74, middle old 75-84 or sometimes 89, and old old/frail elderly 85 or 90+ (Little, 2012, Phases of Aging). Little's definition reflects the phases of ageing used by Statistics Canada.

Pothen et al. (2019) suggested that "focusing on age alone as a marker of change instead of ability and agency" may be "biased" (p. 696). "Old age," too, is contingent on where an individual is on the age continuum (Pinsker, 2020). Age stages however still matter, the typical life course with distinct stages of childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and later life still matter, but the life course is more fluid now. The life course today can be likened to a mosaic, a blending together of many diverse elements at varying ages. It is non-linear. While age norms have not disappeared completely, they are not given as much weight today as they were given in the past two or three decades since what is accomplished in each life stage may veer off from traditional scripts. How we define age today is therefore an outcome of the non-linear life stages.

Further muddying the waters are the multiple definitions of "older learners" and "mature student": "above age 35" (Fung et al., 2017), "25 years or older" (Van Rhijn et al., 2016), "21 years and over," the age used by the institutions in Parr's sample (2000), "students in the second half of life" (Lauzon, 2011), "non-traditional students and lifelong learners in higher education" (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002), "someone who has not had full-time education for at least three years and has usually had experience in the labour market" (Parker-Jenkins, 2018, p.57), and "returners," those students who pursue a PhD after a number of years in the paid work force (Haley & Lohr, 2018).

"Nomenclature is problematic. . . . Defining a group by numerical age . . . is problematic because it changes every year and soon omits the group's defining life experiences" (Coates, 2018, p. 2). Since students' experiences reflect the universities they attended and society at the time they attended those universities, the experiences of women over 50 who pursued a PhD, while similar in some ways, can also be expected to differ depending on where and when they attended. To ensure clarity, I have described participants in this study as women 50 or older who returned to an Ontario university to pursue a PhD in early to mid-2000 and successfully defended their dissertation between 2010 and 2018. And the designation I have elected to use—"older women learners"—is consistent with Chen et al. (2008), Levaque (2012), Smith (1999), Wolf, (2009), and Lin (2011) who defined them as adults in their late 50s, 60s, 70s, and up.

Many forces have shifted the life course. Fewer women are having children today and many of the women who do are delaying childbirth until their 30s or 40s with smaller numbers of children the norm. Smaller families are the norm generally, and multi-generation families living together or in close proximity are less likely as well (Statistics Canada, 2014). Fewer people are marrying, and if they are marrying, partnering, or cohabiting, it is the norm now to do

so later in life (Statistics Canada, 2014, 2016). These changing patterns in marriage and childbearing make for greater heterogeneity in families, and less of one's life is spent married or in a marriage-like relationship caring for children and dependant adult family members. The impact for education is that women will have more time to pursue further education if they wish. Work life has changed as well. Greater numbers of women are opting to work full time, and precarity is making for multiple interruptions in many people's career trajectory, delaying retirement. George (2011) addressed the notion of "structural lag" as an important macro-level consideration when reviewing the literature on life course. Structural lag occurs when there are changes in the behaviours of large groups of people to the extent that structural arrangements no longer meet their needs (p. 249). An obvious example is the need for a national childcare strategy as well as a rethink of adult, elder and palliative care.

Several key take-a-ways emerged from this chapter: little agreement exists on how we define old age and older learners. For the purposes of my study I have elected to use the following definitions: young old, 60/65–74, middle old 75–84 or sometimes 89, and old old/frail elderly 85+ or 90+; a similar lack of consensus exists on how older learners are defined. For the purposes of my study I have chosen to use the following, older learners are adults in their late 50s, 60s, 70s, and up; the life course has altered. It is non-linear, more fluid now, with expectations for what is to be accomplished at each stage in the life cycle more fluid as well; the shift to a non-linear life course is due to changing patterns in marriage, childbearing, and women's greater involvement in the paid work force; and structural arrangements have failed to keep up with changes in peoples' behaviour.

I turn now to key themes within critical feminist gerontology, the doctoral journey, and the doctoral student experience of women 50 and older and follow in the conclusion with a

discussion of the gaps in the literature.

Critical Gerontology and Critical Feminist Gerontology

Behold your future. . . . You will not apply for membership, but the tribe of the elderly will claim you. (Mitchell, 2004, p. 180)

Critical gerontology casts a critical eye on society in general and on gerontology in particular (Baars et al., 2006, 2014; Calasanti, 1993; Calasanti & Zajicek, 1993; Cole et al., 2000; Cole et al., 2010; Freixas et al., 2012; Mandell & Duffy, 2017; Ray, 1999, 2007; Ray & Cole, 2008). It has developed along two parallel but rarely intersecting lines: 1) political economy, which focuses on ageing from a structural perspective, specifically socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural dependency, and ageism and 2) humanism, which focuses on ageing from an individual perspective and examines how older women use their agency to relate to structural inequality (Ray & Cole, 2008).

Critical feminist gerontology brings together critical gerontology and feminist theory. Critical feminist gerontology like feminist political economy "forefront[s] feminism and critique[s] it in the name of empowerment" (Ray, 1999, p. 172). While both critical feminist gerontology and feminist political economy shine a light on gender, intersecting oppressions, and power relations across the lifespan with an emphasis on the voices of the women themselves, feminist political economy adds another layer with its specific focus on the political and the economic. For this reasons I have chosen to overlay a political economy context, on a life course framework and a feminist paradigm and methodology.

Despite its strengths however, feminist political economy does not always use an age lens and when it does it is often a dependency, age as a burden lens. "Ageing is about more than 'structured dependency'; individual agency allows us to 'disturb and destabilize our

understanding of old age'" (Twigg & Martin, 2015, p. 353). Women's stories of ageing and the work of feminist critical gerontologists who examine the linkages between structural inequalities and ageism have given us a more "progressive" perspective (Carney & Gray, 2015, pp. 124, 132). This is why in my study I have taken the approach I have.

Unfortunately though critical feminist gerontology has been relegated to the "back room of research" (p. 46) and many feminist scholars have neglected old age and older women (Calasanti & King, 2011). Freixas et al. (2012) maintained that despite the fact that if we live long enough, all of us regardless of our gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, class, religion, ethnicity, or (dis)ability will be old, die and, sadly, be confronted by ageism, even in academe (Calasanti, 2016; Calasanti et al., 2006; Law Commission of Ontario, 2012; Morganroth Gullette, 2013; Sarton, 1992; Sontag, 1972). Morganroth Gullette (2013) argued that "ageism is to the twenty-first century what sexism, racism, homophobia, and ableism were earlier in the twentieth—entrenched and implicit systems of discrimination without adequate movements of resistance to oppose them" (p. 15).

To bring critical feminist gerontology into the light in order to "perform critical, feminist gerontological research," researchers must first examine their own "implicit cultural beliefs" about age, ageing, and old age (Freixas et al., 2012, p, 46). The work of Ruth Ray (1999, 2007; Ray & Cole, 2008) also focused attention on the look inward. In addition she argued for the coming together of the humanities, the arts, and gerontology in order that the voices of the old in literature, poetry, first person narratives, and the visual and performing arts can be heard and seen. I find this exciting because much of gerontology research even today favours quantitative research over qualitative, speculative research.

In my review of critical gerontology and critical feminist gerontology literature, a number of themes emerged: ageism and the need to look inward, stories of ageing and the coming together of the humanities and the social sciences and challenging the misery perspective. I begin with a look at the literature on ageism. Of particular relevance to my research is how and to what extent ageing stereotypes influence thinking and therefore behaviour since to enter a doctoral program late in life means, in many cases, transiting from the role of professional in a long-established career to the role of student in a rigorous academic program. Such a transition back to the classroom is often preceded by questions about "fit" in institutions that focus on the young adult learner as well as questions about how returning older students, as well as staff, faculty, and younger students view their ability to successfully meet course and research demands.

Critical Gerontology and Critical Feminist Gerontology: Age, Ageing, and Ageism and the Need to Look Inward

Calasanti (2008), in her reflection on feminism and ageism, highlighted her own continuing struggle with ageism in society:

> Unlike other forms of discrimination that grant people lifelong positions of privilege or subordination, ageism oppresses the people we will become, cuts off our options for collective action now, and arms us for battles we cannot win alone, while leading us to ignore that which binds us. (p. 157)

Prejudices such as sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism are manifestations of fear of the other; ageism's focus is on fear of our future selves (Nelson, 2005). It is the one ism of domination that applies to everyone (Calasanti et al., 2006). That is why ageism cannot be relegated to an "et cetera" in the list of isms of domination (Calasanti et al., 2006) and why it is important to look

inward to "address the enemy within . . . implicit ageism," those "thoughts, feelings and behaviors toward elderly people that exist and operate without conscious awareness or control" (Levy, 2001, p. 578). And it is why I cannot investigate older women learners pursuing a PhD without shining a light on ageism. Stereotypes about age and ageing are pervasive and influence thinking about our ageing selves. Cuddy and Fiske (2002) argued that at best the old are portrayed as "feeble yet loveable, doddering but dear." At worst they are condemned to a nether world populated by the ugly, unfit, and undesirable or they are rendered invisible (pp. 3–4).

In 1969 Robert Butler created the word "age-ism" to describe "the subjective experience implied in the popular notion of the generation gap, prejudice of the middle-aged against the old" (p. 243). He argued that "aging is the great sleeper in American life" (p. 245). In 1995 he called it "the ultimate prejudice, the last discrimination, the cruellest rejection" (pp. 38–39). The irony is that the fear of, disease, decrepitude, growing old, and death predates Butler and has been, in the words of W. Andrew Achenbaum (2015), "endemic over time and across space" (p. 14). How then to assess ageism in society?

Erdman Palmore (2001), in his foundational study "The Ageism Survey: First Findings," examined both prejudice, that is, "stereotypes and attitudes," and discrimination, which included "personal acts" and "institutional policies" (p. 572). While Palmore's earlier work (1999) directed attention to positive ageism and positive views on ageing, in his 2001 study he chose to focus on negative assumptions such as that with age comes frailty. Palmore's (2001) objective was to develop a survey that would shine a light on three key questions: "What is the prevalence of ageism in various societies? Which types of ageism are more prevalent? Which subgroups of older people report more ageism?" (p. 572). Palmore surveyed 84 adults over age 60. His sample had a high preponderance of women but an almost equal distribution of those who had

completed high school, some college, and had a post-graduate education. But reporting the findings of his 20-item survey was fraught with difficulty since a particular item (e.g., "A doctor or nurse assumed my ailments were caused by my age") could have been perceived by one respondent as an example of ageism but not by another, or respondents were reluctant to acknowledge that they had experienced that specific form of ageism (Palmore, 2001, p. 575). Focus groups or in-depth interviews would have helped clarify responses.

The ambiguity of some survey items not withstanding, the survey instrument Palmore developed and tested has reliability and validity, and it is cited in many studies on ageism (Bennett & Gaines, 2010; Giles & Reid, 2005; Kornadt et al., 2019; Levy, 2001). Palmore shone a light on how ageist statements and acts were common and occurred frequently among his respondents. He pointed out the intersection of ageism, gender, and educational attainment. This particular finding is important in light of the nexus of sexism and ageism described by Sontag (1972) as the "double standard of aging" (p. 31). With regard to educational achievement, the differences in kinds of incidents reported, while not statistically significant, raise an important question about the role of education, intertwined as it is with income and social status, in either buffering an individual from ageist ideas and policies or making an individual more vulnerable to them. Palmore (2004) was also interested in developing an instrument that could examine the "epidemiology of ageism" (p. 41), and in 2004 he compared ageism in Canada and the United States using the survey he developed in 2001.

In that study both Canadian and American respondents agreed that ageism occurred frequently, but differences were noted in reporting with Canadians reporting it more often than Americans. While Palmore's work is important, he did not address how views on ageing, including self views, have their roots in childhood, evolve over the lifespan, and shape life

decisions (Giles & Reid, 2005; Kornadt et al., 2019). Palmore is not alone. To date ageism

research has focused on middle-aged and older adults. If, as Palmore hoped, ageism can be

eradicated, then work on changing minds and hearts should begin in childhood, in

intergenerational opportunities and thoughtful conversations not only about ageism but about

age, ageing, old age, and death (Biggs, 2008; Morganroth Gullette, 2008). Morganroth Gullette

(2008) described how the "shock" of "seeing the children in the Boston Museum of Science

fleeing from the 'Face Aging Booth' . . . galvanized [her writing] *Aged by Culture*" (p. 194).

In reflecting on Morganroth Gulette's visit to the Boston Museum of Science, I asked

myself some tough questions. Why is it that frailty and dependence disgust us? Why do we find

it more repulsive in old people than we do in children? Ray's (2007) reminder to researchers

remains especially pertinent: "social change agents must not only change the way people think

about ageing, but also how they feel about ageing. This requires that we must first change our

own thoughts and feelings about ageing" (p. 70). To move forward in our thinking as feminists

and, in particular, as feminists conducting research on and with older women, it is necessary to

examine the images and the narratives of old women, what Randall and McKim (2008) called the

"narrative dimensions of human life" (p. x). This examination is necessary for our own identity

as well as our professional work (Calasanti et al., 2006 ; Morganroth Gullette, 2003, 2008;

Macdonald & Rich, 2001; Ray, 2007).

It is necessary as well to move the discourse on ageing from one primarily about loss and

decline to one about renewal and crafting new identities, always understanding that "the

possibility for choice [about how we age] is not equally distributed" (Minkler & Holstein, 2008,

p. 201). What is needed is research that examines what the constraints are that limit choice so

they can be addressed. What is also needed is *Reifungsromane,* stories of ripening (Waxman, 1990).

In sum, ageism shapes identity. While prejudices such as racism and anti-Semitism, speak to our fear of the other ageism speaks to the fear of our future selves. It is the enemy within that operates often in the absence of conscious thought and influences how we think and feel about our ageing selves. An end to ageism requires that we look inward and examine our own attitudes and feelings about age and ageing. But, since attitudes are formed in childhood we also need intergenerational opportunities, thoughtful and thought-provoking conversations about age, ageing, old age and death and we need stories that portray positive images of older women.

Stories of "Ripening" and the Coming Together of the Humanities and Social Sciences

Aware of the power of words and stories to shape and reflect who we are, Barbara Frey Waxman wrote *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature.* Though Waxman's book is about literary criticism, it is relevant to this study. As feminist researchers, our "transgressing" takes the form of crossing disciplinary lines, what Ray (1999) called "disciplinary border crossing and genre bending" (pp. 173–174). Waxman created a new literary genre she named *Reifungsromane*, or "novel of ripening," in which ageing female protagonists challenge negative cultural stereotypes of the old woman and ageing.

In chapter one she surveyed a selection of popular magazine articles written over the course of the 20th century. In the next two chapters she analyzed select fiction on middle-aged women and "young-old women" (age 60–75), and in the final chapter she analyzed works by May Sarton and Margaret Laurence that feature frail old women. Waxman was inspired by octogenarian writer May Sarton (1992) who spoke about "ripening toward death in a fruitful

way" (p. 78). Waxman's book includes stories "created by women writing about aging women for receptive readers in a rapidly aging society" (p. 2). In much of the literature to which most readers have become accustomed, girls "grow-down" as they become women and move into old age. According to Waxman, girl's and women's lives become increasingly circumscribed, their development "thwarted" by cultural restrictions imposed on females. The women in *Reifungsromane*, in contrast, "grow up"; they expand and move into senescence with joy, passion, hope, helplessness, despair, anger at their failing bodies, increased dependence, greater self-knowledge, greater independence, humour, and confidence, in other words, women are portrayed as fully alive until they die. As a woman who returned to post-secondary education later in life, I related to the women in *Reifungsromane* who "grow up," and I became interested in learning about the experiences of other older women "returnees" to post-secondary education.

Where Waxman focused on fictional stories of ageing, Morganroth Gullette (2003) argued for a focus on age autobiography, personal stories of being aged by culture. Ray and Cole (2008) answered Morganroth Gullette's call and focused on the personal stories of prominent critical gerontology scholars who, in a special issue of the *Journal of Aging Studies* (2008), reflected critically on their life and their work. Noteworthy is that all of the contributors were part of a generation that became socially and politically conscious during the 1960s and 1970s, and their work, not surprisingly, reflects that time in history. Of note as well is that the issue was dedicated to Mike Hepworth who, like Waxman, used stories to illuminate ageing. Hepworth's book *Stories of Ageing* (2000) and Waxman's *From the Hearth to the Open Road* (1990) addressed the need to put a human face on old age and to bring together the humanities, the arts, and social sciences in the scholarly gerontology literature.

Tornstam (1992, 2005) too challenged the misery perspective prevalent in scholarly and

popular works on ageing, based on qualitative and quantitative research studies he conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s with persons 65 and older. He suggested that as people age there is the potential for a "shift in metaperspective, from a materialistic and rational view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally accompanied by an increase in life satisfaction" (Tornstam, 2005, p. 41). Tornstam's work was informed by the work of psychoanalyst Carl Jung and developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson.

Jung articulated the challenges faced by adults in their 50s and beyond as they move from a life focused outward on job, money, success, home, and family to a life focused inward as the inner world demands attention (Hollis, 1993, p. 111). Erikson's (1982) stages of psychosocial development, especially his seventh and eighth stages, generativity versus stagnation and integrity versus despair, respectively (pp. 55–72), influenced Tornstam's work. Erikson characterized the seventh stage as a time of leaving something behind that remains after you are gone and the eighth stage as a time of looking back at what has and what has not been accomplished in your lifetime. Such a looking back is accompanied by a feeling of fulfillment or at least acceptance. A descent into despair results from dissatisfaction with one's life as death draws nearer. For Erikson, the eighth stage was not a battle between opposites, an either-or binary. Rather, it represented a natural tension between alternating states that need to be balanced.

My choice of foregrounding older women's stories and acknowledging them as co-creators of knowledge contributed to, in Kivnick and Pruchno's (2011) words, "address[ing] past oversights" in gerontology (p. 144) and, I would add, higher education. Zeilig (2012) argued "when these perspectives [of critical gerontology] are applied to stories of age, innumerable

interesting questions start to form about the intricate interplay between the personal, emotional and the social, political, cultural constructions of age/ageing/older people" (p. 30).

A cautionary note is important. Older adult learners are a heterogeneous group, and a developmental lens must be used with caution in order to avoid the "age stage" trap. It is necessary to hold conceptual models with care. Kim et al. (2017), for example, questioned whether defining generativity as a late life task was sufficient. She saw an "age bias" in Erikson's conception of generativity and suggested generative acts can occur at any age. She also highlighted that generativity occurs within social environments. Generative concerns may arise within individuals, but generative behaviours are by nature implicitly social. Germaine to my study, Kim et al. (2017) noted that education as an important socio-cultural environment is where people are encouraged to think critically and act for the collective good (p. 7). Highly educated individuals, therefore, may have had more opportunities to be generative. They may also have acquired an increased awareness of and ability to maintain generative objects, thus opening another door to inequality.

Returning to an earlier discussion of Tornstam's work, Tornstam's discussion of solitude and positive solitude (2005), Christopher Long and James Averill's (2003) study on solitude and the benefits of being alone, and what Ost Mor (2019) called "soulitude," are important. Their ideas are of particular interest since they problematized the notion that old people disengage from social relationships and social activities as they await death. For Tornstam, the dualism of activity and disengagement did not apply. Rather there is, as Tornstam saw it, a redefinition of self and relationships. Rather than disengaging, the individual becomes more selective in their choice of social and other activities and there is an increased desire for positive solitude.

Calasanti and King (2011) addressed this as well when they questioned why the years in old age have to be governed by a "busy ethic" typical of earlier stages in the life cycle (p. 81). That said, Calasanti and King did go on to highlight that some people are not free of many of the responsibilities that kept them busy earlier in life. Access to positive solitude and a shift in how relationships are constructed are not equally distributed. The structural limits on agency and choice are an important caveat. I will examine this issue of solitude and a redefinition of relationships further in a discussion of the scholarly literature on the doctoral student experience of women over 50.

Challenging the misery perspective, however, calls up many questions about decline, dependence, death, and North America's obsession with youth and its fear of death. Cosco et al. (2013) argued that by "notably failing to include processes of death and dying, current models of successful aging neglect the realities of the lived life" (p. 751). Lamb (2013) pondered "permanent personhood, maintaining the self of one's earlier years, or meaningful decline" (p. 41), and Tornstam (2005), like Lamb, questioned projecting middle-age values "with its typical emphasis on activity, productivity, efficiency, individuality, independence, wealth, health and sociability" into old age and suggested that "growing into old age has its very own meaning and character" (p. 3).

"A wish to make em like us . . . pretending that there is nothing special to the human condition that older age can offer" fails to consider the reality that our life trajectory is not static; change, loss, decline, and ultimately death are indeed the reality as people age (Biggs, 2008, p. 117). In North America age segregation, which has been the norm, has given way to a windfall in anti-ageing products including creams, lotions, active living clothing, and even cosmetic surgery and pharmaceuticals. Media and advertising play an important role in shaming those who are

32

ageing while encouraging them to hide the signs of ageing. Despite the rise in fraudulent claims about the efficacy of certain anti-ageing products and the potential harm in plastic surgical procedures and certain drugs, demand remains strong (Mehlman et al., 2004; Monbiot, 2011; Slevin, 2010; Twigg, 2004).

Biggs (2008) argued further that "critical gerontology should seek to explore the unique contributions arising from that part of the life course" (p. 118). He raised a most thought-provoking point. He suggested that by pretending that there are no differences between youth, mid-life, and older adults and by the "blurring of generational difference" (p. 117), there is potential for intergenerational rivalry as competition increases for scarce resources. What is needed, according to Biggs, is "generational intelligence" defined as "the degree to which one becomes conscious of self as part of a generation, a relative ability to put oneself in the position of other generations and an ability to act with awareness of one's generational circumstances (Biggs, 2008, p. 118). Recognizing "age as difference" and accepting that the difference is neither to be feared nor something to which superiority or inferiority attaches (Cruikshank, 2013, p. 150) can go a long way to breaking the fear of growing old, of the inevitability of decline, and ultimately of death. As Oliver Sacks (2013) remarked, as one ages, the heightened awareness of the "transience" of life can bring joy (para. 11).

To summarize this section, these are the take-a-ways. Feminist researchers are crossing disciplinary boundaries. They are arguing for the need to bring together the humanities, and social sciences. They are looking with a critical eye at stories of age and they are writing and sharing stories about age which put a human face on old age. Scholars in critical gerontology and critical feminist gerontology are challenging the misery perspective so prevalent in the popular

and scholarly literature and they are foregrounding old age as a time in life with it's very own meaning and character and with its very own set of tasks.

The Doctoral Journey

Although each doctoral student has a unique set of attributes and reasons for beginning the degree, it is important to understand that a reflective and proactive stance is needed to successfully navigate the journey. It is crucial for candidates to understand the uniqueness of the journey and [their]reasons for beginning it and continuing in it. (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014, Introduction, Part V)

Since doctoral programs reside in higher education institutions I looked more broadly at the higher education literature before examining the scholarly literature on the doctoral journey. Cruce and Hillman (2012) argued that "the academic community has yet to fully embrace research on adult students" (p. 595). This in light of the fact that traditional stereotypes of old age are being challenged by the post-war, baby-boom generation. There is an emphasis now by boomers and those of the "silent generation" (people born between 1928 and 1945) on enhancing mental capital and promoting well-being in later life through a range of learning opportunities including a return to post-secondary degree programs deferred over the life course by many, especially by women.

Data from the 41st and 44th statistical reports by the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies, stated that "just over half of full-time doctoral enrolments in the youngest [less than age 25] and oldest [age 35 and over] categories are by females (Looker, 2018, p. 45). A 2011 Statistics Canada report produced similar findings:

Nearly half (47.3%) of adults aged 25 to 34 with an earned doctorate were women, whereas this share was about one third (31.6%) in the older age group (55 to 64). Women accounted for 58.1% of adults aged 25 to 34 with a master's degree compared with

45.4% among adults aged 55 to 64 with the same credentials. The share of bachelor's

degrees held by women was 59.1% in the 25 to 34 age group compared with 49.3%

among adults with a bachelor's degree aged 55 to 64. (p. 8)

While these statistics tell us how many women in each age category have ever earned a graduate

degree, they do not tell us what age the women were when they began doctoral studies nor what

age they were when they obtained their degree. They also do not reveal doctoral enrolments in

the 65 and older age group. None the less, with the greying of Canada's population and the fact

that older women are indeed pursuing master's and doctoral degrees universities need to prepare

for an increase in the numbers of older women returning to pursue advanced degrees.

      According to Kasworm et al. (2000), "few critical questions have been posed of higher

education policy frameworks as they relate to adults and to lifelong learning" (p. 452). One of

the challenges however for such policy frameworks lies in the Canadian political structure of

decentralized federalism. The Council of Ministers of Education Canada noted in their 2012

report that there is "no official definition of adult education or adult literacy at the national level.

. . . Provincial and territorial governments have defined a common vision for the concept of

lifelong learning" (p. 1). The authors of the 2008 Canadian Council on Learning Report, "State

of Learning in Canada: Toward a Learning Future," argued that "Canada's hopes for future

prosperity will depend not only on the strength of our educational system, but on our capacity to

engage all groups of Canadians, from the pre-school child to the older adult, in all types of

learning throughout their lives" (State of Learning in Canada, p. 12). The report reiterated that

Canada lacks on the national level, "a lifelong learning system [and] a plan to transform the

rhetoric of lifelong learning into a coherent vision and a plan for action" (p. 5).

When I returned to the 2012 Council of Ministers of Education Canada Report, it was evident that its focus was on meeting language and literacy needs and skills training for the workplace. The Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Discussion Paper (2017) and the 2019 Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) report by Pichette et al. (2019), "Lifelong Learning in Ontario: Improved Options for Mid-Career, Underserved Learners" focused once again on skills for the workplace. The HEQCO report acknowledged a role for colleges and universities but as a means to meet market needs. While skills for the workplace are important, they are not all encompassing. Kasworm et al. (2000) argued that "[this emphasis] reflected the conflicting interests of pragmatic vocational oriented learning versus a liberal education of critical alternative ideas" (p. 457).

Kasworm et al. went on to say that higher education institutions "must now view their mission as the advancement of learning across the lifespan. . . . A critical constituency is the increasing number of adults who pursue learning as a lifelong process and mission statements must reflect their learning needs" (pp. 460–461). Much more needs to be done through federal-provincial partnerships and national organizations to broaden the meaning and the scope of adult education and lifelong learning. Further research is needed.

Those of us who, in later life, return to university to pursue advanced degrees, represent a new constituency. The paucity in core higher education publications of research from the perspective of adult learners themselves, and in particular older women learners, has important implications for success in higher education generally and in doctoral programs specifically. What follows are themes drawn from the scholarly literature on the doctoral journey: fit and belonging, supervision, solitude, and agency.

Themes in the Literature on the Doctoral Journey

Fit, Belonging, and Social Support Networks

      Engaging in doctoral study is like no other educational experience. It is a journey to becoming a scholar and an academic. Fit, a sense of belonging, and a belief that this elite educational experience is one in which I can engage and find success depends in large measure on the doctoral student's socialization into the university and the faculty/department to which they belong as well as their sense of self-worth. For many women, however, it is a struggle to fit into a White, masculine, upper-class, and increasingly competitive institution. As Wall (2008) pointed out, the university is a "meritocracy that disadvantages women who are uncomfortable with competition" (p. 220). It disadvantages those students as well who are trying to survive financially and who are burdened by often precarious and low paying work, whether on or off campus, and securing research grants and scholarships. In addition to the demands of successfully navigating courses, research, and writing, the mad scramble to stay afloat financially often impedes access to conferences, faculty, and university events, which are opportunities for networking and socialization into the academy (Acker & Haque, 2015). Socialization, as Acker and Haque noted, is for some doctoral students the "ideal, a model of how things might work under certain fortuitous circumstances, but somewhat limited when viewed against the realities of contemporary academic life" (p. 239).

      The literature on the high attrition rates for doctoral students confirms there is a problem. (Charbonneau, 2013; De Clou, 2016; Devos et al., 2017; Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2000; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Tamburri, 2013; Wendover, 2006; White, 2004). According to Charbonneau (2013), the percentage of students from eight research intensive universities in Canada who successfully completed a PhD within nine years ranged from a high of 78.3% in the health sciences to a low

of 55.8% in the humanities. The financial loss to a university that invests heavily in their doctoral students and the loss to the individual and society of future economic and intellectual capital is too great to overlook. An important question is how do internal factors (motivation to enter and complete a PhD, academic identity and self-worth, writing, research, and time management skills) as well as external factors (social and financial supports, faculty/department climate, socialization into the faculty/department, and supervision) facilitate or impede belonging?

Mantai (2019) "conceptualised 'belonging' as a consequence of social and collaborative practices that lead to co-constructed identities" (p. 369). She went on to say that "social support provides candidates with a sense of competence and confidence as emerging researchers and as professionals. . . . Candidates' sense of belonging to personal, social, and professional communities is critical for their becoming (i.e., development as researchers)" (p. 369). Enhancing a student's sense of being a member of an academic community influences persistence and degree completion. Informal activities such as interactions with one's supervisor and committee members as well as peers are important to a sense of belonging (Sverdlik et al., 2018). These activities are especially important for students who enter feeling ambivalent about whether or not they belong. Patrick O'Keeffe (2013) also shone a spotlight on the importance of a sense of belonging in a doctoral program: "The creation of a caring, supportive and welcoming environment within the university is critical in creating a sense of belonging" (p. 605). He went on to suggest that "this can be achieved by the development of positive student/faculty relationships . . . and the encouragement of diversity and difference" (p. 605). At the faculty or department level, leveraging and building students' personal social capital and networks can also go a long way to enhancing the doctoral journey. It can also meet the need many learners have to learn "within a web of connections" (Wolf, 2009, p. 56; see also Yosso, 2005).

On the matter of capital, a note must be made of the work of Yosso (2005) who, in using a critical race theory lens, looked at the unrecognized and unacknowledged forms of capital students from socially marginalized groups bring to their studies. Yosso referenced aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital, defined respectively as "the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality" (pp. 77–78), the skills needed to "maneuver[e] through social institutions [that] . . . acknowledge individual agency within institutional constraints . . . [the] social networks that facilitate community navigation through places and spaces" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80), and "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality . . . grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination" (p. 80).

Socialization into doctoral study however is not straightforward. For many students, it is an ideal. McAlpine et al. (2012) moved from socialization to the development of what she called an "academic identity trajectory" (p. 511), similar to a life course trajectory where past experiences influence the present and the future. In McAlpine et al.'s study "Untold stories," the researchers showed how 24 doctoral students, 12 in Canada and 12 in the UK, navigated significant personal and academic challenges on their doctoral journey. Of particular interest is the paradoxical nature of agency McAlpine et al.'s study revealed. They concluded that because the students exercised agency and met those challenges with resolve, they were not deterred from their goal of obtaining their PhD. As a consequence, however, problems endemic to the system and the culture of the universities, faculties, and departments went "undisturbed," and students experiencing difficulty continued to be seen quite simply as not "measuring up" (McAlpine et al., 2012, p. 521). While it is outside the scope of this study McAlpine et al.'s study raises several interesting questions. What is the impact of agency versus structure? How realistic is it to

expect students to make changes at the macro and even mezzo level of large institutions? To what extent therefore is post secondary education at the doctoral level more like the workplace with students expected to create social support networks and communities of practice they can turn to for resolving problems? As McAlpine et al. noted, students did resolve their difficulties and successfully navigated their way through their program however they left "undisturbed" structures which may well have needed to be modified. How then does change happen? An interesting and familiar conundrum.

Supervision

As important as peer support is to student success, a positive supervisor–supervisee relationship is equally so. "The first—and often most influential—external factor that affects doctoral students' experiences in graduate school is their relationship with their supervisor(s)" (Sverdlik et al., 2018, p. 369; see also Bégin & Géarard, 2013; McAlpine et al., 2012). The investment in making this complex, dynamic relationship work is high for both the student and the supervisor. It is a relationship, hierarchical in nature whether or not one acknowledges it, that at its best is collegial, constructive, mutually respectful, and growth enhancing—a relationship in which the supervisee is accompanied on a journey of intellectual and academic growth until they can be launched as an independent scholar. It is also a relationship that has to be resilient enough to withstand "sturm und drang," the inevitable differences in expectations, interpersonal disagreements, challenges inherent in both supervisor and supervisee weathering multiple responsibilities, conflicting timelines, and communication breakdowns. Grant (1999) likened supervision to walking on a "rackety bridge" (p. 9). She argued that "both supervisor and student need to be sensitive to the effects of their actions and responses to the other, or the student may

fall off" (p. 9). Just as Grant used the metaphor of a "rackety bridge," Cotterall (2013) used the

metaphor of a "roller coaster." She described the doctoral student experience as a "rollercoaster

of confidence and emotions" (p. 174). She believed that

> if acknowledged, emotions can inspire, guide, and enhance research; if ignored or
>
> suppressed, they can delay and even derail it. By acknowledging the emotional dimension
>
> of doctoral students' experiences, supervisors, departments, and institutions can better
>
> support their research trajectories. (p. 185)

Other scholars concur. Creely and Laletas (2019) examined the experiences of Kate, a

50-year-old doctoral student in early candidature, and the reasons for her successful completion

of a PhD. They concluded that her "deep reflexivity, enjoyment of her research and her own

well-being" were the keys to her success (p. 439). Bryant and Jaworski's (2015) book *Women*

Supervising and Writing Theses: Walking on Grass stood out for both its focus on "the affective

politics of academic knowledge production" in the humanities and social sciences and its

richness and readability (p. 3). Different forms of life writing by different contributors in which

the personal and the theoretical intertwine guided Bryant and Jaworski's analysis. The authors

described the doctoral journey as a "journey of transition or transgression into academe" (p. 3).

In the chapter Rowntree (2015) contributed to Bryant and Jaworski's book, she talked

about the "emotional space to feel vulnerable" in the supervisory relationship (p. 97), and she

reminded the reader that the suppression of emotion has its roots in the elevation of reason,

associated as it is with the masculine, and the devaluing of emotions historically, associated as

they are with the feminine. She argued that passion and the passionate pursuit of knowledge is at

the heart of academic work, and the "dampening down" of the emotions result in what she called

the "epistemological divide" (p. 97). The importance of emotions in supervising and thesis writing was a recurring theme in Bryant and Jaworski's book.

Returning to the concept of "fit" discussed earlier, supervisor/supervisee fit is important especially in light of the significance of the supervisory relationship to student success and the role emotions play in the supervisory relationship (Devos et al., 2016; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009; Pyhältö et al., 2012, 2015). Like the supervisory relationship itself, supervisor/supervisee fit is complex. McAlpine and Norton (2006), while not directly addressing supervision or supervisor/supervisee fit, shone a spotlight on the significant problem of doctoral attrition rates, and they proposed a framework of what they called "nested contexts" (p. 6) for understanding the complex web of relationships in which students and faculty work and which impact the doctoral student experience. Students conduct their doctoral study and research within a "departmental/disciplinary context" which is "is nested within an institutional context that is situated within the societal/supra-societal context (p. 6). As McAlpine and Norton (2006) argued, the value inherent in such a framework is that we are reminded of the importance of "considering contexts not presently in our focal area" (p. 6). When analysing supervisor/supervisee fit it is important to remember that student and faculty alike work within institutions, departments, and "supra-social context[s]" that are intertwined. Students wish to be agentic to the extent possible in each of these different contexts, and they draw on a variety of relationships for support. Supervision is "a collective institutional experience" (McAlpine, 2013, p. 260). It is important to remember as well that fit is a "dynamic process" that unfolds over time (Pyhältö et al., 2012, p. 409), and at any point in time these various contexts can shift and create uncertainty, instability, even volatility and, as a result, impact decision making about the choice of a supervisor and one's evaluation of an already established supervisory relationship.

With the COVID-19 pandemic shutting down universities in March 2020, all courses went online, and advising and supervising were conducted by telephone, videoconferencing, and social media. It seemed fitting, therefore, to examine the literature on the role of technology-mediated individual and group supervision (Dowling & Wilson, 2017; Fenge, 2012; Gray & Crosta, 2019; Hutchings, 2017; Jones, 2013). Gray and Crosta (2019), in their review of internationally based research on online doctoral supervision, contended that what constitutes effective supervision is the same whether supervision is face to face or mediated by technology: enthusiasm for the student's research, care for the student's well-being, timely feedback, cultural awareness and sensitivity, agreement on expectations and openness to change when necessary, flexibility, creativity, experience, knowledge of available resources, ability to see potential difficulties, and approachability when clarification is needed or issues arise. However, implementing such a relationship when it is mediated by technology can be difficult. The supervisor's and the student's knowledge of and comfort with technology, the hardware and software programs used, and the new learning environment must be considered along with feedback and what modes of feedback would be best. The availability of and access to computers and the internet must be factored in as well.

Hutchings (2017) pointed out the impact of technical difficulties such as slow internet speed and intermittent internet connectivity. As one participant in her study said, "[using technology] makes [the] assumption everyone has access to required and correctly configured equipment and is IT literate, this will discourage people from engaging" (p. 11). With COVID-19 forcing the closure of university and public libraries with their free computer and internet access, the issue of the "digital divide," the unequal access to personal computers and high-speed internet, has once again been revealed. Participants in a small sample of research I reviewed,

43

stated that they would not give up face-to-face supervision. While they were open to online tools, those tools could not replace face-to-face (Dowling & Wilson, 2017; Hutchings, 2017).

With regard to group supervision, it establishes a "cohort identity," whether online, face-to-face, or a blend of both and acts to tempers the sense of isolation so often felt by doctoral students. (Fenge, 2012; Hutchings, 2017; Jones, 2013). One of the students in Fenge's (2012) study likened members of her cohort group to "essential travelling companions" (p. 407). The group could be based on a number of things including but not limited to field of study, research methodology, or stage in the doctoral journey (pre-candidate, post-candidate). Group supervision enhances the important sense of belongingness while supporting collaborative learning. It can act as a meaningful addition to individual supervision sessions. As Jazvac-Martek et al. (2011) pointed out, there is increasing interest in collaborative knowledge production and co-publishing; providing doctoral students with opportunities for developing the skills needed to engage in collaborative work would seem to be good preparation for their future. Going forward, when life after the pandemic returns to a semblance of what it was before, it will be interesting to see to what extent supervision goes back to a dyadic, face-to-face relationship and whether faculty and students have acquired a new openness to and comfort with individual and group supervision online or a blend of face-to-face and online.

Solitude

Figure 2.1

Solitude

The solitary nature of scholarly work can be a positive experience for some, a welcome opportunity to engage with their capacity to be alone. It can be an opportunity to self-reflect, to think their own thoughts and express their creativity as they consider new and original ideas. For others it can be an isolating experience. A friend suggested that a good job for a PhD student would be a lighthouse keeper. For others still it can be a mix of both. It is important before proceeding, to differentiate between what Long and Averill (2003) called positive solitude, being alone without being lonely, and feelings of loneliness and isolation. Feelings of isolation can have a significant negative impact on the student experience.

Isolation can happen when doctoral students do not see themselves, their values, beliefs, attitudes, ways of knowing, ways of teaching and learning reflected in the ways they are taught and supervised and in the way they are expected to produce and disseminate new knowledge. Hearing the voices of doctoral students is important if we are to fully understand the doctoral student experience from the perspective of an insider (Acker & Haque, 2015; Burford & Hook, 2019; Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2000; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2007; McAlpine & Norton, 2006; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wall, 2008; Yosso, 2005). However, as Golde (2000) claimed, doctoral students are consulted the least and are "relatively voiceless, stemming from their powerless, dependent position" (p. 203). This serves to increase the sense of isolation.

Increasingly today's students are female, older, employed or retired, and have family responsibilities. In addition to being older they may also be international students, first-generation Canadian students, First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation students, students with disabilities, students who identify as LGBTQS+ and others who are not the traditional student of the past. Many come to their doctoral studies not only wanting to be heard but expecting to be heard. They come expecting to contribute their knowledge and expertise. So while universities have opened the door to an older and more diverse student population, the organizational changes needed to make them feel they belong may be lacking. Tierney and Rhoads (1993) pointed out that to welcome non-traditional students "without . . . the re-shaping of the organizational culture is an assimilationist endeavor prone to failure. Increasing diversity demands structural change" (p. 72).

Feelings of isolation and loneliness can result in a lack of social and academic integration into the doctoral program for the student. As noted earlier, a sense of social isolation can be mitigated by faculty and peer support. However, for some students faculty support is limited and peer support not available, or if it is, the student may be time crunched and unable to take advantage of it due to work and family obligations. As well, they may not be able to discuss academic issues with family and friends (Golde, 2000; Sverdlik et al., 2018), and they may lack money for social outings, which are opportunities for informal learning about role expectations, the research and writing process, publishing opportunities and conferences, and sources of financial support.

For doctoral students generally, but especially for those students returning to graduate school after a long absence, the solitary nature of scholarly research and writing can be daunting. Developing self-efficacy in understanding and applying theory and methods to writing proposals,

journal articles, and conference presentations as well as their dissertation can leave a student

feeling overwhelmed (Burford, 2017; Golde, 2000; McAlpine et al., 2009; Spaulding &

Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Burford (2017) argued that discussions of scholarly writing that

focus on skills often position the student, and the student alone, as the bearer of the "writing

problem." For Burford, to view academic writing as simply a skill is not sufficient. He advocated

for a view of writing as a "complex social action" and a "culturally specific knowledge-making

practice" that is inherently political and affective (p. 21). He concluded by suggesting that

writing be approached as a "life world" that opens the door to researchers asking how writing

should be done in the hurried academy and how the "burden" of writing more in less time

impacts well-being. These are questions that go beyond the level of skills, as important as those

skills may be. Again, an effective supervisory relationship can provide some support especially

when individual supervision is combined with cohort group supervision and when supervisors

are prepared to instruct students on what and how to write for their discipline (Cotterall, 2011).

On the matter of a teaching role for supervisors, Boud and Lee (2007) offered a thought-

provoking challenge, arguing for "peer learning as pedagogic discourse" (p. 509). They

suggested that in addition to fellow doctoral students, peers could also be coworkers, students

and faculty in other departments, and members of a broad research community outside the

university. What they argued for is in essence a community of research practice.

Like Boud and Lee (2007), Jazvac-Martek et al. (2011) also questioned the assumed

centrality of the supervisory relationship. While important, and while an ineffective supervisory

relationship can certainly have a negative impact, students also engage with peers beyond their

own cohort group in order to meet their learning needs. They seek out and engage with

coworkers, other faculty in and outside their department/faculty, and researchers outside the

university. How to implement formalized communities of research practice within existing department and broad institutional structures would, as Boud and Lee (2007) noted, require further research. Presently, in many university doctoral programs, peer writing groups exist that enhance feelings of belonging to an academic community while facilitating progress in becoming an academic writer and researcher (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Maher et al., 2008; Maher et al., 2004; Scott et al., 2019; Vacek et al., 2019; Wegener et al., 2016). It is important to mention, in conclusion, that negative experiences can be ameliorated through individual, and collective agency. Students are resilient. Individually or enmeshed in networks of social support they can and do navigate through learning and work structures.

Agency

While structure agency is not an organizing principle of my method or conceptual approach, it is an important element in the narratives of the participants and will emerge as issues/themes in the findings. I begin then with a brief discussion of the work of Giddens and his theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984). Giddens advanced the idea that while social structures shape individuals, individuals can and do shape social structures. There is a dynamic synergy between structures and agency. Structures don't just come into being, absent from human action. They are reinforced when individuals are acquiescent; on the other hand, when individual's engage in reflexivity they can refashion structures. By acting outside barriers which impede progress change is possible. Risman (2004) said this about Giddens's work, "Giddens embraced the transformative power of human action. He insisted that any structural theory must be concerned with reflexivity and actors' interpretations of their own lives" (p. 432). How doctoral students "come to situate themselves within the structures in which they are working and

learning" constituted the focus of McAlpine's and Amundsen's (2007) study. It is, according to McAlpine and Amundsen, key to the student experience.

While a focus on the structural context within which larger educational decisions are made is necessary, in a later study McAlpine and Amumdsen (2009) drew attention to the importance of student agency and how the student's sense of agency plays out within various structures: societal, university, and faculty/department. Important to the student experience, therefore is, as Giddens (1984) argued, not only how students are shaped by the contexts in which they engage but also how they are active in shaping those contexts (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Giddens, 1984; Hopwood, 2010; McAlpine & Amumdsen, 2009).

McAlpine and Amundsen (2009) identified two "variants" of agency, individual and collective (p. 114). Noteworthy was their idea of collective agency since doctoral education is viewed by many as a solitary and isolating endeavour. Negotiated agency in which the student works to achieve individual and collective aims in doctoral activities and interactions was accompanied by both pleasurable and challenging emotions. Not surprisingly, when the accompanying emotions were largely pleasurable and the student felt empowered, they were encouraged to persist in their studies. But when the emotions were largely challenging, students often left the program before completion of their degree. There is therefore another reason for encouraging negotiated agency beyond the role it plays in facilitating degree completion—it is important for the doctoral student's overall well-being. Well-being is multifaceted and defined in a variety of different ways in different contexts. There is agreement, however, that it is subjective, that is, it is the individual's experience of their physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual health that is key (Hopwood & Paulson, 2012; Jones, 2015; Schmidt & Hansson, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Tomasz & Denicolo, 2013).

In the words of Tomasz and Denicolo (2013), "studying for and living through a doctorate is an inescapably bodily experience" (p. 47). Emotions are experienced in the body and expressed through the body. Meanings are attached to gendered, aged, racialized, classed, and (dis)abled bodies, and those meanings bear on the doctoral student experience. While the doctoral student is agentic, agency has structural limits, and some students are more equal than others in their access to social and academic resources.

Taking bodies into account provides a more comprehensive picture of doctoral student activities and interactions, yet much of the literature on the doctoral experience is "disembodied," paradoxically "assuming a white male body" (Hopwood & Paulson, 2012, p. 670). In higher education and doctoral education literature, the presence of an absence is discussed. This reflects the extent to which North Americans privilege the mind over the body as if the "physicality of studying" can be ignored (Hopwood & Paulson, 2012, p. 667). Thinking of the body as an object of study helps researchers make important connections between mind and body and between the doctoral student's academic experience and the impact of bodily issues on that experience. This is especially important now as students and faculty respond to the challenges of universities under neo-liberalism, focused as they are on the demands of the market. Change, what Monk and McKay (2017) referred to as "shifting terrain," produces tensions felt at all levels of the university. Opportunities for caring, collaborative, supportive relationships that enhance well-being for doctoral students and faculty alike are needed more now than ever (Heinrich et al., 1997).

The Doctoral Student Experience of Women 50 or Older

Older individuals comprise a small but growing number of the college–university student cohort, which reflects their interest in intellectual enrichment in later life. . . . Intellectual stimulation and personal fulfilment are the key reasons cited by older people for enrolling in higher education programs. (Brownie, 2014, p. 724)

What follows are themes drawn from the scholarly literature on the doctoral student experience of women 50 and older: fit/belonging, supervision, solitude, integrity and generativity, teaching, and learning. As noted earlier, there is very little literature on the older adult woman pursuing a PhD. I am breaking new ground. As a result, some of the themes are the same as I discussed earlier however the content will be different. For those themes that are the same, for example fit/ belonging I address only what stood out as unique for the older doctoral students.

The dearth of research on older adult students and in particular older adult women who pursue a doctorate late in life, while disappointing, affirms the need for further research in this field. Of concern is that the limited number of studies on older women doctoral students serves to reify the prevailing social constructions of women and old age. While masculinity continues to be defined by competence and autonomy, qualities often enhanced by age, women's cultural capital continues to be defined by youthful beauty, a quality that does not improve with age (Morganroth Gullette, 2013; Slevin, 2010). A further concern is that there is a real fear among middle-aged and older women that with old age will come mental decline, even dementia. Such a fear reflects a general anxiety about the ageing process and ones own health and a lack of understanding that dementia is different from age-related memory loss (Alzheimer Society of Canada, 2020; Kessler et al., 2012; Molden & Maxfield, 2016).

Researchers call it "dementia worry," defined by Kessler et al. (2012) as an "emotional response to the perceived threat of developing dementia, independent of chronological age and

cognitive status, . . . a hybrid, combining elements of ageing anxiety and health anxiety (p. 277). The ageing stereotypes internalized over a lifetime emerge in late life as self-stereotypes. They have become embodied, impact cognitive and physical health, and limit late life growth and development (Kessler, 2012; Levy, 2003, 2009; Wu et al., 2016). Chronological age has never been a good predictor of intellectual ability, nor for that matter does it predict how one will behave in academic or workplace situations (Fitch & Van Brunt, 2016; Morganroth Gullette, 2013; Tam, 2013; Wu et al., 2016).

Research on cognitive development and ageing and teaching and learning for older learners acknowledges that older adulthood, like other phases in the life cycle, encompasses social, psychological, and physical changes (Grady, 2012; Imlach et al., 2017; Tam, 2014; Twitchell et al., 1996; Wu et al., 2016). Those changes, however, are not a barrier to later learning and can be addressed through educational strategies that, as Twitchell et al. (1996) argued, could enhance the learning environment for all students (p. 178). Imlach et al. (2017), who studied predictors of academic success for adults aged 50–79, 71% of whom were women, concluded that "ageing-up to the eighth decade of life is not an impediment" (p. 5). Their evidence showed that over the life course, participation in cognitively rich activities combined with such specific cognitive functions as episodic memory (defined as the conscious recollection of facts) and language processing ability, contributed to academic success for older adults. Since older adults are not a homogeneous group, changes in older adulthood are best viewed from a life course perspective (Brownie, 2014; Grady, 2012; Imlach et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2016).

Older women are defying negative stereotypes and graduating from doctoral programs thereby helping shift dominant discourses on ageing. However, the practices and procedures in place in graduate programs, based as they are on a model of the young adult learner, often do not

consider the skills, educational and career achievements, activist work, and personal/family life experiences older adults bring to their learning. This can create a **"chilly climate"** for the older adult learner (Hannah et al., 2002, p. 21; see also Hayes & Flannery 2000; Heaney & Ramdeholl, 2015; Kasworm et al., 2000; Lauzon, 2011; Thompson & Foth, 2003; Thomson & Walker, 2010; Van Rhijn et al., 2016; Wolf, 2009). Gardner (2008) argued that "for underrepresented students the experience of graduate education and its normative socialization patterns may not fit their lifestyle and the diversity of their backgrounds, making them feel they do not 'fit the mold'" (p. 135). While it is outside the scope of this study to examine in depth theories and strategies for doctoral student teaching and learning, questions arise in the literature about how best to address the learning needs of older adults. Therefore, a review of that literature was necessary.

Older adults' decision to pursue doctoral study is a deeply personal one. But for many it meets late-life developmental needs of integrity, that is, looking back at what has and has not been accomplished over ones lifetime and generativity, a desire to give back and leave a legacy for the next generation. Therefore, a review of some of the literature on generativity was undertaken as well.

Themes Across the Literature on the Student Experience of Women 50 or Older

Fit, Belonging, and Agency

Examining fit, this time from a developmental perspective, Lauzon (2011) looked to the work of Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung to articulate the challenges faced by adults in their 50s and beyond. According to Jung, in the second half of life "individuals had to develop the undeveloped and neglected aspects of their personality" (Jung, 2009, p. 80). Over the life course we therefore ask two very different questions. In the first half of life we ask, "what is

the world asking of me?" In the second half we ask, "what now does the soul ask of me?" (Hollis, 1993, p. 111). It is about asking the "larger questions" (Luzon, 2011, p. 296; McWhinney & Markos, 2003). In the context of a doctoral program, the question of fit and belonging looms large for all students. It is, however, especially important for older doctoral students. This is likely the last "kick of the can"—a second try may not be possible.

How comfortable older students feel with their place in the program, department, and university can impact whether they will see the degree through to graduation. For older doctoral students Lauzon (2011) argued, fit, belonging, and agency were intertwined, and accepting the status quo challenging. Older doctoral students come back to the university after years of personal life experience and as respected professionals. Their personal identity, to a large extent, has been tied to their professional identity. To give up that professional role for the role of a student can be difficult (Wellington et al., 2005). Finding just that right balance between the expectations people continue to have of the women as professionals and the expectations the university has of them as students can create tension. This is most especially the case if the women worked as grassroots activists. The anecdotes and first-person accounts of the older adult students Lauzon (2011) supervised ring true. Some older doctoral students with decades-long careers in their research area found themselves engaged with an institution that wanted to maintain the status quo as much as they wanted to shake things up. While the desire to shake things up is not unique to an older age group, it arose for Lauzon's supervisees from a strong desire to have their experiences used, not simply acknowledged. They wanted to contribute to their department and to the university.

Wolf's (2009) research was on older women learners age 55–64 transitioning from educational settings into the job market, her work is applicable to my research. Some older

doctoral students do transition back into paid work upon completion of their degree while others

choose a different path. But all, when they enter their doctoral program, are in transition, a state

of flux, dealing with the positive and negative stresses transitions engender. Wolf was interested

in what older women needed to succeed in times of transition. She identified supportive

collaborative relationships and the building of social capital as important. Forging collaborative

relationships with faculty, especially supervisors and committee members, while important for

students, can be challenging given existing power relationships and power dynamics in the

academy.

Supervision: Does Age Matter?

Lauzon (2011) wondered who advisors to students in "the second half of life" should

be—a question worthy of study. He shared a personal anecdote: "Terry sits in my office once

again, enraged. Terry, a former schoolteacher who now wishes to develop a career in

international development, is in her mid-50s and I am her thesis advisor." He then goes on to

describe the interaction with Terry as it unfolded in his office: "Getting red in the face . . . she

looks at me, anger in her eyes, and tells me she is almost old enough to be my mother and how

do I think that makes her feel that I am her advisor?" (p. 301).

Lauzon offered no answer to his question about who should advise older adult learners,

but he did assure the reader that Terry graduated, wrote a fine dissertation, and with her husband,

went on to do development work in Asia before they both retired. While there is research on the

roles gender and race play in the supervisory relationship (Wall, 2008), little to no research

appears to have been done on the dynamics of age. Carlson (1999), in her survey of mid-life

graduate students, noted that having faculty responsive to the needs of older students contributed

to their success. Whether or not age of supervisor was a factor we do not know. This is a gap in the research especially when the fit between supervisor and supervisee has been found to play an important role in the student experience.

Solitude

Much has been written on the solitude of the PhD scholar, the sense of isolation and feelings of loneliness voiced by doctoral students. Much less, however, has been written on positive solitude, the relationship between age and solitude, and the impact of solitude on older doctoral students. Ost Mor (2019), in her presentation to the Canadian Association on Gerontology, discussed solitude and positive solitude, what she called "soulitude," to highlight its positive nature and distinguish it from solitude. Her research-in-progress focused on differences in younger and older adults' attitudes towards positive solitude. Results are pending.

A study conducted by Lay et al. (2020) at the University of British Columbia looked at age differences and "solitude seeking" (p. 483). Their findings supported the results of Long and Averill (2003) and Tornstam (2005). The experience of time spent alone differs across the life span, with older adults feeling more positive than middle-aged adults about time spent alone. The constraints of work and family for middle-aged adults may make opportunities to be alone and enjoy positive solitude less attainable. This is especially so for women who struggle with the demands of the double day. Tornstam called positive solitude "contemplative solitude" (p. 70). He suggested that in later life it becomes a need (p. 189) as one seeks to integrate a lifetime of experiences and answer big questions about "what now" as death is closer than ever before. The time in life when one is in this contemplative state would seem the ideal time to pursue solitary scholarly work. Long and Averill (2003) noted that solitude provided opportunities for freedom,

creativity, self-transformation, intimacy, as paradoxical as that seems, and a heightened sense of spiritual connectedness.

While few would argue that there are benefits of being alone, practical problems abound. How in the hurried world of doctoral student, researcher, teaching assistant, course director, and member of a family and community is it possible to slow things down, take time away from the many distractions that demand time and attention, and enjoy time alone? The impact of solitude on the older doctoral student warrants further study since the solitary nature of doctoral work figures largely in discussions of the doctoral student experience.

Integrity and Generativity

In a survey of 212 mid-life women in master's and doctoral programs, Carlson (1999) highlighted that the reasons they pursued a graduate degree were employment and financial security. At the same time however participants also noted generativity, a concern for and a desire to guide the next generation, along with personal and professional challenge, a need for change, and a desire for growth. Especially noteworthy was Carlson's acknowledgement that as women age, they come to the realization that all life has an end point, which increased their awareness of unfinished business. Hopes and dreams left behind as women built their careers and cared for their families surface. When asked their reason for enrolling in a master's or doctoral program, Carlson's participants expressed a desire to be a "role model and a model for family and others regarding continuing education" (p. 49). One woman stated that she wanted to "have my daughters see me in a role other than homemaker" (p. 49).

While there is, as noted, an absence of scholarly literature on the experiences of older doctoral students, scholars have studied older adults' participation in educational programs, such

as University of the Third Age, which offers opportunities for adults to take a variety of courses in a friendly social setting (Hori & Cusack, 2006; Kamler, 2006; Villar & Celdrán, 2012), and the Inter-University Program for Seniors in Spain, which offers a three-year university education for people over the age of 55 (Munoz-Rodriguez et al., 2019). Their work provides important insights into older adults, generativity, and education. Villar and Celdrán (2012) argued that while "leisure related" (p. 669) education was a worthy goal it was not sufficient for many of today's older adults seeking educational opportunities late in life. They believed that university programs face two challenges. The first was around human capital and "finding a suitable social use for the enormous quantity of knowledge and expertise accumulated after decades of involvement in training programs—in the labor market or in diverse life experiences" (p. 676). The second was around what to offer older people that would enable them to continue developing personally and leave a lasting legacy.

Teaching and Learning

Is there a need for a distinctive theory of teaching and learning for older adult learners? Do their unique reasons for pursuing formal and non-formal learning late in life warrant a different approach? Does their developmental and physiological stage in the life cycle demand an approach tailored to their needs? And practically if there were some reasons for age separate learning would it even be possible? While these questions are outside the immediate scope of this project Tam's (2014) arguments for and against a distinctive theory of teaching and learning are noteworthy for future research. She concluded that first and foremost, older adult learners, like learners at any stage in the life cycle, are heterogeneous and diverse. One size does not fit all. That said, she reminded readers that life changes in older adulthood come with physiological,

58

psychological, and social challenges that need to be addressed through open, honest

communication between student and instructor and teaching and learning techniques that

compensate for any deficits. Tam (2014) also advocated for a teaching approach that was

sensitive to and respectful of the personal and professional experiences older adult learners bring

to their learning. On the matter of effective teaching strategies, Twitchell's (1996) article was

outstanding, clear, and readable and despite the fact that it was written almost 25 years ago, his

strategies (which can be applied to all students) are still relevant today.

Twitchell began with the physical factors that affect learning: the reduction with age in

visual acuity and hearing, both well understood. He discussed the implications of these changes

and then provided simple practical suggestions on how to address those issues. He highlighted

cognitive changes that affect attention, language processing, and memory, the implications of

these, and he provided effective techniques for responding to any deficits. While his references

to cognitive science are dated, current studies support the age-related changes Twitchell noted.

Cognitive science today also supports Twitchell's belief that cognitive function can improve with

adjustments to the learning environment (Grady, 2012; Imlach et al., 2017; Tam, 2014; Wu et al.,

2016).

Summary

Information presented in this review of the literature on critical feminist gerontology, the

doctoral journey, and the doctoral student experience of women 50 or older provided the

background for the interview process used in this study. It was also the foundation for data

analysis. Human beings and human behaviour though are complex and require we look to many

scholars and many sources for understanding and so, for additional background I looked to

scholarly works on structure-agency, and psychological theories of development, and I looked to works of poetry and fiction.

While there is a rich body of scholarly work focusing on the doctoral student experience of those under 50, absent was research that focused specifically on the student experience of doctoral students over 50. In spite of the ageing of the population, little research has been done that makes clear who exactly these older adults who are pursuing a doctoral degree later in life are. My study contributes to filling the gap in the scholarly literature on the older doctoral student.

In the absence of research on older doctoral students, what is also not known is the extent to which ageism, age-related stereotypes, and self-stereotypes, in addition to the intersection of age with gender, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability, impact the student experience. Older students come to their doctoral program with a wealth of personal and professional skills and knowledge that they can apply to the creation of new knowledge. For the benefit of the university they attend and society at large, their talents should not be squandered.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The role of feminist scholarship is to operationalize feminism: to move feminist theory off the page, into our lives, and back onto the page, starting the process all over again as we live our theoretical claims as political commitments. (Bell, 2010, p. 97)

In chapter three I discuss how a life course framework viewed through a feminist theory and research, feminist political economy, social reproduction lens provides, in the words of Grant and Osanloo (2014), a "blueprint" for my study. A detailed discussion of each of these parts of my framework follows. A life course framework is most suitable because it shines a light on structure and agency, change over time, growth, transitions, and changes in social, historical, cultural, political, and economic factors. And it did so through the voices of the women themselves. It also highlighted turning points, those personally significant experiences and important life events that, over time, shaped the women's hopes, dreams, and accomplishments (Biasin & Evans, 2019; Elder, 1995, 1998; Elder & Giele, 2009; Elder et al., 2006; Field, 2006; Gouthro, 2009, 2010; Hooyman et al., 2002; Komp & Marier, 2015; Mandell et al., 2008; Merrill, 2009; Miller, 2007; West et al., 2007).

Feminist theory and research, feminist political economy, and social reproduction have their own particular focus but together with a life course framework, they provide an interpretive structure for understanding the doctoral student experience of women 50 years of age and older. They are particularly well suited to this research because they provide a socio-cultural, socio-political, and economic framework within which to examine women's lives and their learning trajectory while also centring on their individual life experiences. Structures of patriarchy, a historical system of social structures and practices that oppress and exploit women, and capitalism, defined as "the historical commodification of labor," are equally important for

understanding the social context within which older women have approached education (Calasanti & Zajicek, 1993, p. 121).

Life Course Framework

Until death stops it all, human lives are always in transition. . . . Some transitions, some periods of change, stand out as especially significant. . . . We may see them . . . as changes in the direction of our lives. (McAdams et al., 2001, p. xv)

Life Course: A Brief Historical Overview

A pioneer in life course studies, Elder (1995, 1998), in his early work on life course, was inspired by longitudinal research on child development conducted in the 1920s and 1930s. Those early studies followed children into adulthood, and in the process of doing so, raised issues that theories of the time were unable to address. Elder's studies make clear that human development and developmental issues continue throughout the lifespan. Importantly, his early studies also revealed the impact that historical context has on an individual's life.

While there is controversy about whether life course is a theory or more accurately described as a perspective, framework, or paradigm (Hendricks, 2012)—yet another definitional dilemma—Elder et al. (2006) viewed the life course as a "theoretical orientation" because it "established a common field of inquiry . . . a framework for descriptive and explanatory research" (p. 4). They went on to say that their view of the life course is that it consists of "age-graded patterns that are embedded in social institutions and history" (p. 4).

Giele and Elder (1998), whose work on life course was also foundational, created "a four-part paradigm" characterized by the dynamic interplay between macro-, mezzo-, and micro-level forces: 1) the socio-historical, socio-cultural, and geographical location of events, 2) social

connections, or what they called "linked lives," 3) the timing of events and how the past shapes

the future, and 4) agency in the pursuit of goals and the development of a sense of self (pp. 9–11;

see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1

Key Elements of the Life Course Paradigm
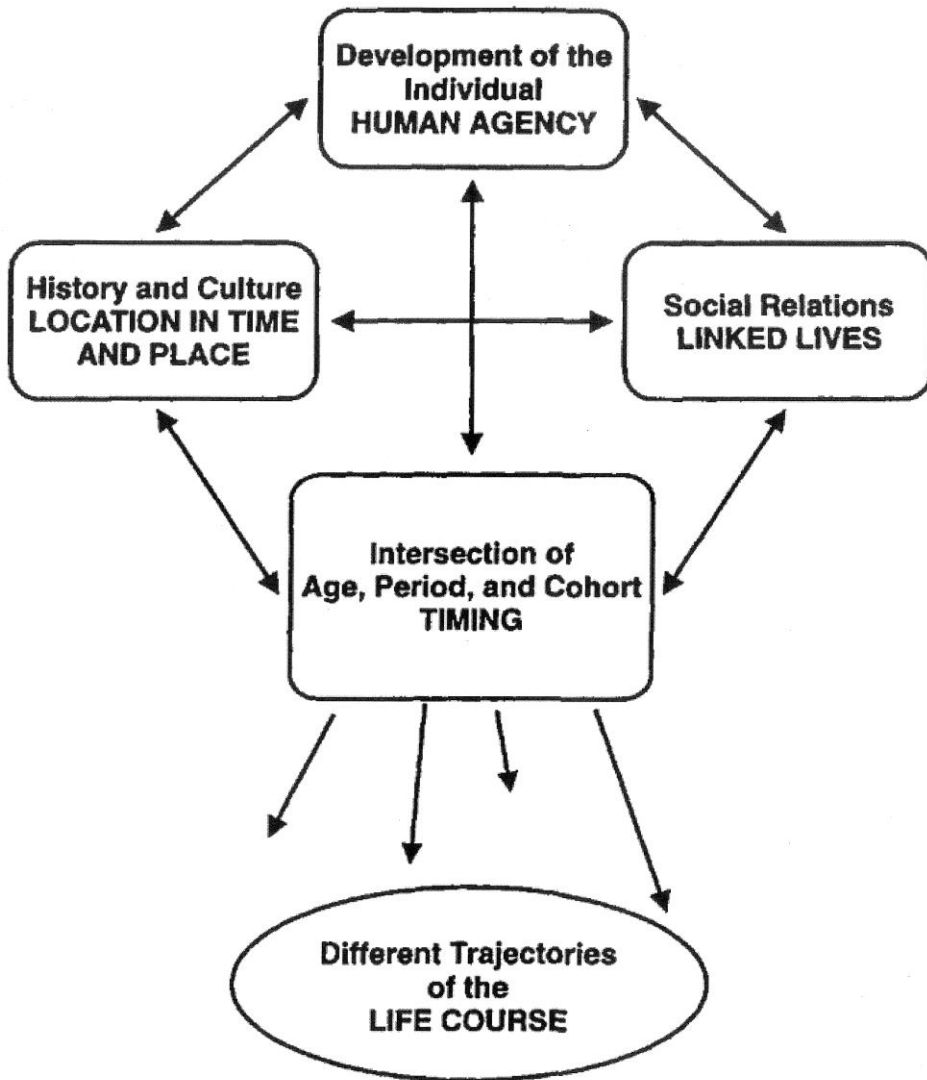
Source. Life course research: Development of a field, by J. Z. Giele & G. H. Elder, Jr., 1998, in *Methods of life course research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (p. 11). Sage.

Life Course and Education

Specific to education, and pertinent to my research on women pursuing a doctoral degree late in life, is the life course work of Lörz and Mühleck (2018) and Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000). Lörz and Mühleck studied gender differences in higher education in Germany from a life course perspective. They conducted an analysis of datasets from the longitudinal study *Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification of the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies*, which looked at secondary to higher education including an individual's first post-doctoral position. While they were examining gender inequalities in a cohort of students aged 20 to 40, their reason for using a life course framework is consistent with mine. They were interested in transitions from one stage of an individual's educational career to the next, and they wished to tie together individual decision making about pursuing post-secondary education with educational, familial, and work contexts. Consistent as well with other studies I examined, they found that finances and family care obligations posed barriers for women.

Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) studied the views of high school students on education and approaches to learning and looked at how their views changed over time in response to the socio-economic and socio-cultural forces as expressed in class, gender, and ethnicity. Their work was found to be relevant to learners across the life course and has since been used to examine the learning trajectory of adult "returners" to higher education (Gallacher et al., 2002). A feminist life course framework is about change and analyzing and interpreting change from the perspectives of women themselves. It is dynamic and full of life, well suited to our non-linear time.

Gouthro's (2009) cross-Canada study of the life histories of women learners directed attention to the fact that educational trajectories cannot be studied in isolation from other social institutions and social roles. Women's learning trajectories reflect their non-linear life trajectories, which in turn reflect gendered differences in expectations regarding higher education, paid employment, and caregiving (Gouthro, 2009, 2010). While the life decisions women make are individual decisions, those decisions are made within social, socio-political, socio-economic, and historical contexts. Looking specifically at gender roles among over-50 women who came of age at a time of great social change, a life course perspective makes possible an understanding of transitions, role changes over time, and how beliefs and attitudes about gender roles influence life decisions and are changed by those life decisions (Lendon & Silverstein, 2012).

Life Course and the Power of Stories

The power of a life course framework lies in the life stories people tell, in which the past, present, and future reside. In the early 1960s, research was conducted on the transition from school to work of nearly 900 young adults in England. For close to 40 years, the majority of the data languished, unanalyzed and unpublished. Since research conducted at the time focused on boys with little attention paid to gender differences, O'Connor and Goodwin (2004) decided to use the data from the original study to draw attention to the transition experiences of girls. The stories the 260 girls told about their transition from school to work, from student to worker highlighted the complexity of this transition, fraught as it was with contradictory messages. On the one hand, the girls were expected to get a job when they finished high school and, on the other, they were socialized to believe that paid work outside the home was the domain of men.

O'Conner and Goodwin were able to reflect on the issues raised in the 1960s with 21st-century eyes. They also planned to re-interview a sample of the girls today to see how, as baby-boomer women, the hopes they had for their lives when they were first interviewed in the 1960s became reality.

A life course perspective, in addition to highlighting transitions, highlights turning points, those significant personal events and experiences that result in changes in the direction of a person's life over the long-term (Biasin & Evans, 2019; Pallas, 2003). Those events and experiences can include, but are not limited to, family, education, employment, friends, health, faith, job, sexuality, social life, marriage/divorce, and births/deaths. How women use their agency, social relationships and ability to self reflect in order to activate those events and experiences are important to a life course framework (Biasin & Evans, 2019, p. 61; Black & Garvis, 2018).

Leonard (2010) examined the pursuit of a doctorate within a life course framework with a focus on the employment skills older doctoral students bring to the university when they return. She wrote about knowledge transfer, networks, and the loss of "creative potential" if universities fail to acknowledge and use the skills of returning students (p. 172). Leonard's observation is thought provoking: While universities today stress the relationship between their programs and the employability of their students, they seem unconcerned about the prior or current work experience of their older doctoral students.

Ng (2017), in her study of the impact her divorce and subsequent new romance had on her PhD field research, shone a light on how as a feminist researcher the complex emotions and affect she felt and displayed became a way to better understand her participants. It also assisted her in producing what she called "multidimensional, ethical research" (p. 409). Ng noted in the

conclusion to her article that "it is our linked lives [researcher and participant] that create the research and make it transformational" (p. 414).

Life Course, Stories, Positionality, and Reflexivity

Integral to a discussion of Ng's study is the work of Fine (1998), who drew the reader's attention to how "self and other are knottily entangled" (p. 135), and Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2007), who argued that "without empathic interpersonal relationships researchers will be unable to gain insight into the meaning people give to their lives" (p. 148). Including my own story within the limits I set was a decision I made consistent with the feminist lens I bring to my work and a belief that doing so would add a richness to my study.

Finlay (2002) used the wonderful metaphor of a swamp to help researchers understand the process of engaging in reflexivity. She likened it to one "full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails as researchers negotiate the swamp of interminable deconstructions, self analysis and self disclosure" (p. 1). Another key feature of feminist research that is tied to reflexivity is the importance of positionality, the idea that the researcher's values, attitudes, points of view, and location in time and space influence how she understands the world and consequently how she views her position in relation to her research and the intensely personal nature of the research relationship. This approach is consistent with autoethnographic principles, which informed my work and which I explore next.

Ellis and Bochner (2005), authoritative voices on autoethnography, maintain that when researchers bring their personal and professional day-to-day experiences to their research, the reader is provided with and therefore is better able to understand the context within which knowledge is produced (see also Ellis et al., 2011). This renders the research more trustworthy. It

is important to clarify the difference between autoethnography and autobiography. Autoethnography, while it is reflexive and narrative, highlights an individual's personal experiences through a social, cultural, economic, political, and/or historical lens. It stands on firm ground embedded as it is in theory, practice, and critical inquiry (McIlveen, 2008). An autobiography is a self-story important in itself when a personal story must be told, but in the absence of a clear connection to theory and critical inquiry, it is often perceived as lacking rigour and therefore not deemed appropriate as a method for scholarly research. While it is outside the scope of my study to elaborate on the different forms of autoethnography and to discuss further the fine distinction between autoethnography and autobiography, when self-stories are written to achieve social justice, suffice it to say that I agree with Ng (2017), Ellis and Bochner (2005), and McIlveen (2008).

A Feminist Theory and Research Lens

To engage in feminist theory and praxis means to challenge knowledge that excludes women, as though what is true for dominant groups must also be true for women and other oppressed groups. Feminists ask "new" questions that place women's lives and those of "other" marginalized groups at the center of social inquiry. (Hesse-Biber, 2012, chapter 1)

Feminist Theory: A Brief Historical Overview

Fundamental to all feminist research is the interrelationship between feminist theory, research, practice, and activism. "The consciousness which underlies [feminism] enables feminists to interpret social reality in ways which may be radically different from other interpretations" (Stanley & Wise, 1979, p. 369). At the same time, it is important to note that there is not just one feminist consciousness—there are many—and they emerge from the

different experiences women have and their different involvement in and interpretation of those experiences (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997; hooks, 2015; Phillips, 2010; Stanley & Wise, 1979).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the women's movement created new feminist perspectives. Feminist theory is therefore many theories or perspectives. These different feminist ideas and practices originated at different times in history and have different theoretical beginnings and approaches to how to achieve social change. All, however, place gender at the forefront of analysis. Many long-time feminists can trace the evolution of their thinking about feminism based on time in history, personal life experiences, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, and race. "'Then and there' back in the 1970s" feminists considered themselves "producers of feminist theory which then informed and was changed by their practice as feminists" (Stanley & Wise, 2000, p. 278). Stanley and Wise differentiated between feminist small-t theory, theory that emerged from practice, and feminist theory with a capital T. They argued that "feminist theory now contains considerably more of the latter (theory) and considerably less of the former (feminism) and takes the form of a 'parallel project' running alongside, in many respects mimicking, but rarely influencing, mainstream/malestream social theory" (p. 263). They went on to say that "over the period that has led to 'now and here,' it has been interesting to observe the gradual assimilation of academic feminism, and the entry of successive cohorts who 'came to feminism' through the text rather than through political practice" (p. 278). As a consequence, Stanley and Wise claimed, theory had become more distant from practice. This is a long-standing tension between feminist theorists and activists.

Hemmings (2011) called this shift in the 1990s the "professionalization of feminist knowledge" (p. 6). The shift from women's studies to gender studies is one example (Evans, 1990; Jackson, 2016). In *York Stories: Women in Higher Education* (2000), Himani's reference

69

to Dr. Faustus, an academic "who bargained with the devil for a knowledge that could make him rich, famous and a super-consumer," is prescient (p. 115).

Many of the frontline activists in the 1960s and 1970s never made it into the academy to teach. Those who did, often did so late in life and without advanced graduate degrees only to be relegated to the margins, tossed to the curb as increasing numbers of PhD graduates well schooled in big-T theory lined up for academic positions. Some of those women are now returning to the academy seeking the advanced degrees they did not obtain earlier. What impact this will have on both the women pursuing those degrees and the university faculties admitting them remains to be seen.

What Makes Feminist Research Feminist?

All research by women is not feminist research nor is all research about women feminist research. What then makes feminist research feminist? "Feminist research is, thus, not research about women but research for women to be used in transforming their sexist society" (Cook & Fonow, 1986, p. 13). Feminist research has as its goal moving women's lives from the margins of knowledge production to the centre. Life narratives reveal women's subjective responses to structural pressures. Through telling their own stories, the inequality women have experienced over their life courses and how they exercise agency to resist and overcome structural barriers is given a voice. Feminist research makes the private public, validates lived experiences, strives to be non-hierarchical, and is especially attentive to issues of power and how knowledge is created. When O'Reilly's (1972) "Click! The housewife's moment of truth" appeared in the first issue of *Ms Magazine*, it resonated with readers around the world. It was a click of recognition; one click led to another and another and another until women became "clicking-things-into-place-angry,

because [they] . . . suddenly and shockingly perceived the basic disorder in what ha[d] been believed to be the natural order of things" (p. 12).

As noted earlier feminist theory, research, and practice are interrelated with a focus on women and moving women's knowledge from the margins to the centre. I turn to Oakley's (1981) foundational work "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms" as an example of how theory and practice are interwoven for feminist researchers and how "knowledge building becomes a relational process rather than an objective product" (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 144). Oakley wrote about a research protocol in fashion at the time that reflected a "predominantly masculine model of sociology and society" (p. 31). She challenged the prevailing interview paradigm in which the interview is a one-way street: the interviewer asks the questions, the interviewee is the source of the data, and nothing of the interviewer's personhood comes through. This "proper" interview style is an expression of the "mythology of the hygienic research" (Oakley, 1981, p. 58) and a "masculine fiction" (p. 55). She argued that none of these interview methods "fit" with interviewing women in ways that validated their lived experiences. She went on to say that this "use of prescribed interviewing practice is morally indefensible," and "the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of the interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (p. 41). She further argued that "personal involvement is more than dangerous bias—it is the condition under which people come to know each other and admit others into their lives" (p. 58).

According to Oakley, the interviewer must strive for a balance between the warmth needed to establish rapport and a measure of detachment necessary to ensure it is the interviewee's story that is front and centre. This calls for personal reflection and reflexivity. She

likened this balancing act to "walking a tightrope" (p. 33). Reinharz and Davidman (1992) concurred: "Before researchers can expect to hear suppressed voices, they will have to examine the power dynamics of the social location they are studying and their role in it" (p. 194). Oakley's article and Reinharz's words remain thought provoking today, decades after they were written.

Feminism and "The Essential Woman"

Social lives are complex, and in the words of Audre Lorde (1984), there is "no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives" (p. 138). This became a defining issue in the 1980s and 1990s as feminists warned against reducing all women to the essential woman. Feminist researchers, in acknowledging the issue of power dynamics, are open to the diversity of experience among women and the intersection of gender with "isms of domination" such as classism, racism, anti-Semitism, ageism, and heterosexism, all "oppressive and patriarchal conceptual frameworks" (Warren & Cheney, 1991, p. 181). As De Vault and Gross (2007) asserted more than a decade after Lorde, "genders are multiple; and gender itself is a discursive production; theorists of gender and sexuality (and their intersections with race, class, ability, age, and nation) now resist any simple reliance on this categorical identity [woman]" (p. 175).

At the same time, other feminists who worked and thought globally talked about the need for women to come together across identity categories in the fight for change. Bordo (1990) argued that "too relentless a focus on historical heterogeneity . . . can obscure the transhistorical hierarchical patterns of white male privilege that have informed the creation of the Western intellectual tradition" (p. 149). I see merit in both points of view. We need to be, in De Vault and Gross's (2007) words, "cognizant of the differences that exist among women and be sure that,

72

when we speak on behalf of women, we are not really only speaking on behalf of some women (e.g., North American, Anglo, able-bodied, middle-class women)" (p. 175). At the same time we need to work across differences to form strategic alliances. Bystydzienski and Schacht (2001) call for something they describe as "organizing across difference" (p. 14). This creative tension need not be divisive. It can be used strategically to meet specific goals.

In sum, as with so many things in life there is a gap, sometimes very large, between the ideal and what is possible. This applies equally to feminist research. While feminist research with its focus on gender and the injustices that exist in society has much to contribute to higher education, there are many barriers that prevent the researcher from achieving all she hopes to achieve. Feminist researchers first and foremost cannot claim to speak for all women, and outside forces have an impact as well. There are funders to answer to as well as publishers. There are dissertation, tenure, and promotion committees; power at all levels informs researcher decision making as does the researcher's place in the hierarchy and thus her ability to resist those forces pulling her away from what she had hoped to achieve with her research. So, in answer to what makes feminist research feminist, Weston (1988) argued that "all research [exists] on a fluid scale between traditional research and ideal feminist research. . . . One can evaluate to what degree a research project is feminist by looking at the choices being made by the researcher" (p. 142).

Feminist Political Economy and Social Reproduction

Women experience particular social-structural factors in their work and family lives that have implications for their income security in the long-term. . . . Women and men experience gendered paid work opportunities. . . . Women have lower incomes from paid earnings than men. . . . Women are still primarily responsible for domestic labour within the home (including housework, child care, and care of other family members). (Gazso, 2005, n.p., Table 1)

Feminist Political Economy and Social Reproduction: A Brief Overview

Feminist political economy is about the politics of everyday life, with a focus on the interweaving of gender and class as they are shaped by households, markets, states, and increasingly by the global political economy. Feminist political economy challenges the neo-liberal economic model, with its focus on the market economy, growth, and accumulation as the primary drivers.

In feminist political economy, gender is central to analysis, and women's lived experience takes centre stage. Bakker (2007) observed that there is a "structured male bias that is built into the economic models that inform neoliberal policies" (p. 546). Leonard (2000) agrees. Through a feminist lens, she examined the "projects of masculinity embedded in late-modernist thinking" (p. 181) and argued that "a project of masculinity, of (super) rationality, of scientism ... is both re-constructing women's marginalization and disguising much (substantively, methodologically, and epistemologically) about the process of creativity which (feminists and others) have been working to understand for the last thirty years (pp. 188, 190).

A social reproduction lens makes clear how "various institutions (such as the family/household, the market, the state, and the third sector which includes voluntary and community organisations, self-help groups, co-operatives) interact and balance power so that the work involved in the daily and generational production and maintenance of people is completed" (Bezanson & Luxton, 2006, p. 3). It involves, along with the provision of food, clothing, and shelter, carrying forward to subsequent generations knowledge, socio-cultural values and practices, and individual and collective identities. Second-wave feminism focused on women's labour in the home and how women's unpaid labour "subsidised capitalist reproduction"

(Bakker, 2007, p. 541). While this still has resonance, social reproduction today is not confined to the household. The current focus is on the restructuring of the global political economy.

When individuals and families cannot do the work of maintaining the household on their own, the state traditionally stepped in with social and income supports. With neo-liberalism and the state rethinking such commitments, it has been largely women who have taken up the slack in home and family responsibilities in addition to their paid work. For those families financially able to hire help with child and dependant adult care, it is usually racialized women already overrepresented in the service sector who provide support. "Social reproduction of the affluent is prioritized over those of unprotected workers particularly from the Global South" (Bakker, 2007, p. 551; see also Mies, 2014b; Walker, 2006). The impact of gender, race, and class is made visible as is the unequal distribution of power.

Feminist Political Economy, Class, and Early Schooling

Central to social reproduction, as noted, is the transmission of knowledge and socio-cultural values. Education is the institution, along with the family, charged with the transmission of knowledge and values and the construction of individual and collective identities. As with other social structures, schools both reflect and create classed and gendered ways of being a student. Sometimes missing, however, from a discussion of class and its impact on education is what Sayer (2005) argued for, a greater understanding of "how people value themselves and others" (p. 948). The participants in my study brought up the issue of class, the impact, as one participant noted, of "jumping into the middle class" when starting university and the feelings that engendered for her. For this reason I have chosen to begin my discussion of feminist

political economy, class, and education with a brief look at Sayer's article "Moral Worth and Education."

Sayer stated that "class concern is about having access to the practices and ways of living that are valued, and class of course renders this access highly unequal." He continued by noting that the "inequalities in resources and opportunities themselves have little or nothing to do with the moral worth or merit of individuals but they have a major impact on the possibility of achieving valued ways of life that bring recognition and self-respect (p. 948). There are moral and ethical dilemmas, and there are, as Sayer (2005) so poignantly remarked, "feelings associated with class such as envy, resentment, compassion, contempt, shame, pride, deference and condescension[, which] are evaluative responses to particular properties of class inequalities and relations." Those feelings, he reminded the reader, are "influenced" not "predetermined by position within the social field" (p. 950). And while there is also agency, individual, collective, and institutional, that can, within limits, mitigate some of the barriers class presents, the effects of inequality and the feelings it engenders can cast a long shadow. What follows now is a brief discussion of class and its implications for early schooling; how educational institutions benefit upper- and middle-class students over working-class students. Following that is a discussion of political economy, older adults, and education.

Since I took the long view with a life course framework, the participants in my study discussed their own early schooling, their parents' education, and their parents' views on child rearing and education. For this reason I have elected to draw the reader's attention to Lareau's (2002) work on the linkages between parenting styles, class, and education. I decided as well to examine Brantlinger's (2003) work. She pointed out how young students from low and high socio-economic status fare in the American educational system but in addition she highlighted

76

the importance to her research of personal reflection and reflexivity, key elements of feminist research and practice.

Lareau's (2002) ethnographic study examined the impact of parenting styles on the relationships children and parents from middle-class, working-class, and poor families had in the home and outside the home with other adults and professionals. She examined a data set of white children and black children approximately 10 years of age and concluded that race had much less of an impact than social class. How children used time, how parents and children used language, how parents disciplined their children, the nature of their social connections, and how parents interacted with outside institutions were more similar along class lines than racial lines. Consistent with a social reproduction lens, Lareau noted "differences in family dynamics and the logic of childrearing across social classes have long-term consequence. . . . In interactions with agents of dominant institutions, working-class and poor children were learning lessons in constraint while middle-class children were developing a sense of entitlement" (p. 774).

Brantlinger (2003) concluded that high socio-economic students were clear winners in schooling. She gave her results a second look in 2007 in her "re(turn)" to the data. As she analyzed the data a second time, she recognized that in 2003 her assumptions had blinded her. She then explained the paradox in her two sets of findings. What became apparent the second time was that the American educational system produces no winners, embedded as it is in a capitalist and meritocratic system. Poor and working-class students were often caught in a moral dilemma: how to balance their loyalty to and identification with their families and communities against their hope that education would open doors to social and economic success later in life. Middle- and upper-class students came to the realization that while they may be successful academically they knew little about how to play the game. When the rules keep shifting, as they

do in the social, cultural, political, and economic landscape, middle- and upper-class students

can, to their surprise, find themselves tested beyond their own agency. I turn now to a discussion

of the political economy, older adults, and education.

Feminist Political Economy, Older Adults, and Education

While it may never be too late to pursue education, doing so has significant financial

consequences. Insufficient individual or family financial support remains a significant barrier to

pursuing graduate education across all ages (Acker & Haque, 2015; Coates, 2018; Gouthro,

2009, p. 103; Lörz & Mühleck, 2018; Wendover, 2006, p. 123). This is especially the case for

women who experience a "cumulative disadvantage" over the life course (Dannefer, 2003; see

also Harrington Myer & Herd, 2007; Lörz & Mühleck, 2018), as their lack of educational

achievement and full-time work experience often result in reduced income in old age.

The cumulative disadvantage framework represents a mirror of women's life course

experiences. The lower socio-economic status of older women does not, in most cases, occur as a

simple product of advancing age. Rather, as Julianne Malveaux (1993) pointed out, it is a "map

or mirror of their past lives" (p. 168). Many older women never entered the paid work force,

entered late, or interrupted their work lives and their education to raise a family and/or care for

dependant adults. Separation and divorce also left many women vulnerable to financial

insecurity over the life course, as did remaining single.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation (2018), based on a wage gap of 31.5%

in Ontario, it would take some woman an additional 14 years to earn the same pay earned by a

man by age 65. Women still earn less than men—women earn 74 cents to every dollar a man

earns. Most low-wage workers are women. They are 70% of all part-time workers, 60% of all

minimum wage earners, and although 62% of university undergraduate students in Canada are women, women with a university degree earn only 68% of what their male counterparts earn. Many older women also defer education for economic or socio-cultural reasons (Lauzon, 2011; Mandell et al., 2008; Spotton Visano & Taylor, 2009; York Stories, 2000). While more education cannot guarantee a job, it does open doors to a measure of financial security even with the income gap. For some women that is their stated reason for wanting to return to university (Lauzon, 2011; Mandell et al., 2008).

The Neo-Liberal University

For older women returning to university to pursue a PhD, it may have been 30+ years since they were in a classroom. Picking up studies after a break of many years can be challenging. Much would have changed: university governance, curricula, the language of academia, theories, theory building and research techniques, technology, and the sheer volume of information now available. University culture has undergone a change that speaks to an underlying shift in values. These changes require ongoing adjustments that impact older students' experiences.

In her chapter in *Inside Corporate U*, "Going to Market: Neo-Liberalism and the Social Construction of the University Student as an Autonomous Consumer," Elizabeth Brulé (2004) described neo-liberalism's assault on students, faculty, and staff. This includes decreasing support for undergraduate education, lowering the costs of education for the university while increasing the costs to undergraduate and graduate students, making work more precarious, favouring applied research and commercializing research results, marginalizing the humanities, applying metrics and accountability to faculty output, expecting faculty to work more efficiently

79

and effectively while weakening their autonomy, and threatening academic freedom. Many contract and non-tenured faculty have become "freeway fliers" (Welch, 2015, para 4) as they cobble together a living by teaching at different universities within commuting range while students struggle with distracted instructors, massive debt, and multiple demands on their time and energy.

Fallis's *Multiversities, Ideas, and Democracy* (2011) and Reimer's *Inside Corporate U* (2004) have made clear how challenging it is in today's university to enhance student/program fit and congruence, student-faculty and student-student relationships, collegiality over competitiveness, care for the well-being of faculty and students, and mutual regard and belonging, all so important to the student experience. When Adams (2015) wrote her chapter in Bryant and Jaworski's book, she was a PhD candidate, nurse, wife, and mother. She described how she navigated her way through intertwined "caringscapes" of

> caring at work as a nurse, caring at home and caring about her research while
> simultaneously completing her dissertation within a corporatized, hierarchical, and
> masculine institution indifferent, or so it sometimes seemed, to the human cost of the
> changes which had been instituted. (p. 86)

According to McAlpine and Amundson (2007), the many challenges faced by doctoral students are central to their identity. What is needed is an increase in interactions and activities that bring pleasure and enhance the doctoral experience. Mountz et al. (2015), in a thought-provoking article on slow scholarship, examined how some of the joy McAlpine and Amundson suggested was missing could be returned. They advocated for more time to "think, write, read, research, analyze, edit, and collaborate" (p. 3), and more time to care. But it was not just about more time. It was also about power, inequality, and changing the academic culture. What they

proposed was a "feminist ethics of care" (p. 4): consideration for how we work and how we relate, quality over quantity, and balance, all important to the student experience. They positioned their ideas as acts of resistance. Importantly, the authors acknowledged their own positions of privilege as tenure-track professors in research and teaching universities. However, from their positions of privilege they felt they had a duty of care and a responsibility to "push back by also acknowledging those who are missing from the academy" (p. 5).

Political Economy and a Gender Analysis

The political economy of post-secondary education in Canada, the connections between political economy and, in particular, neo-liberalism, and the post-secondary student experience bear directly on the subject of my research. Of particular interest to me is the extent to which scholarly political economy research includes a gender analysis. I made reference earlier to the work of Lörz and Mühleck (2018). Their analysis showed that gender has a strong impact on an individual's academic career. They noted a difference in the educational trajectory of men and women, with family circumstances and finances being more influential for women. They ascribed these differences to traditional gender roles, which continue to have an impact. And they posited that these differences could also be the result of discrimination. However, the quantitative nature of their study did not permit a subjective understanding of a number of variables.

Caretta et al. (2018) also studied gendered outcomes for doctoral candidates and early-career women. They too found that the disadvantages experienced by doctoral candidates were gendered. They highlighted how the "penchant for measuring and counting" in the neo-liberal university made taking time to care for children, self, and other family members exceedingly

difficult (p. 271). Somehow, in order to ensure an upward educational and career trajectory, there must be time and energy for study, research, teaching, grant writing, publishing, in addition to care work. And as Lörz and Mühleck (2018) pointed out, care work continues to fall disproportionately on women.

Caring labour, who does it, and who does not do it is a central question to understanding women's learning trajectory: "Given the moral imperative for women to do care work and on men to be care-less, the carelessness of higher education has highly gendered outcomes" (Lynch, 2010, p. 54). Lynch made clear that while universities have always been controlled by men for men, built as they are on Cartesian rationalism, what is different today is a new managerialism with its emphasis on scrutiny and performance measurement, commercialism, and entrepreneurism, in essence, "a particular 'care-less' form of competitive individualism" (p. 57) that challenges the university's role as a "public good." What is different, according to Lynch, is the moral legitimacy afforded "care-lessness."

While the number of women in post-secondary education has increased—in some faculties and departments women even dominate—they still remain underrepresented in doctoral studies and fields that have close connections to the market such as STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and computer science; Eisenkraft, 2013; Reimer, 2004; Wall, 2019). According to a Statistics Canada Report (Ferguson, 2016), there are "fewer women among earned doctorate holders than among bachelor's or master's degree holders," and among doctorate holders only a small share hold a PhD in such fields as physical sciences (22%), architecture and engineering (15%), and mathematics, computer, and information sciences (21%)" (p. 17). University structures, created by men for men are centuries old, and even today

the processes of learning and teaching are based on a male life course and body. The culture and ethos of the university remains androcentric. Change comes slowly.

In light of recent labour disruptions in the education sector both in Canada and the United States, Lynch's (2010) observation is most prescient: "new individualized capitalism breeds an organizational culture marked by increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties (to the university and higher education), and a declining sense of responsibility for others particularly for students" (p. 57). The "care ceiling" and how it works to exclude women *and* men who have primary care responsibilities bears directly on the student experience. Lynch's conclusions are a message for graduate and post-doctoral students about who is a suitable candidate for academic life. She argued that both women and men unable to work many unpaid hours because of personal and family obligations are likely to be at a disadvantage and that the human cost of the neo-liberal agenda in the academy demands a response. As Gill (2010), wrote, a conversation is needed in order to "begin to redress our own collective silence . . . with the broad aim of understanding the relationship between economic and political shifts, transformations in work, and psychosocial experiences—and starting a conversation about how we might resist" (p. 230).

The Doctoral Journey and Neo-Liberalism Through First-Person Narratives

Scholars have addressed neo-liberalism, the neo-liberal university, financial constraints, diversity, wellness, and mental health as they relate to the doctoral journey through a variety of approaches: qualitative, semi-structured interviews (Acker and Haque, 2015), a feminist autoethnographic lens (Caretta et al., 2018), first-person narrative (England, 2016), an introduction to a special issue of the *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien* on mental health in the academy (Mullings, 2016), a feminist research lens (Parizeau et al., 2016), and a life

course, social reproduction lens, though not expressly stated as such (Simard-Gagnon, 2016). Nicotra and Patel (2016) addressed political economy as it relates to higher education, globalization, international mobility, the concept of global citizenship, and the "good citizen," using the narrative of Nicotra's experience as a doctoral student.

While I have documented, at various points in my dissertation, the pressures of studying and working in a neo-liberal university and while some of those accounts are from the perspective of students and faculty, what stood out for me in the scholarly works of Acker and Haque, Caretta et al., England, Mullings, Parizeau et al., and Simard-Gagnon was the prominence they gave to accounts of doctoral students discussing their concerns about mental wellness in the academy, in narratives and first-person accounts. As England (2016) pointed out, "autobiography can provide richness in detail and description" (p. 226). I could not agree more. Outstanding in this regard is Simard-Gagnon's (2016) "Everyone is Fed, Bathed, Asleep, and I Have Made it Through Another Day: Problematizing Accommodation, Resilience, and Care in the Neoliberal Academy" and England's (2016) "Being Open in Academia: A Personal Narrative of Mental Illness and Disclosure." While England wrote her account as a faculty member, she discussed her "mental health status" through all stages in her career from diagnosis when she was a graduate student to when she sought full professorship. As I read these first-person accounts, I thought also about the importance these authors gave to our shared humanity.

What parent could not relate to Simard-Gagnon's (2016) story of juggling childcare, self-care, and care for her doctoral work. She described her experience as a doctoral student, a mother of two children, one with autism, as "one of endurance—an experience of continuous and almost overwhelming fatigue, in a context where exhaustion is camouflaged within a toxic ideal of resilience, grounded in celebratory accounts of hardships and adversity" (p. 220), resilience here

being personal resilience. For Simard-Gagnon, sharing her story was only a starting point to a broader discussion of how accommodation and the "debilitating aspects" of "a liberal and neo-liberal understanding of individuated autonomy" play havoc with an individual's mental and physical well-being (p. 220).

I must make a brief mention of the foundational work of Jordan (1992) on relational resilience. Jordan challenged the idea that resilience is a personal quality, an inner toughness some lucky individuals have, and suggested instead that resilience can be strengthened in everyone through growth enhancing relationships. In her words, "the movement toward empathic mutuality is at the core of relational resilience" (p. x).

England's (2016) first-person account is brave given the stigma that still surrounds mental illness. She considered the risks of disclosure and sought advice on whether to proceed. In the three decades since I worked as an educational psychologist and experienced a mental health crisis for which I was hospitalized for several weeks, some progress has been made in lessening the stigma, but we have a way to go. I was reminded by the administration then that I was not to discuss the reason for my hospitalization since we were professionals. I am not sure what my colleagues were told; they must have wondered about my absence. The joke among my friends was that perhaps my colleagues were told I was hospitalized with a "lady" problem, certainly nothing anyone would wish to pursue further. England noted that her "decision to disclose address[ed] stigma within academia" and was both a political and a personal decision. Such stories give hope to others and build the relational resilience Jordan wrote about. England asked a colleague who was dealing with anxiety and depression if reading her story would have been helpful, and the answer was a resounding yes.

While most of the authors cited above wove their personal stories into larger discussions of issues pertinent to the doctoral student experience, Nicotra's experience as a graduate student in international education and international mobility was woven into his and Patel's (2016) critical review and discussion of the literature on international education. Their article showcased once again the power of first-person accounts to make theory real. Reflecting on Nicotra's experience as well as the literature in the field, they disputed the political economy perspective of higher education and looked critically at the goal of international education and international mobility to develop the "mythical global citizen." They saw such a goal as a corporate money-making enterprise, and Nicotra called students engaged in such endeavours "mindless tourists" instead of "mindful travellers" (p. 30). He and Patel advocated for the making of the "good citizen," someone whose graduate education focused on "educating for democracy" (p. 35).

Student Success and Government Ideology

With the emphasis today on "education as a consumable product and students as autonomous consumers" (Brulé, 2004, p. 247), the link between the ideology of the party in power in Ontario, and to some extent the ideology of the current federal government, and what unfolds in universities cannot be overlooked (Fisher et al., 2014). When women's educational trajectories span decades, as is the case with the women I interviewed, their engagement with post-secondary education reflects, for better or for worse, different provincial and federal government ideologies and different universities' governance structures. Factors key to student success, such as gender equity, accessibility, reasonable tuition fees, financial aid, and availability of child and adult care, as a government responsibility are all reflective of government policies.

Today in Ontario a major priority has been institutional accountability with funding tied to universities meeting key performance indicators (KPI), most notably what the government calls "outcomes-based funding." This is relevant to my study since doctoral education is delivered within this context and the student experience of the participants in my study is framed in part by this context. The current Ontario political and economic focus on KPI and performance-based funding ties 60% of provincial operating grant funding to metrics such as graduation rates, employment rates and job ready skills, community engagement, research funding, experiential learning opportunities, and graduate earnings (Ontario Government, 2020). How this will impact teaching, learning, and availability of courses in other than applied faculties and departments remains to be seen.

A *Globe and Mail* report by J. Friesen (2020) states that "the Ontario government has temporarily shelved their plan to introduce performance-based funding for post-secondary institutions as it comes to grips with the economic and administrative destabilization caused by the COVID-19 pandemic." For now Premier Ford has stated that the government's focus is on the health and safety of students as COVID-19 remains front and centre, but the Ontario Government remains committed to this policy. According to Friesen, "the government did not specify when it will revisit the new funding model, but at least one university-planning document indicates it won't be before 2021." Tying university funding to a student's job readiness would seem highly problematic today.

From labour markets becoming more precarious, to fewer jobs being secure, to benefits and pensions increasingly becoming a thing of the past, we must now add the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic to the difficulties faced by people trying to find work, keep the jobs they have, and stay afloat financially. In the 2009 recession triggered by the 2008 financial

crisis, Trish Hennessy and Armine Yalnizya (2009) coined the expression the "he-session" to highlight how men bore the brunt of the financial downturn because of the loss of jobs in the male-dominated sectors of manufacturing, construction, and natural resources. In the recession caused by COVID-19, Hennessy and Yalnizya identify a different trend.

The first jobs to disappear this time were in the female-dominated service sector. Hennessy and Yalnizya called this the first "she-session" (Galloway, 2020). While it is outside the scope of my research to discuss the economic impact of the pandemic in any detail, it is important to note that while emergency financial assistance from the government has provided immediate relief, long-term, dual, or even multiple earners in families will become more necessary, and it continues to be left primarily to women to balance paid work and unpaid work at home (Adams, 2015; Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Gouthro, 2009, 2010; Luxton, 1981; Lynch, 2010; Wall, 2008). Blair-Loy et al. (2015) argued that the gender revolution Hochschild wrote about in her 1989 book *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* "remains stalled" (p. 438). In a wonderfully titled review of Hochschild's 1989 book, Kuttner's (1989) "She Minds the Child, He Minds the Dog" (p. 3) sums up her book perfectly. We are as well facing a social class disparity that is widening.

Money in Later Life

In 1957 Franco Modigliani developed his life-cycle income hypothesis that individuals borrow when their income is low and save when their income is high, the assumption being that during an individual's working life, wealth will increase, and money will be put aside for post-retirement years when income falls (Deaton, 2005; see Figure 3.2). Since it is more difficult to

earn money late in life, if one works hard in early and mid-adulthood then they will have savings on which they can draw in old age.

Figure 3.2

Modigliani's Life-Cycle Income Hypothesis

Source. T. Pettinger, 2019, https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/27080/concepts/life-cycle-hypothesis/
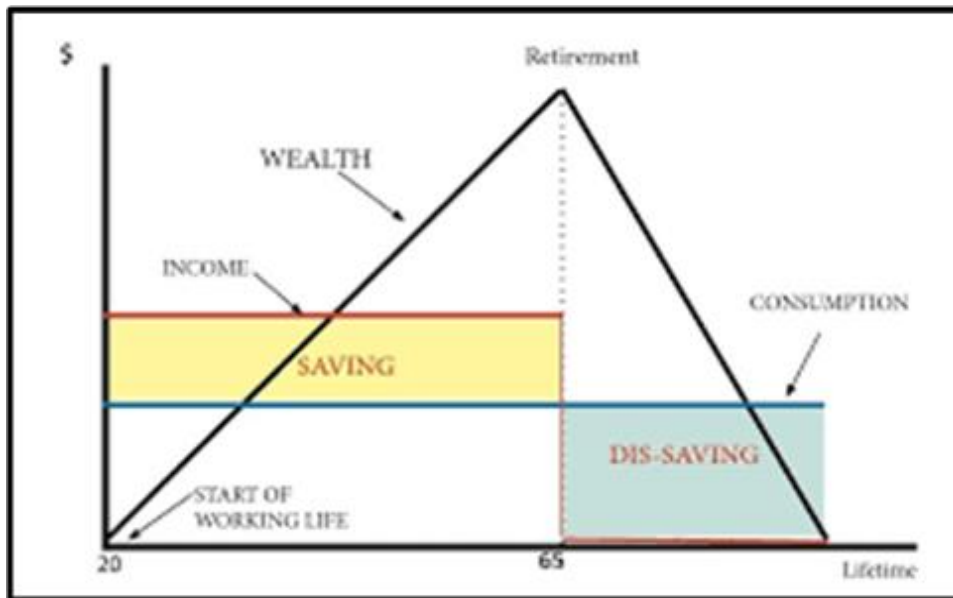
As has been discussed, many women do not fit this trajectory. Modigliani's life-cycle income hypothesis is gendered. Some people, especially older women who did not enter the paid labour force, entered late, worked part-time, or interrupted their work life to care for children, enter old age poor—as per the cumulative disadvantage theory discussed earlier—and are unable to save. In addition, as Gazso (2005) noted, "women's eligibility for the CPP and occupational pension plans/registered retirement savings plans is dependent on their wage earnings" (n.p., Table 1). thus creating the "potential to disentitle their access to income security in old age" (n.p., Abstract). There are also issues around the increased number of women in the work force, the ageing of the population, employment and precarity, borrowing, spending, saving, and

retirement that were not considered in the 1950s. Modigliani's life-cycle income hypothesis is much more applicable to people who have large incomes and are able to put aside money for their retirement (Komp, 2011).

Modigliani's hypothesis, however, remains important because it has withstood the test of time, and, as noted earlier, the perception that a linear life course holds true for all older adults by virtue of their age remains. The impact of such thinking was evident in my findings. Several participants in my study reported that finances remained a barrier to pursuing doctoral study.

Personality variables must also be considered. Some people do not plan long term, some lack the self-control needed to forestall immediate gratification, and others lack the financial savvy to understand how best to save for their retirement. Nor does the notion that people could run down their savings in old age as they outlive their money hold true for everyone. Some people do not let this happen because they want to leave an inheritance for their children. Today, as well, some people are opting to continue work to age 70 and beyond while other people are opting to work less in early and mid-adulthood and then continue to work part-time into their 70s and beyond. And there is also an increasing tension between longevity, an unequal old age, and neo-liberalism's decreased social and economic institutional support for an ageing population (Phillipson, 1991, 2015). Phillipson (2015) wrote about the need for "redefining the basis of social solidarity between and within generations" as a way to fill the support gap neo-liberal social and economic policies have created (p. 95).

While Price and Livsey (2015) have also highlighted the impact of neo-liberalism, they focused on the shift from the interactions of older adults with the state and the family to the marketplace and older adults as consumers. Money in later life, as Price and Livsey noted, has become "intensely individual, complicated and risky" (p. 307). Where political economy

critiques capitalism in order to show how certain groups in society are disadvantaged, Price and Livsey looked to the cultural turn in gerontology to understand money in later life. For them greater emphasis needs to be put on the link between consumption and identity in an older individual's daily financial dealings and the shifting discourse from the old as "needy subjects of welfare" to a discourse of the agentic, powerful, even "greedy consumer" discourse that must be examined for the potential it holds to mask inequality (p. 310).

Summary

In this chapter I explained the rationale for grounding my study in a life course framework viewed through a feminist theory and research, feminist political economy, and social reproduction lens. I highlighted the socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic factors that impact women's lives, in particular their educational trajectories.

I shed light on the structures that affect women's pursuit of a post-secondary education, which include insufficient individual or family support for post-secondary education, finances and family care obligations, long gaps between university attendance, the "leap into the middle class" when participants entered university, the wage gap and the cumulative disadvantage over the life course, a shift in university culture that speaks to an underlying shift in values from the university as a social good to the university as market driven, and a model of save when earnings are high/live on savings post retirement, which is gendered and not relevant today for many except high earners. Ageism too is reflected in the shift from the needy, dependant senior to the agentic, affluent "greedy consumer." How the participants in my study were able to resist, challenge, and find ways around structural barriers and how they used their individual and collective agency is documented in the findings and analysis chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Feminist methodology [links] theory and method in a synergistic relationship that brings epistemology, methodology, and method into a dynamic interaction across the research process. (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 143)

I undertook a qualitative study with women who began their PhD when they were over 50 years of age and received their PhD between 2010 and 2018 from universities across Ontario *excluding* York University. I was interested in learning how women over 50 experienced their doctoral studies. From this "grand tour" question (McCracken, 1988), I sought answers to several other questions. Why do later life women enter a doctoral program? What do they learn from their experiences, and what do they hope to achieve with their PhDs? What does their successful completion of a rigorous academic degree tell us about late-life learning and the frequent depictions of old age as a time primarily of loss and decline?

Methodologically my research stands on the belief that grounding my study in a life course framework viewed through a feminist theory and research, feminist political economy, social reproduction lens lends itself well to recognizing the importance of women's lived experiences. I acknowledge the work of Grant McCracken (1988), who while not specifically feminist, highlighted the researcher "as an instrument of inquiry" at every stage of the research process (p. 32), something that is consistent with my feminist theory and praxis. A discussion of my role as researcher follows. I use gender and class as the lens through which social and political relationships and structures of power in participants' personal lives and doctoral programs are analyzed, challenging the current neo-liberal economic model.

The data used to answer each of my research questions included semi-structured, in-depth interviews, an artifact that represented the woman's doctoral journey (an interpretation of that

artifact was requested by me as well), email correspondence, field notes, and reflections.

The Role of the Researcher

As a reflective researcher—"an instrument of inquiry" (McCracken, 1988, p. 32)—there were ethical and methodological considerations that I had to think through. How I boundaried and located myself bore on my approach. I decided not to draw any of my participants from York University in order not to implicate any student, staff, or faculty, even indirectly, who was in the same university and/or faculty in which I was pursuing my PhD. I also considered the comfort level of participants who might not feel free to discuss their student experience knowing I was pursuing my degree at the same university as they were. I further limited my presence in the data by discussing my own learning trajectory only up to the point where I accepted an offer to enter a doctoral program. It was, after all, the participants' stories I had come to hear.

Central to feminist research and practice is reflexivity, which takes place at all stages of the research. As a researcher, and especially as a feminist researcher, I acknowledge that it is impossible to be outside of my study. However, while there is much discussion among researchers on the importance of reflexivity, there is less discussion on what reflexivity actually looks like in practice and, not surprisingly, there are differing opinions (Dallos & Stedman, 2009). Too much reflexivity threatens to render work self-indulgent while too little leaves the reader wondering about the researcher's engagement with the process. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) reflected on their own doctoral research (from which they had some distance) and they concluded that "degrees of reflexivity" is probably the more accurate way to describe reflexivity in their work (p. 425).

Some influences may be easy to see and to explain at the time a researcher is gathering and analysing their data, but other influences may not be so easily accessed. Time and emotional and intellectual distance may be needed in order to see how something in the researcher's personal journey influenced their work. Brantlinger's (2007) study discussed in chapter three illustrated very well how a researcher's bias can intrude during the data collection and in the analysis of the data and how after time and distance from the original work, and upon reflection, the researcher's perspective can change.

That said, as Oakley (1981) reminded researchers, learning about the lives of others through interviewing is optimized when a non-hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee is established and when the interviewer is able and willing to invest something of their own personal identity in that relationship. It is a balancing act and one that required reflexivity on my part, a consciousness in the moment of when to engage, knowing when to put myself into the conversation, when to step back, and when to allow for those all-important moments of silence. It called for me to adjust my thinking and behaviour as the interviews progressed.

Not surprisingly, participants wanted to know about my research and my doctoral journey almost as much as I wanted to hear about theirs. I had to balance my personal closeness to the subject of the interviews with an openness to the participant's unique experience. My shared identity with participants while positive could, as McCracken (1988) stated, create "as much blindness as insight" (p. 12). The constructions I make of other peoples' lives are to a lesser or greater degree a reflection of my own life. So, while McCracken acknowledged the risk for all researchers of failing to see their own assumptions, he argued for reflexivity and self-awareness.

In his words, a "clearer understanding of one's vision of the world permits a critical distance from it" (p. 33).

Seeing as I am a member of the demographic I studied, I believe my observations of the interactions I had with the women I interviewed and my reflections have the potential to add to the richness of my study. Throughout my dissertation I weave in the occasional observation and reflection, for example, the hospitality of a home cooked meal offered by one participant along with shared time in her kitchen preparing the lunch—perhaps her way of establishing rapport. Oakley (1981) posited that rather than considering this as an indication of a desire for a personal "friend" relationship, something that could blur the boundaries between interviewer and interviewee, it could signal an acceptance of the goals of the research project. Assuring my comfort and hers was a way to put us both at ease and to ready her to tell her story and me to listen to her story.

In "A Coda: The Researcher's Reflections" (see chapter seven), I offer additional observations and reflections. Since I am breaking new ground with my study on how older women experienced their doctoral studies, I was especially interested in the women's responses to the following research questions: Why did you pursue a PhD late in life? How did you arrive at the decision to pursue a PhD? What does the successful completion of a rigorous academic degree tell us about late-life learning and the frequent depictions of old age as a time primarily of loss and decline? In the coda, as I reflect on the women's thoughts, I also include my own thoughts on what brought me to doctoral study at age 70 and on what age, ageing, and late-life learning mean to me.

In chapter one I wrote about how as a child stories were my companions. The stories I was told around the kitchen table and at bedtime as well as the stories I read and eventually

wrote connected me to myself, people, and worlds outside myself, and to big ideas. I am at heart a storyteller and a story-listener. I have been privileged, as well, in my employment to hear people's life stories and share my own. My understanding of feminism arose in much the same way, from the ground up: from the stories shared around the kitchen table in my family home, to the stories that were shared in the consciousness raising groups in which I participated (groups that crossed racial, religious, ethnic, and class lines), to the activism of the anti-nuclear movement and the many social justice movements that rose to prominence in the 1960s and early 1970s.

I did not come to feminism through the text and the academy. I was not schooled in what Stanley and Wise (2000) described as big T theory. To return to Calixte et al. (2010), feminist theory can be likened to a "roadmap" (p. 1) with all of the twists and turns in the road one expects on a long journey. From the 1990s to today I have positioned myself as a socialist feminist. This means that class and gender are central to both my research and activism. Where I have been on that journey to feminist consciousness informs my personal, professional, and academic life, first as a radical feminist, then a lesbian separatist and a lesbian feminist, and finally, where I am today.

I believe, as I stated in chapter one, that stories have a magic and a power. They have the potential to shift our perspectives, even inspire change. By presenting the voices of the women I interviewed and the stories they shared with me, I hope there will be a shift in the conversation from later life as a time of lost youth and missed opportunities to later life as a time of renewed strength and opportunities whatever each of us wishes those opportunities to be. We do not come into this world stamped with a best before date, and there is no one right way to age.

Recruitment

After receiving ethics approval (see Appendix A), recruitment was initiated through snowball sampling and purposeful sampling to ensure diversity in a small geographic area (Gouthro, 2009, p. 101; Johnson & Christensen, 2012, pp. 230–235). I wanted to ensure that participants were representative of universities in eastern, central, south-western, and northern Ontario. In addition to geographic diversity, I sought diversity among universities and doctoral programs since the cultures of departments, faculties, and universities differ. My preference, therefore, was not to limit participants to education but to recruit participants who had graduated from other doctoral programs in social sciences, humanities, and arts.

I emailed graduate program directors and student advisors at Ontario universities with doctoral programs and asked if they had any recent PhD graduates or if they knew of any past graduates they thought might be interested in participating. I then sent out a recruitment flyer to graduate program directors and advisors who requested one (see Appendix B). Women who expressed an interest in participating contacted me directly via email. The seven women who responded were asked about their availability to participate in a confidential interview about their doctoral student experience and a date was set for the interview. None of the seven participants were known to me. No incentive was provided.

McCracken (1988) recommended up to eight participants. Coates (2018), Gouthro (2009), Frances (2009), and Wendover (2006) conducted studies similar to mine and had anywhere from eight to fourteen participants. Since I preferred to go deep and elicit thick, rich descriptions, my sample size was limited to seven women. For McCracken (1988), "qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it" (p. 17). Though a small number of participants can raise questions about generalizability, it was a subjective understanding of the women's

doctoral journey that I wished to foreground. Through the voices of the women, I sought an understanding of how they constructed their world. A small number of participants was, therefore, acceptable.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) addressed generalizability, or external validity, as an issue that arises with qualitative research especially when there is an auto/biographical thread woven through the research, as is the case with my study. However, they used transferability instead of generalizability (p. 51). Transferability is the degree to which meaning and knowledge can be applied in different settings and in different contexts. Transferability was assured in my study through thick, rich descriptions, which have the potential to be applied to other contexts.

Just as there is a definitional dilemma about how older adult students are defined and whether life course is a perspective, framework, or paradigm, there is a definitional dilemma about the terminology used to account for the rigor of a qualitative research study. Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2000) were the first to propose four specific criteria other than quantitative criteria of reliability and validity for determining how trustworthy a qualitative research study was. For a quantitative study to be reliable, two researchers studying the same thing must come up with compatible results, and to be valid the study must be a clear and accurate reflection of the world the researcher is describing. But in qualitative research the focus is different. It is on how well the researcher backs up their findings with evidence so that their descriptions and analysis are representative of the persons and situations they are studying.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985, 2000) four criteria for evaluating qualitative research are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility can be likened to internal validity. It is the degree to which the researcher has correctly represented what the participants have said or done. I achieved credibility by identifying and addressing themes,

98

patterns, issues, and complexities that arose in my study and making them understandable and meaningful to the reader. I achieved dependability, or reliability, through careful documentation, an audit trail, peer review, and triangulation. Confirmability can be likened to objectivity with one important caveat. As a qualitative researcher I do not claim to be objective nor is it something I aspire to. Confirmability requires that the findings arise from the research rather than from the researcher's biases and subjective impressions, hence objectivity. This I accomplished through reflexivity and reflexive practice. I was also open to challenges about all aspects of the research process. Transparency about decisions and how those decisions were made was key.

Methods of Data Collection

Confidentiality was maintained through all stages of the research process. I kept all the information I gathered in my personal work area, which was at home in a locked filing cabinet. Offices for graduate students are shared and therefore all written materials, digital files of interviews, interview transcripts, and researcher notes would not be secure there. Research material on my personal computer was backed up on an external storage drive, which was also kept in a secure area. I used pseudonyms for participants in the text. Actual names were never used in reporting. Information that identified participants was also maintained in a secure area but separate from files containing research data. I will keep data for three years after my dissertation is published and destroy it when it is no longer needed.

Data Sets

Tape-Recorded, Semi-Structured, In-Depth Interviews: Interview Protocol

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth, rich, open-ended interviews in person at a place of the participant's choosing, and if that was not possible, then we used videoconferencing. Interviews were conducted over a three-month period from July to September 2019 and were one-and-a-half hours in length to two-plus hours. I recorded each interview, and they were then transcribed using an online software program. Once transcribed, I emailed participants the transcript of their interview (see Maguire, 1987, p. 136). Any questions or concerns they had were addressed by email or telephone, with one participant requesting a follow-up interview by videoconference. Participants familiar with the role of researcher enjoyed the opportunity to be, as one participant said, "on the other side of the desk."

Prior to the scheduled interview I emailed participants a confirmation of the scheduled interview and a consent form (see Appendix C). Interviews were confidential, and anonymity was assured through the use of pseudonyms. Because of the nature of participants' professional work prior to commencing their doctoral studies, they asked that there be no indirect identifiers included in my dissertation. For this reason, specific universities are not named nor are any specific details of participants' previous work included. As well, participants expressed a desire to speak freely about their doctoral student experiences and asked for assurance that any unique details about their programs, which if mentioned could identify the program and possibly specific people, not be included.

I carefully constructed the interview questions so that participants could tell their story in their own way and on their terms (see Appendix D). McCracken (1988) called these non-directive questions "grand tour" questions. If they did not elicit the desired information, they

were followed by more directive "planned prompts" (p. 35). While I had interview questions prepared, I also offered participants the opportunity to suggest questions or topics they wished to discuss (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011, p. 680).

Of the four women who met with me in person, three suggested lunch either at a restaurant or at their home in order to get acquainted before beginning the formal interview. With the fourth woman, because of distance and travel time, she suggested a quick coffee and conversation before the interview and a more leisurely coffee after. Two of the in-person interviews were conducted in participants' homes, one in a meeting room at a university, and one in a meeting room at a community college. Our shared identity as women pursuing a doctoral degree late in life and the opportunity to enjoy a meal together engendered a high degree of rapport. For the same reason, interviews conducted online always began with informal social conversation and an opportunity to get acquainted before beginning the formal interview. In-person interviews and those conducted through videoconferencing began with a review of the signed consent form (with a "back-up" brought to the in-person interview just in case). This was followed by obtaining permission to record the interview and to take written notes, an explanation of the confidentiality and anonymity process, and the assurance that they had the right to refuse to answer any questions and terminate the interview at any time they felt the need to. Participants were also given an opportunity to ask any questions they had about the process (see Appendix C).

Artifact

To ensure I had checks and balances on my interview data, I introduced a second qualitative method to reduce concern about the lack of rigor and that my conclusions were

unduly influenced by any one method: a visual data collection of photographs, drawings, paintings, and video.

Objects alone or in conjunction with text can tell the story of a person's life (Barata et al., 2005; Biasin & Evans, 2019; Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; Davidson et al., 2009; Ewing & Hughes, 2008; Hartung et al., 2017; Heinrich, 2000; Kearney & Hyle, 2004; MacKenzie & Wolf, 2012; Sinner et al., 2006). Devos et al. (2016) shared line drawings with their participants which illustrated change over time (p. 472; see Figure 4.1). They then asked their participants to sketch their own doctoral journey using simple but evocative differently shaped arrows (straight, jagged, or broken) taking different directions.

Figure 4.1

Change Over Time Depicted by Different Shaped Lines
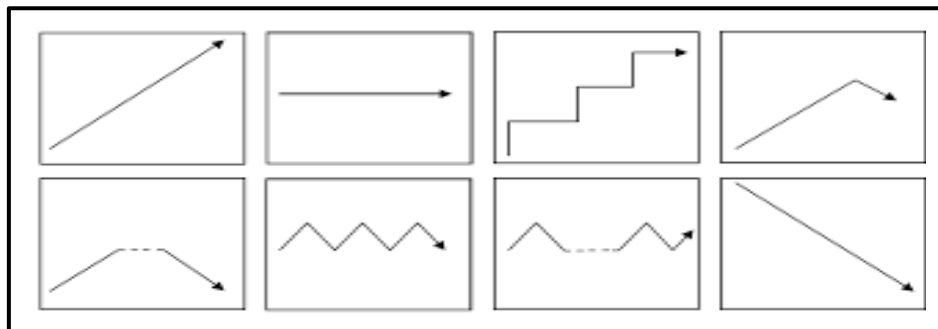
For my study, participants were invited to tell the story of their doctoral student experience and what inspired their writing, through a different medium. When accompanied by written or oral comments (recorded and transcribed), the credibility and rigor of these media would be assured. Objects, visual art, and images are as much a language as words, but they tap into the symbolic and affective aspects of experiences in a way that words often cannot. For Kearney and Hyle (2004), participant drawings were valuable for "drawing out the emotions" (p. 361) not always expressed verbally. Their work is particularly noteworthy because they used

participant-produced drawings that would be called naïve art, that is, drawings produced by participants and researchers unschooled in visual art techniques. I was aware of the challenges inherent in using an arts-based method in addition to interviews. Participant engagement could be lacking and there would be an additional time commitment on the part of the participants. There is also, as Davidson et al. (2009) noted, the matter of the "politics of academia" (p. 1). Visual art techniques are viewed by some academics, again in the words of Davidson et al., as "lower in status" (p. 9) and not appropriate for inclusion even in a qualitative dissertation. I disagree, however. As Johnson and Christensen (2012) stated, "the image is one of the richest methods of data collection" (211). Images also add emotional texture that words alone cannot convey. When I considered including naïve drawings in my dissertation, I was encouraged by the research that argued for "address[ing] the question in new ways. Instead of asking, 'Is this good art?,' we are now asking, 'What is this art good for?'" (Sinner et al., 2006, p. 1253).

After receiving the transcript of the interviews, I invited participants to contribute an artifact that represented an aspect of their doctoral student experience or inspired their writing. It could be in the form of a photograph of objects, short literary piece, poem, sketch, drawing, painting, diagram, collage, or an audio or video file emailed to me for inclusion in my dissertation. The artifacts would be stripped of all identifiers so no participant or university could be identified. While I envisioned participant interest in contributing an artefact, only one of the participants agreed. She submitted a photograph of where she had once worked and where she returned to gather her data. It was a mutual decision not to use the photograph because of the location of the photo (the reason why the photograph had personal resonance for her) would have made it possible to identify the community and consequently some of the people there.

Upon reflection two participants shared with me what inspired them on their doctoral journey, in particular what inspired their writing. One participant toured me around her home, a large and lovely old house, with a long and interesting history. This was where she wrote and found inspiration to write. Another woman, via videoconferencing, toured me around a room once occupied by one of her children and now it was, as she said, "a room of my own." "I have my laptop, large screen, just like I like, not a super huge room, but very peaceful." This is the room where she said she found her inspiration to write.

I believe I would have had more success obtaining an artifact had I asked participants to bring an artifact to their interview, whether in person or on-line. After I completed my data collection, I continued to read about storytelling and the use of artifacts, and a friend directed me to a podcast produced by Penguin Books. The host had authors join him in studio with five objects that inspired their latest book (Grant, 2015). Because I did not use an artefact as the second data source I could have negatively impacted my study. However, I did obtain thick, rich data from the open-ended interviews, so I am confident in the trustworthiness of my findings. Certainly, had each participant contributed an artifact, the richness of my findings would have been strengthened since the artifacts and the participants' interpretation of their artifacts would have given me further insight into their world, their experience as a doctoral student, and what provided inspiration for their writing. The objects they would have brought to the interview could also have acted as an icebreaker. However, the participants, as noted earlier, were experienced with and knowledgeable about the research interview process and were very comfortable. In the coda I added a photograph of my writer's getaway in Montreal where I found my inspiration to write, along with a picture of my childhood friend and I working together at one of our Saturday editing sessions (see Appendix E). She obtained her PhD when she was 60

(10 years before I began my doctoral studies, as she reminded me), and she has been a critical friend for my writing as well as my mentor throughout my doctoral journey. Wright (2003) noted that the support of a friend, partner, or other person is instrumental in students completing on time (p. 222). I agree.

To return to the need for triangulation and a second method of collecting data. I used autoethnography, albeit boundaried by the limits agreed upon and discussed earlier, which served as a second data source for the purpose of adding rigor to my study (Chang, 2007).

Email Correspondence

Emails provided additional data. They were either spontaneous or consisted of a request from me or from participants for information or to confirm the interview date, time, and location. I kept hard copies of all email messages under each participant's pseudonym. For the purpose of including these excerpts, I removed potential identifiers. It was clear from the email correspondence that the participants welcomed me as they might a colleague, and the interview was perceived by them as an opportunity for a collegial exchange.

> Hi Lois,
> You have been on my mind. I think I was particularly impressed by your view that the very mature (old woman) brain could still open up. I have become overly fixated on what I do not remember—like words and names. You might want to sample some academic work by my Australian friend Dr. ___. At one point she was supervising 12 phd students. Her field is education—at the doctoral level—and I remember her as having all kinds of interesting things to say about mature students. We still correspond regularly, so I can put her in touch with you. A true daughter of Australia she has phenomenal energy.
> cheers,
> (Alexandra email correspondence, July 11, 2019)

Lois—my house is [close] to ___. I'm happy to meet at ___ when you arrive. I'm going

to suggest we drive to a really cute breakfast/lunch place very close by called ___. We

could go there and have an early lunch/late brunch and then come back to my place for

the interview afterwards. Once done, if we have time we could head downtown for a mini

tour and tea break before heading back. . . . I am looking forward to this! Happy to share

my academic experiences with you. (Betty email correspondence, July 25, 2019)

Hi Lois,

I highlighted my responses to your questions below in your email. I read the transcript

and I think you have lots to work with. Let me know if you need anything more.

Have a good weekend. (Millie email correspondence, September 6, 2019)

Field Notes and Reflections

Field notes were mainly observational. They helped me see and reflect on details of the

interview and they provided me with background information, such as where the interview was

conducted. They also provided a record of my observations during the interview, such as any

interruptions in the flow of the interview, high notes, and concerns. My written reflections

included my assumptions about and interpretations of interview events and information about

relationships as illustrated in the following excerpt.

The telephone rings, Jean [pseudonym] has it beside her, grandson—four-year-old—sick,

croup. It's her son wanting advice. Jean takes call and subsequent call shortly after, also

from her son. Several phone calls after all work related from different things she's

involved in—did mention she's a "go to person" she didn't take those calls. Ever the

mother. Busy juggling multiple demands.

These field notes and reflections offered me additional insights into the context in which

participants engaged their doctoral studies.

Data Analysis

Method of Analysis

My analytic approach was inductive, directed by the data itself. I let the data more or less speak for itself. I began with content analysis, counting the frequency with which a particular code appeared. However, as Saldana (2016) noted, "the frequency of occurrence is not necessarily an indicator of significance" (p. 41). With this in mind I moved to thematic analysis and looked for patterned meanings. As I coded for a word or phrase, I made note of a pattern, concept, or theme and wrote it in a memo along with observations I made during the interviews and the information I gathered from participant emails. This was first-level coding. My codes and my notes led to reflection on the deeper, more complex meaning of what each of the women said, which initiated second-level coding. In second-level coding I condensed the 43 codes I initially came up with and ended up with approximately 20 codes, after which I grouped them into categories that led me to themes and subthemes.

After I reviewed my themes and subthemes, I returned to my data and did a third round of coding. I dug deep into the transcripts and considered how what I discovered related to larger issues. What struck me was change—change over the life course. In the findings chapters, I elected to use the themes that emerged from this third round of coding since they represented the larger issue of change: how structural conditions have changed over the past 70 to 80 years resulting in changes in family, gender, economics, learning, and how we conceptualize age, ageing, and old age. For example, family, and how we define family, and gender, and how we view gender roles, have undergone significant shifts. Non-linearity is a characteristic of our time so lifelong learning—learning across the lifespan—is also different from what many people in the past understood it to be.

Coding

I coded interview data manually. Because of the small number of participants, manual coding was efficient. Coding was an iterative process consisting of repeated rounds of analysis. I listened to the recordings of the interviews several times, and I read and reread the interview transcripts in order to generate codes and create categories and themes from those codes (see Appendix F). The audiotaped interviews were converted into text by an online transcription service. When I received the transcripts, I reviewed them for clarity. I listened to the audiotape of the interview while I followed along in the transcript and made changes where necessary. For example, in one transcript of a videoconference interview, the audio was indistinct at a point where the participant explained that she was coming down the stairs. The transcript read "count the stairs," so I edited it to read "coming down the stairs." Participants were emailed a copy of their interview transcript with any questions I had or points I needed clarified. In turn, they were asked to respond by email with any information they wished to add or have redacted and any questions, concerns, and comments they had after reviewing the transcript. One participant asked for a brief follow-up interview in lieu of responding via email. Like the initial interview, the follow up interview was conducted remotely. During the interviews, topics in the research questions were explored. Keeping in mind my focal research question, additional questions, my three theoretical frameworks (life course, feminist research and practice and feminist political economy, and social reproduction), and the literature I had reviewed, I immersed myself in the transcripts.

What I looked for first were topics from which thematic categories could emerge. I coded the data manually using descriptive coding (Saldana, 2016) and ended up with 43 codes that summarized the topics in the excerpts I highlighted. I started with the first interview, chunked a

section, went through that section line by line, highlighted a relevant word or short phrase, gave it a code, and assigned it a colour. This process required that I make sense of the data. Just as I had to be an observer of my own process when I collected the data, I had to continue to be an observer of my own process as I generated codes. I continued, therefore, to note my reflections and ideas. I proceeded in this fashion through the first transcript, keeping a list of codes and their assigned colours. I constructed a large wall chart with codes on the vertical axis and participants' pseudonyms on the horizontal axis. As a code appeared in a transcript, I put a checkmark under that participant's pseudonym, and I made brief notes on the chart referencing the page in the transcript I wanted to review. I moved on to the next six interview transcripts, adding to my list of codes and assigning colours for each code. All the while I updated my wall chart. The wall chart gave me a clear visual of the frequency with which codes appeared, the connections and patterns that were emerging, and the emerging themes.

I then condensed the 43 codes into approximately 20 codes, after which I grouped them into categories that led me to themes and subthemes. This constituted the second-level of coding. I continued to document my data analysis process in a series of wall charts: First-level data analysis and second-level data analysis (condensed codes, codes grouped into categories, and possible themes; see Appendix F).

Richards and Morse (2007) have pointed out that coding is more than labeling; it is linking. It "leads you from the data to the idea and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea," but the links also "lead both ways. Coding takes you away from the data—up from the data to more abstract ideas and categories [and it] also takes you down from the idea to all the material you have linked it to" (p. 137).

As I went through this process, I discovered that more than one category could apply, for example, data that I coded as "turning points" and "pivotal moments" could also go into the "awakening" category along with "sense of wonder," "awe," "aha moment," and "curiosity." Saldana (2016) cautioned against doing this too often as it "may suggest that the codes and/or the categories may not be as clearly defined as necessary" (p. 11). I reviewed my codes and categories once more with Saldana's cautionary note in mind. "Gender," as well as "finances," linked to all the other categories, but both figured prominently in the women's stories and were significant factors in their non-linear educational trajectory, so I was not concerned. Themes emerged out of the codes via these categories. These six themes and subthemes are presented in Table 1 on the following page.

While the women I interviewed grew up in a time of major social upheaval, they were raised as I was and as many boomer women were, within the socio-cultural constraints of an earlier time. The "summer of love," "the women's year," and "rebellion" all loomed large in my study participants' thinking then and in how they fit the pieces of their lives together as they moved into the future.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

1. Growing up in the 60s	2. School days	3. Building a career
family of origin	elementary & secondary school	career(s) pre-PhD
mental/physical health/ disability	post-secondary prior to graduate school	career(s) post-PhD
marriage and divorce	graduate school	interruptions
pregnancy/child rearing	interruptions	family
Gender "the women's year"	family	gender
finances	gender	finances
agency—"rebellion"	finances	
resilience		
4. Guess what . . . I'm a doctor	**5. Journeying inward**	**6. Age matters?**
technology	the gift of time	ageing
relationships—family-peer-faculty	the joy of solitude	ageism
academic language	the excitement of an aha moment	late bloomer
theories	the value of life experience	fear of mental decline
knowledge transfer	the thrill of facing your fears and overcoming them	leaving a legacy
politics	the power that comes from self-understanding	senior's waiver
gender	the desire to give back, to leave a legacy	gender
finances		finances

Limitations

This study has certain limitations, some of which are inherent to qualitative research. Of particular concern is the issue of researcher bias in a study such as mine where the researcher and participants have in common their membership in a generational cohort and their involvement in late life doctoral study. I thought carefully about how to account for this limitation and how to

minimize its impact by making sure that my study was credible, dependable, and confirmable. I identified themes, patterns, issues, and complexities, I carefully documented my work through an audit trail, and while as a qualitative researcher objectivity was not a goal, I ensured through reflexivity and reflective practice that my findings were not based on my biases or subjective impressions.

Another limitation is the difficulty participants might have had in taking on the role of participant. As I stated earlier, the women extended hospitality and expressed an interest in my research and in my doctoral experience: One woman followed up her interview with a source she thought I might be interested in pursuing for my own research, and two other women shared with me an organizing strategy they had used for their writing that they thought would be helpful for me. It is possible, therefore, that they responded in ways they perceived could be helpful to me and, in the process, they may have lost sight of their own story.

To address the problem of what Maxwell (2013) called participant reactivity, I acknowledged my research agenda at the start of the interview, and I reiterated that it was their story I was looking forward to hearing. I also reflected both in the interview and after, as I reviewed the transcripts and initiated coding, on how I might have influenced participants. I made note of when I thought this might or might not have happened. For example, when I inserted a brief comment in an interview about a friend's reaction to my decision to pursue a PhD, Betty listened politely then continued on with her anecdote about the reaction of her friends and family to her decision. In a different interview, Millie asked me to tell her a little about my own research before she shared her story. She quickly jumped in, however, with a comment about how what I had just said made her think of ___, and she was off telling her story. These observations supported by others and by the general pleasure the participants expressed at having

an opportunity to talk about their doctoral journey reassured me that the participants' own stories were at the forefront of their minds.

The small number of participants could be construed as a limitation. However, each participant produced such thick, rich data I am satisfied that my study accomplished my goal of providing a window into how the university was serving a new and growing constituency. My study was an exploratory study of an area of research for which there is a paucity of literature. Further study is needed. And finally, I did not reach out to faculty, graduate program directors, or university administrators. In the future I would like to do so. Their perspectives on the university's response to older adult learners who return to university to pursue advanced graduate degrees are important.

Summary

In this chapter, I started with a quotation that highlighted the link between feminist theory and method, and I explained my role as a reflective researcher. I discussed how I boundaried myself by not including participants from York University and by only including myself in the study to the point where I accepted an offer to enter a doctoral program. Next, I discussed recruitment and my methods of data collection. I detailed how the confidentiality of research materials was safeguarded, how the interviews were carried out, and how anonymity was assured. I elaborated on my rational for using both interview and arts-based methods and how additional data was provided through email correspondence, field notes, and reflections. Included as well was how I approached the process of data analysis, linked the data to my theoretical frameworks, completed coding, and generated themes. The chapter concluded with limitations. In the following two chapters I discuss my findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS—GROWING UP AND MOVING ON

The way I go is the way back to see the future. (Hanzlová, cited in Berger, 2013, p. 156)

Chapters five and six present the key findings from my study on how women over 50 years of age experienced their participation in PhD study. Because I used a life course framework to connect the individual women's lives to the historical, political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural contexts in which they lived, two findings chapters on the same themes of family, gender, economics, learning, and age seemed appropriate. For chapter five I draw on Hanzlová's words to provide the reader with an appreciation for what brought these women to such a rigorous venture late in life. Why now, the women were often asked. Their life story up to the point they applied to pursue a PhD answers that question. Chapter six highlights the women's self-reflection as they considered pursuing a PhD and their perspectives on their doctoral studies. Chapter six also provides insights into the women's lives after their PhDs as they grow into old age.

Findings were based on data obtained from seven in-depth interviews, artifacts, email correspondence, field notes, and reflections. Participant quotations, taken from interview transcripts, are included in both chapters in order to make central the voices of the participants and ensure that the reader has an opportunity to hear from the women themselves the richness and the complexity of their stories as well as how they exercised their agency to resist and overcome barriers in pursuit of a post-secondary education.

I begin chapter five with a group profile of the seven participants. Next, I present the five major findings in early and mid-life. In the words of Alexandra, one of the participants, "the

whole pursuit of education is, is complicated by, I will break it down to three factors here, first

off your sex, second off your class, third, your age" (participant interview, July 6, 2019).[1]

Group Profile

These seven participants have both similar and diverse characteristics.

1. One of the seven participants came from a family where one parent completed grade eight and one parent grade four. Three participants came from a family where one parent went to high school the other parent did not. Two participants had parents who both completed high school while one participant had a father who attended university later in life. One participant's mother secured a professional designation, although she never attended university. At the time it was possible to acquire such a designation through on the job experience and courses.

2. While participants were not asked their ethnic background, one participant self-identified as Irish Canadian and one as "Franco-Ontarian . . . raised French Canadian." One participant, who shared little about her family, shared an anecdote about her father and a favourite saying of his which, she noted, was said "with his heavy Québécois accent."

3. Four participants were retired after long careers with the federal or Ontario government as policy analysts. Of the other three, one was an entrepreneur with many years of business experience in the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors, one was a practitioner/researcher in community engagement and knowledge mobilization, while one had a varied career in the arts.

---

[1] A note about citing participants interviews. The first time a participant is quoted, I give the date of the interview. For subsequent quotations, I use only the participants' pseudonyms. The one exception is Alexandra, who was interviewed twice, July 5 and 6, 2019. All quotations are the July 6 interview unless noted.

4. Participants ranged in age from 52 to 62 when they began their doctoral studies and were 58 to 67 when they graduated.

5. Their PhDs were obtained from different universities across Ontario in areas of study that included the humanities, education, environmental studies, information technology and social and political theory.

6. Upon graduation one participant secured a tenure-track position and one was actively seeking a part-time college position. Five were continuing to research, write, present workshops, and speak at community events. One had elected to retire from sessional teaching to spend more time with her children and grandchildren.

Findings

Turns in the road. . . . The stories that are made and told about major transitions in life contribute to identity, help the process of coping with challenges and stress, shape how the future is seen, help to determine the nature of interpersonal relationships, and position us in the social and cultural world. (McAdams et al., 2001, p. xv)

As per Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), how many participants responded in a particular way will be represented by percentages and designations that are consistent throughout the chapters that follow: 100%, all (seven); 95%, an overwhelming majority (six out of seven); 75%, a majority (five out of seven); 30%, some (three or four out of seven), and 10%, few (one or two out of seven) (p. 110).

Family

The overwhelming majority of participants (six) were the first in their family to attend university. While siblings may have also gone on to university, none achieved a PhD.

Rose Marie, whose father was a lumber jack and mother a hairdresser, noted that "education was simply not an option [for her parents] for a number of reasons." At the same time, she described them as "intelligent problem-solvers with a whip-smart sense of humour" (participant interview, July 10, 2019). In Gini's immediate family, her father graduated from high school her mother did not and in her story we hear about the intersection of gender with education: "You know in those days, early forties or late thirties she would have reached 16, and you start working, you know. So, it was one of those things. Yeah because it was an expectation, women didn't have a choice" (participant interview, August 1, 2019). In addition to gender, three of the seven participants spoke about the intersection of class with education: a sense their family had of not belonging and of the university as not being a place for them. Some participants' families were not aware that funding was available to assist with the cost of a post-secondary education. On this point Rose Marie commented, "university it was not in the cards . . . when I asked my parents if I could go to school and being completely ignorant about funding, my parents said, what do you think we are the Rockefellers?" Gini made a similar comment, "My parents couldn't afford anything at all. So sorry. Only rich people go to university. And then there is this issue of belonging. Who do you think you are?" With some anger, Alexandra, who had grown up in a working-class family, addressed how the issue of class and intellectual and social capital were factors once she entered university.

> My mother completed four years of commercial high school and she had the most
> education. I was about to go on a Marxist rant here. If we made it into the middle class, if
> we jumped into the middle class when I arrived at university then there was a whole
> bunch of not only intellectual but social vocabulary I didn't have, I had to decode.

She went on to compare her family to her husband's: "My husband . . . comes from a lower middle class family but both his parents had university degrees in his mother's case a Master's

degree and . . . they fueled the intellect by reading good books and subscribing to good magazines" (Alexandra, participant interview, July 5, 2019).

The Second World War also figured in the decision making around pursuing further education for participants' parents. For Jean's mother the war was the stated reason why she could not go to university: "My mother finished high school, wanted to go to university, couldn't because it was war time. And she just couldn't find a suitable situation and her parents were split up." For Jean's father signing up was what enabled him to pursue post-secondary education. When he returned from serving overseas, "the GI bill, sort of like, that type of thing" made money available to returning service men so he was able to attend university. "Then he rejoined the navy and he went back in later years, took an accounting course, taught accounting at night. And very much enjoyed it. So, when he retired from the navy, he went back and taught high school" (participant interview, September 19, 2019).

For a few participants, pursuing an undergraduate degree and moving on to obtain a graduate degree was impacted by personal issues that also acted as barriers and contributed to their non-linear educational trajectory. Rose Marie left the family home at the age of 15: "My parents were living where they were living and I, I went to Toronto." She went on to say, at a later point in the interview, "Those of us who have always had to find our own way to get where we wanted to go with very little assistance, we just continue on that path." For Alexandra, the economic situation in her family became "dire" when her father lost his job, her brother could not hold a job, and her mother experienced a mental health crisis. As much as she would have liked to continue to graduate school, she needed to "find a job for the wellbeing of the family." Both Rose Marie and Alexandra cited mental and physical health issues as reasons for

interrupting their post-secondary education. Rose Marie recounted a poignant story about divorce and mental illness that were "obstacles" to pursuing a master's degree:

> I loved it [university] and wanted to keep going. But I had that obstacle. And the obstacle was the divorce and the, my marriage was not good. And the divorce kind of sent me plummeting into a spiral of I'm no good. I'm not lovable. I'm not good enough. I'm not whatever, and a dreadful mental illness, and depression and all of that and it took a long time for me to get hold of that. So then when I got over that and I started working, doing small jobs and things, and then I thought, okay, I think I'm back, I'm going to go to school and get a master's degree. I had, I had some money. I had a steady place to live, which is something I didn't have for a long, long time in my life. And so then I, I wanted to go back to school because I, I just loved it. I loved it.

Alexandra, as noted earlier, had to help support her family and so she delayed applying to graduate school. In addition, her "late twenties and early thirties were kind of a mess." She was ill, dissatisfied with her work and personal relationships and "on the verge of a serious depression. And the one thing that I found that would relieve the depression was going back to school." (I pursue this paradox further in chapter six.)

Gender

Some participants (three out of seven) indicated that the attitudes of their parents about education, and more specifically post-secondary education for women, impacted their learning trajectory. Had I asked directly about parental attitudes towards post-secondary education for women, it is possible that the number would have been higher. In retrospect, I believe I should have asked that question. Participants voiced the impact of their parents' attitudes on gender and education after high school in the following ways:

I graduated cum laude from my undergrad and my father, I was going out with my husband at the time and I was back at university. And my father said he couldn't understand, so my future husband said he couldn't understand how someone would not encourage me. . . . And he asked my father aren't you proud of your daughter? He said, well, we expect her to get married and have kids. It's going to be a waste of an education. It was a waste of an education for a woman because you're gonna get married and have kids. (Gini)

I'd been carefully saving money for my tuition and I was accepted in, you know, at McGill and U of T in medicine which was not easy then [1968] for a woman. And um, and all that and working too. And, and they, my parents, didn't want me to go and I had the money in the bank, but they said if I moved away from home before I got married, they'd never speak to me again. (Jean)

Jean went on to say that she did go to university to pursue a BA and a master's degree, but she never again tried to pursue a degree in medicine. She noted that when girls finished high school in the mid to late 1960s, it was not unusual for parents to discourage their daughters from pursuing post-secondary education:

I talked about this with one of my friends and you know, it was not abnormal at all for parents to discourage girls going to university. . . . I worked this hard and uh, you know, so I mean, I took an English degree because that was the compromise . . . but I really felt that I was being cheated because I was very interested in science and and I was kind of good at it, you know. So, I took a biology course and a chemistry course, uh, but that wasn't going to get me any where. . . . When you're in your early twenties, you think, oh well medicine's out. The thought that you might actually go back and try again and ignore your parents, just doesn't occur.

Like Gini's and Jean's parents, Alexandra's parents felt that "an academic education for girls was a complete waste of money." Her mother was prepared to send her to secretarial school in grade 10, her father was "a man of his time."

120

Noteworthy are the comments the women made about "turns in the road," which Gini called

> the 60s shift. . . . So, the thing about the early sixties, late sixties what I call the woman's year, the 60s was phenomenal for social change. Change gave liberation, the women's movement, the civil rights movement, the indigenous movement, AIM [American Indian Movement] all that.

For Gramma MJ, it heralded a change in direction in what she would pursue in her undergraduate degree:

> And, and by the time those changes were happening all I wanted to do was save the world and environmental studies sounded cool. I had considered history. . . . So I took a sample history course and it was all about men and it was all about the 18th century 19th century, whatever, dead white men. (participant interview, July 30, 2019)

For Jean it was an "eye opening" time as "all hell was breaking loose. So social norms wise, the birth control pill had arrived, you know. Right. And all of a sudden, the role of women, the traditional role of women was being challenged."

When I listened to the women recount their stories about life in the 60s, I could hear the excitement in their voices. Gini's comment in particular stayed with me: "they [boomer women] are not used to being told no. They may have given up because they couldn't, couldn't do it earlier, but they see themselves now and there are more options." As I reflected later on her words, I was struck by the fact that the women I interviewed seemed to be constrained by the gender norms of an earlier time while sea changes in the role of women were happening all around them, and I wondered why they could they not, in Gini's words, "do it earlier." What I concluded was that ideology, consciousness, "the click" precede action. Like seeds, which when planted need nourishment and time to bear fruit, so do ideas. The women I interviewed absorbed

the changes happening around them and along the way they made turns in the road, and those turns took them to where they are today.

Gender arose again as an issue when the women moved out of the family home and built families of their own. Four out of the seven women spoke about juggling pregnancy, child and elder care, paid work, and university studies. Jean and I shared a laugh as she recounted a story to which many women can relate.

> I used to joke that whenever I hit university I'd get pregnant. Mercifully, it didn't happen when I was 60. So that gap between the first degree and then I worked for a year and then I did the honors and then I went straight into the Masters. At that point I had a baby and the baby became really demanding and I had another baby that, well that was it for the Masters. That's why that happened. And then when I went back again in, I guess I graduated in 94, I must've gone back in about 90, cause it took me years to get it, even though I had pretty well finished the first time. I had that gap between the seventies and nineties and fashions in, in criticism had changed. So, I took a course just to get my feet back into the water. And then when I settled down to write the dissertation and focus, don't I get pregnant? So that was my last child. And I took a year off then while I had the baby, cause I'm still working. Don't forget, in those days, we had four months of maternity leave, so I was juggling work, babies and existing children, relationships, everything. It was, you know, it was a pretty busy time.

Millie, Betty, and Gini would concur. Juggling multiple demands made for a busy life. Millie spoke about how she "rushed through my masters because of the urgency with it. Cause I had children that needed me to start making money and all this other stuff" (participant interview, August 21, 2019). Betty spoke of taking "courses" while holding fast to her dream of writing: "Once I decided to become a full-time student . . . writing was up there, the personal dream of writing. Prior to that everything was about paying for kids and family and making life work and all that stuff" (participant interview, August 7, 2019). Gini highlighted not only childcare

122

responsibilities but elder care as well as reasons for the gap between her degrees and her need to pursue her master's degree part-time.

> I was an A student in my Undergrad and then I had a family and raised kids. I remember doing my Masters part time. My father passed away, my mother needed care, you know, life happens. I was very young when I did my BA. I graduated in 73. So, I graduated and had a baby not long after and raised kids and did all that. Kind of went back to do my Masters part time and my kids were young. The kids remember coming here when I was doing my Master's part time.

Regarding the issue of the gap between university degrees, one woman spoke about the lack of access, where she lived, to a PhD program that matched her interests, resulting in an interruption of over 30 years in her education trajectory. The PhD programs in the closest university to where she lived focused on meeting the needs of specific, primarily male-dominated industries. I was curious why she elected not to leave. I wondered if perhaps financial costs and family obligations stood in the way. We did not, however, have an opportunity to discuss this further.

Economics

While all participants expressed a love of learning and a desire to pursue higher education, the majority of them were hindered by educational costs. For those women, high school jobs, bank loans, pursuing part-time courses while continuing with paid employment, and obtaining university funding (a scholarship, a SSHRC grant, a university fellowship package, a teaching assistantship), all facilitated access.

Jean worked in a grocery store "morning, noon, and night. I literally went to the grocery store, worked, then went to [high] school. And this was to support myself because I heard nonstop about how we didn't have enough money and I was the problem." She went on to say

that because of the hours she put in working she did not obtain a university entry scholarship. Gini worked after high school and obtained loans. She noted as well that because she was the youngest child in her family, it was not necessary for her to contribute to the household income.

> So, I worked after high school and I got loans. You could get loans then. The banks would give you, encourage you to go to school. . . . You know . . . and there was no obligation to contribute to the family in my case being the last one, I was privileged in that way. And I did indicate that to my brothers and sisters that I had an advantage that they didn't have.

While Millie "rushed" through her master's because she needed to support her children, she cited these "financial constraints" as having an impact on her ability to do her master's work, Betty, after obtaining her Bachelor of Commerce degree, pursued part-time career related courses because, as noted earlier, "prior to [pursuing a master's degree full time] everything was about paying for kids and family and making life work." Rose Marie described how important it was for her to obtain the funding she needed to go to university after her divorce and after declaring bankruptcy: "Without the funding of course, I wouldn't have been able to do it. There's no way because I had nothing. I really just had the clothes on my back and a bunch of books." She went on to say:

> I applied in the hope that I would get some kind of funding and they gave me funding for my first year. And on my first day I went into the office and I said, do you think I could get a little bit more? . . . I know you have rules and things set up around this. But I never think there's any harm in asking, so I'm going to ask. And I brought in my CV and I said, you know, I'm a go getter. I'm going to work really hard. I won't let you down. . . . And they said, well, we'll see what we can do. And they did give me more money. And so that was my first year. That was a fellowship and a TAship.

Rose Marie was able to complete two master's degrees full time because of her university's funding package for graduate students. She also held teaching assistantships, and she applied for and received a SSHRC grant during her second master's degree.

Learning Prior to PhD Studies

All seven participants expressed a love of learning, and five stated that their early school experiences had been positive. Betty "loved everything about school." She recalled "always doing little jobs for the teacher so school was very positive." Gramma MJ's and Gini's comments echoed Betty's. "I absolutely loved elementary school and high school, but particularly elementary school," said Gramma MJ. "I loved school. I always have, I love, love being at school" (Gini). Jean noted that she was a "good student." Millie, who, with her brother, attended boarding school, stated that she received a "good education." Two participants, however, reported negative elementary and secondary school experiences. How they sustained a love of learning and a willingness to pursue further formal learning intrigued me.

Rose Marie said this about her high school experience: "High school was horrendous for me. I hated it. I hated it. I hated the way the students were treated. I hated the peer pressure. I hated it, I just felt like it was so fruitless." She credits her love of learning and especially her love of "everything" at the post-secondary level to her "attitude":

> It [my attitude] had a lot to do with it and my, what I call my ability to be amazed, which I value and struggle to preserve at all times. So, it's like, go ahead, amaze me. Come on. That's something that's very important for me. So, there's that idea of, of wanting to maintain my sense of wonder and my sense of awe and all of those things.

Rose Marie was the only participant who completed two college programs before beginning an undergraduate degree as a mature student at age 36. One was in radio and television

broadcasting, and after a stint working in that field she returned to college and took an arts administration, performing-arts management course. Rose Marie believed that it was on the strength of those two college diplomas that she was admitted to university: "I did my college diplomas and that was, I think the thing that allowed me to go into university." She went on to say, "I was just really glad, but so scared when I first applied to university thinking, oh, I'm never going to get in. I'm not good enough, but I really want this." A bit of the "imposter syndrome" surfacing, she noted.

Like Rose Marie, school was not a happy place for Alexandra because she had significant learning difficulties, namely dyslexia. "Elementary school was excruciating. High school was not much better then that. The BA was a lot better, the MA better still, but the best was the PhD," she recollected.

> I wasn't particularly encouraged. I wasn't encouraged by anyone in my intellectual interests because I wasn't that great a student. I was dyslexic. I had a very poor attention span. I could be lazy because I would lose interest. In many ways, I had a bit of a double whammy because I had a demanding intellect that wanted stimulation but the road to academics didn't seem clear.

She noted that when her husband had a fellowship at Harvard, the university was very generous. They allowed her to "take any course I could talk my way into, and they gave me a library card. And I think I gained a lot of confidence there to begin the PhD because I could hold my own among the Harvard undergraduate students." How she defied the naysayers, maintained a love of learning, and persevered to successfully defend her dissertation is an important story in itself and one that offers hope to other students struggling with seemingly insurmountable barriers. Her doctoral story follows in chapter six.

All the women indicated that their post-secondary learning career was interrupted at various points. For Rose Marie there was a gap of "about five to six years" when she was unable for personal reasons to pursue a university degree. For Betty there was a gap of more than 30 years between her undergraduate degree and re-entering the university at age 60 to complete her master's followed immediately by her PhD. For Alexandra there was a gap of about 10 years after her undergraduate degree before she could begin her master's, which she pursued part-time. There was yet another gap, this one of almost 20 years between completing her master's degree and beginning her PhD. This pattern was similar for Millie and Gini. For Jean, as noted, there was a "gap between the seventies and nineties" and for Gramma MJ, there was a gap of more than 30 years between her master's degree and her PhD.

How these women reengaged with university life and what strategies they used to bridge the gap interested me. Alexandra took several courses for credit as a special student because "there was no way that I qualified for entry into the PhD program according to the University standards, which are totally, uh, numerical as far as I can see." Jean "took a course just to get my feet back into the water" before settling down to do her master's thesis. And learning outside of the school system is still learning. I wondered about the extent to which universities, when reviewing applications from older students, consider what those students had been doing during their time away. All of the participants in my study were pursuing other personal and professional interests, working outside the home, and/or working on the home front taking care of children and dependant adults. All, as Betty put it, were "making life work." Both Betty and Gini gave voice to this when they identified themselves as "lifelong learners." "Whenever there was an opportunity, I took a course," Betty said. "When I was married and had a baby and stayed home, I thought I was always interested in business, so I took a course on how to start up a small

business." While growing a successful business, Betty and her husband thought of buying a building. So, Betty took a course on property management. And when she was on her own and thought she needed a career change, she took a course in real estate and later courses in marketing, international marketing, and consulting.

Gini pointed out how we learn throughout our lives, not just in formal or non formal educational settings. "I'm happy I'm here, but it doesn't have to be, it doesn't have to be at university. It can be about culture. . . . I learned how to knit from my grandmother, you know, things like that." Gini's comments remind us that older adults returning to university after a significant period of time away bring with them a host of personal as well as professional and career related skills.

Grades obtained 20 to 30 years ago need to be viewed in the context of the time when they were obtained. Gini's disappointment was palpable when she relayed how she was refused admission to the university of her choice, the university she had attended for an earlier part-time graduate degree:

> When I was being excluded from the University I wanted to go to for my PhD, they were looking at straight grades. Just person X these are your grades and your Master's grade from 1989 wasn't as good as someone else's. Yes but I was raising kids, caring for an elderly mother. I mean, I was doing all those things and I had my professional work, I was working as well. I tried, I couldn't get in. I was so, so disappointed. I tried and I gave up. I thought, oh well, it's not going to happen."

Jean tells a different story about her admission into the PhD program of her choice. She described her master's grades as "nothing to write home about. Matter of fact, my, my first degree, wasn't anything to write home about either." And so, I never had sterling grades . . . certainly not the top grades you need now to get into some of these programs." Jean credits her easy acceptance to her PhD program on her work experience, that she was known in her field,

and that she had already written a book on an aspect of the subject she planned to pursue for her dissertation. With some humility, however, she dismissed the book as

> a dry exegesis of the law and what it means and how to interpret it. . . . I had, I had very good reviews. I had several well-known academics recommending me and I was so well known by this point. I'd done umpteen public speeches and presentations and I had been associated with so many different professional causes that really, I think from the perspective of at least the folks doing policy work at the university [they thought] here was somebody who knew where all the [policy] bones were buried.

Age

While the majority of participants (five of seven) cited age as less of an issue of concern in their return to university, they saw it as a concern of society at large, and they challenged the perception of age as a time when a person is "basically moving into [a] lawn chair in the garden" (Millie).

Jean's idea that she had a story to tell—"I've got the history, I can say, you know what happened here and you know what happened there"—was echoed by Millie: "turning 65, retiring and then basically moving into my lawn chair in the garden is not what I want to do. I enjoy some of that for sure but that's not all I what to do." She went on, "I see myself as continuing to be engaged, moving through things, and making contributions."

However, when participants announced their decision to pursue a PhD, the response from friends and family was mixed. As Betty said, "there were two schools of thought; people were clearly of two minds." One school of thought was, "oh my goodness, that's amazing, I've always wanted to go back to school myself." The other school of thought was, "hmm, what are you going to do with that? What is that going to get you at this age? What the heck is that all about? What are you trying to prove?" Betty wondered why people were so negative and "skeptical,"

129

and she concluded that "like anything in life when we do something out of the norm, something out of the typical stages of life, it challenges the people who know you to say, well why are you doing that?" She concluded as well that "people are happy for you or they question your sanity, but that is because they're questioning themselves about where they're at and what have they been doing and all of a sudden [what you are doing] challenges their own thinking."

With regard to whether participants were conscious of their age as students, seeing as classmates and members of their cohort were usually younger than they were, Rose Marie spoke for all the women when she said "I'm a late bloomer. Look at all the great people who arrived late and did amazing things." She would think to herself "every now and then" that she was older than her classmates but then she would forget about it; she was unaware of her age for most of her time at university. At the same time, she remarked that her professors were conscious of age, as was she when she took off her student hat and put on her university instructor hat:

> My professors used to say to me, we love mature students and now that I'm teaching, I agree. I love mature students because they just bring more, they're there to do it, they're there to accomplish for the most part. So, they are pretty dedicated. And they bring some life experience, they have a little bit more of a tempered understanding of things which I think is invaluable.

Jean noted as well that the other students were very welcoming; age was not a barrier. Their attitude was, "oh great, this lady has contacts, you know, job ideas." And Gini remarked that while she too enjoyed positive relationships with her peers, she did not want to be seen as a "mother figure" to them. One particular professor close in age to Gini kept making age-related references and looking at her and saying, "you know that you know the sixties." Gini felt uncomfortable when he did that because it separated her from the other students, so she addressed her concern with her professor: "Don't, please don't do that. I feel that it is separating

130

me from the rest of the students in the class, maybe I look like the teacher's pet. I don't want that." Gini thought that her professor saw a younger "audience" in his students and was happy to have someone to whom he could relate. Gini felt, however, that it sent the wrong message; he needed to relate to all his students. She acknowledged that what "rattled" her a bit was that he was not taking advantage of the younger students' experiences by focusing on the older learner's experiences. She suggested that "the professor was just someone who maybe wasn't quite ready to teach at that level and maybe didn't realize that we're all here on individual merits."

Does age matter when it comes to learning? With advancing age, do we lose some of our ability to succeed at complex academic tasks? And if that is the case, are there ways around these deficits? Alexandra's observations are prescient:

> If you had to cope with a perceptual problem [dyslexia] all your life, you become skilled at finding ways to, to, get beyond things, to move around to open up a different pathway. So, I think one could offset the limitations of aging with new mental pathways.

I could not agree more with Alexandra. As someone who has worked for decades with students with significant learning disabilities and as someone who has had to work around their own significant physical limitations, strategies acquired over a lifetime of having to cope with complex activities be they at home, at school, or on the job, serve a person well as they move into old age. This may also be why Alexandra stated earlier that while elementary and high school were "excruciating," she met with increasing success in her post-secondary programs.

Summary

Information in this chapter included participants' accounts of how their families of origin, gender, economic status, early school experiences, pre-PhD post-secondary experiences, and being an older adult learner impacted their educational trajectory. The question all of us who

have come late to PhD study are asked is, why now? Why so late in life? The reasons are, of course, deeply personal. But at the same time they are connected to larger historical, political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural forces. In order to understand how these women experienced their doctoral studies, it was necessary to go back in time and learn from the women about their lives before they made the decision to pursue a doctorate. It was important as well to learn from the women themselves how they persisted and overcame personal and structural barriers to pursue a PhD.

What emerged from the stories the women shared of early- and mid-life was that, despite the lack of support from their parents, they were able to hold on, over decades, to their love of learning, curiosity, and desire to be amazed. Yosso (2005) identified this as aspirational and resistant capital (pp. 77–78). What stood out once they left the family home, was both the continuing impact of structural barriers on their educational trajectory and the support for their educational dreams that they received from their chosen families and friends, recurring themes in the stories of the women's doctoral journey detailed in chapter six.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS—THE DOCTORAL JOURNEY

Incomplete, incomplete. And you have to feed yourself at some point. And sometimes we got so busy, I had kids early, you get so busy you never feed yourself. It's just, yeah, I don't even want to talk about it, but it's very easy to ignore the little part of you that is crying to do something that you could easily do and it would be useful, you know, and the time is now, and the time is now because the guy that I worked with died the other day at 53. (Jean)

In chapter six I provide insight into the doctoral journey itself—"guess what . . . I'm a doctor!" (Rose Marie)—which is at the heart of the women's stories. I first shine a light on the inner journey the women embarked on and the self-reflection they engaged in, which they reveal in their reasons for pursuing a PhD late in life. I highlight this first since it figured prominently in their stories about their doctoral student experience. Included next are the participants' comments about the five themes that emerged from their stories. These include the support they received from their chosen families (husbands, partners, friends, children, and grandchildren) and how they navigated gender and economics. Learning, what I call the "nitty-gritty" of the doctoral journey follows: courses, learning the new spoken and written language of the academy, and the learning of theoretical frameworks. Included in that discussion is how the women navigated relationships with advisors, supervisors, committee members, and peers and how they dealt with the solitary nature of doctoral writing. Finally, I focus on what participants thought about age and ageing and their place in a doctoral program as an older adult learner.

The Inner Journey: Reflections on why a PhD Late in Life

With the exception of Rose Marie who saw the PhD as the open door to an academic career, the overwhelming majority of participants (six out of seven) did not pursue a PhD for career reasons. Post-PhD, the women continued to conduct research, write, teach, and volunteer, but as Gini said, "I didn't come for employability, I came for the vision. . . . I've had a big

career, a fabulous career. This is the follow-up to my career." For Gini, doing a PhD was explained in the following way:

> I wanted to do it because I always wanted to do it because I wanted to show that I could do it. I wanted to write at that level. I wanted to be questioned at that level. I wanted to defend at that level, I wanted to be challenged the same way that someone goes and climbs Mount Everest. The PhD was my mount Everest.

For Betty, it was to fulfill a dream of being a writer. She also likened her doctoral journey to a "spiritual journey," and she described how the "iterative building of things" is the way she has seen her whole life. "That's probably why I'm thinking that I'm on some kind of spiritual journey that I'm only half guiding the boat." She then connected the way she was feeling to her age:

> I do feel I'm headed on a journey for some reason, maybe it's my age, maybe it's where I am at in life. It's my ability now to explore things because now you're not tied down with a million obligations like you were.

For Rose Marie, entering a doctoral program was the "test of her metal" and a way to greater self-understanding. "When I got into the doctoral program, I realized very quickly that I had to face myself. Who are you? What do you think you are doing? Why are you doing it?" She likened the doctoral student experience to

> peering into the abyss because the abyss peers back at you. So, there is all this self reflection and you have to be honest with yourself. And that is terrifying. . . . I had a lot of things where my life went off the rails and bad things happened, and negative experiences occurred. But in my head, I kept saying, no, I can do better than this. And finally, I got to a point where it was, that's it. I'm doing this. I'm all in. This is for me and me alone.

For Jean, taking on a PhD had everything to do with unfinished business; she had not been able to pursue the university program she wanted to because she

> was in that generation. . . Colleagues would say, why on earth are you going back to do a doctorate? And my stock answer was I don't want to be 85 in a rocking chair complaining that my mother wouldn't let me go to university.

She went on to explain that she entered university in 1968 and was accepted in medicine, but her mother did not want her going into medicine. That sense of disappointment stayed with her:

> And so, one tries to get over these things, but there was always a little bit of a bone in my throat over that. And I thought, you know what? I never got to be a doctor and I want to be one, I'm going to go and do one. That wasn't everything of course. But if you understand, that was like the, the *Princess and the Pea*, the burr under the saddle, that you know, darn I could have done it and I think I would have enjoyed being in academia because I love teaching and I love young people and I think it would have been fun.

Jean added that you have to be "sort of an activist" to go back late in life and get another degree. "It's not getting you another job. And I don't think anybody does it so they can have doctor on their tomb stone? It's a way of integrating what you've learned over the years." When a friend of a friend wondered why she was doing a PhD, Jean told her to "tell her friend that I want to be an unassailable curmudgeon, an old warrior for my cause. I want to be able to pass back the kind of bullshit that you get in academic debates about this subject."

For Alexandra it was the "journey" that drew her to pursue a PhD. She described how it had always given her "great consolation in life to work at my brain, to try to acquire wisdom." She later went on to say, "I guess there's this search for meaning, maybe it's as simple as that." Alexandra described as well how she had felt that she had not succeeded at her professional life. "My various learning problems and perceptual problems had always been an incredible block, I felt a lot of failure and frustration, so I needed to complete something that's why the PhD had

traction." There was a need to prove that she had "staying power." For Millie, it was about passing on the knowledge she had acquired over 20 years completing hundreds of projects in her area of expertise: "I thought when I turned 60, what am I going to do with all of this stuff? I know, is there a contribution I can make?" And finally, for Gramma MJ, it was the fulfillment of something she had long thought about: "over the years I did feel that getting a PhD was something I had never started, and I wanted to complete it as a challenge."

Findings

Family

In chapter five, the focus was on the participants' families of origin and, with the exception of Gramma MJ who stated that "the family, my brothers and sisters were always encouraging," parental support for post-secondary education was lacking. In this chapter, the focus is on the participants' chosen families: husbands, partners, friends, children, and grandchildren. The majority of the participants (five out of seven) spoke positively about the support they received from their chosen family and the impact it had on their pursuit of a PhD.

Millie began her PhD at almost the same time as her daughter entered medical school. So they worked together, and Betty, after discussing with her daughter the idea of pursuing graduate studies, decided that since she was going to be a new grandmother, she would apply to the university in the city where her daughter and soon-to-be-born grandchild lived. For Rose Marie, support came from her "guy" who celebrated her accomplishments alongside her, while Gramma MJ's husband provided tangible support for her work:

> I'd say to him you took stats. We took the same one years ago. Can you look this up and write it for me in plain language? And he did that a lot. So, the encouragement was there, right through.

She recounted a train ride when she and her husband were going to visit their son. She was reading a book related to her research and passed it across the aisle to her husband to read while she napped. They would discuss it later. For Gini support came from her husband and his family:

> My influence came from my husband's family where they were all encouraged to get an education. My mother-in-law had been to university in the 1940s, she was a very strong-willed woman. For my husband, it was get an education. So, when I say yes and no for family support [I mean] in my personal family, no but in my married family, yes.

Though support from her parents may have been lacking, Gini went on to share that her mother was "like a hippie before her time. She was vegetarian at the time and people thought she was a little crazy." She continued, "my mother was around when I got my Masters; my father had passed by then; she died not long after, but she was very proud, very proud. She was you like school. It's okay." As Jean noted in her interview, "when you get older, you realize the kinds of conflicting pressures that were on your parents" and serendipitously, as if to make just that point, the phone rang in the middle of our interview. She took the call since she saw that it was from her son who was home with his son and concerned about his croup. After speaking with him and offering some suggestions for what might soothe her grandson, she talked about how her son often comments that being a parent leaves you "plain exhausted half the time." "Now he understands," she said.

On the matter of children, Jean made a most thought-provoking comment: "from a family perspective, I felt guilty because I'm spending money on myself, spending money on tuition, but I could be giving it to my kids. On the other hand, they're very proud of me having done this truthfully." While Jean felt guilty about spending money on herself rather than on her children, Alexandra spoke of feeling guilty because she took the place of a young student. It is worthy of

note. Why guilt? What was it about accomplishing something meaningful for yourself that engendered feelings of guilt for Alexandra?

> Subsequent to having the degree, I felt somewhat guilty about taking the place of a young person. I do, because here I was engaging in this intellectual, this stimulating intellectual exercise to meet my own personal needs rather than to build a career or contribute. And I was taking the place of a younger person and I was consuming this good at immense public expense when you consider how much it costs to train a PhD student, for completely narcissistic reasons.

Gender

The challenge these women face living in a world constructed by and for men resonated through comments made by the overwhelming majority of participants (six out of seven). The opportunities available to women today compared to when they were growing up resonated as well. "Society isn't going to define who I am as a woman. Not like it did," Gini stated. She then elaborated on her comment:

> Women want to contribute to new knowledge saying we lived through this. We have something through our work, our raising children, our work in the community and we can add to it. It's making this contribution to society. Everything was geared one way and now it's women wanting to make a difference and changing those perceptions.

Change, however, has been slow in coming according to Millie:

> The department I was in, I would say was still functioning the same way that it would have been functioning 40 years ago . . . from a gender perspective, mostly men. There definitely were changes going on, but very slow.

The specific changes Millie noted were an increase in the number of women and Indigenous faculty. Millie recounted a story about what happened when she was thinking of applying to the university to which she subsequently applied and was accepted. She arranged a meeting with the

person responsible for guiding PhD students: "I was really unimpressed because he didn't really get what I was interested in. He didn't understand the topic I was interested in, so it really put me off." When she began her doctoral studies and "got to know him better," she thought it was gender: "I think it was gender. He didn't appreciate and understand the kinds of things that women might be interested in because it didn't fall into his sort of understanding of the world. That was my conclusion about that." For Rose Marie, persevering in the face of obstacles was "a woman thing":

> We hit a lot of doors that won't open for us. There's no, you can't do that. No, you can't do that. No, your family doesn't want you to do that. No, you can't do that for whatever reason. And I think that we get used to dealing with that and circumventing that in some way. To get somewhere, maybe not exactly where we thought we were going to go but to get somewhere we'd see a small obstacle say, in my PhD work a professor I don't like, or a course that is not working for me, those kinds of things, well they are just one more thing to circumvent. I think we are trained in circumventing problems. I'll just work my way around it somehow and find a way.

It was at this point in our interview that Rose Marie shared an especially meaningful memory she had of her father.

> It's funny actually, my father always used to say, "you've got to make it go make it go," with this heavy Quebecois accent. "Well, you've got to make that go." That kind of became the battle cry. Just figure out how to make it happen. You know, perhaps it's not going to be that straight trajectory that everyone else gets to do, but you can figure a way in.

All the women entered their doctoral program with long careers behind them, and both Jean and Gramma MJ talked about how they "made it go" in workplaces where women were still not welcome. Jean commented: "I went to trade policy, but I said, I'll do this, as long as I get this particular file which I had seen at the international level. They laughed at me and said, whoa, this

isn't going to happen." She went on to say, "I was a woman among a very male dominated bunch of economists." And Gramma MJ described what she called

> one of the worst years of my life. . . . When I started in this government office [late 1970s], they would have morning coffee. They called it morning coffee from eight until nine. And I was the only woman who was there. And they used to sit there and just chat and talk about their curling or their hunting or their fishing. And I tried to be interested; but it seemed like a private club. It was a private club. And I stopped going and then my manager said, no, we really need you to be there and get used to people. But, but then he almost fired me because I asked someone to help pour coffee one day. The manager was going to fire me he said my attitude was really quite a problem because I asked for help serving the coffee. I told him that for me to actually pour the coffee, I would have had to stand on the table and walk across it and go to the other side cause the chairs were all full and close to the wall.

Advice I received from a mentor is apropos: get a backbone or you will not survive in academia. In Rose Marie's words, "You put on your big girl pants, you get on out there and you do whatever it is you have to do, you just get it done."

Economics

Some participants (three out of seven) indicated that financing their PhD required that they sell their home, delay their start date until they had their full pension from work, take their government pension early, or be eligible for a senior's waiver of tuition fees. One participant noted that while financial constraints influenced her ability to do her master's work, completing her PhD was not a financial burden. One women received an inheritance, and two of the women noted that they managed on SSHRC grants and university fellowship packages. Being single impacted the ability of two of the women to pursue their doctoral studies. Betty had to sell off her assets when she decided to pursue a PhD:

140

When I decided to stay on that was a big decision financially because I was on my own; I still owned my home, I knew that if I do this [PhD], I'd have to sell and I would never be able to buy back into the housing market again. But, I had to sell; there was no way I could do it without selling. To make the decision to carry on do the doctorate was a huge, and I would say not smart financial decision. (Betty, participant interview, August 7, 2019).

She also lost income from her consulting business and had to take her Canada Pension early. As Betty said, "I was single through all of this; there was no other support." Jean reflected as well on being a single woman and its impact on pursuing a PhD:

Oh, I certainly, I'm not rich. I've been through divorce. I've, only just got mortgage-free and now that I bought this place, I'm back carrying a mortgage. But I was fairly determined, and I mean my supervisor was a bit frustrated because we discussed this [doing a PhD] in 2004 at a conference and I didn't really start in until 2010, 2012. So, I think it was a bit disappointing in that respect. But I needed to get my pension. I needed to put in x more years to get a decent pension.

Jean went on to say, "I'm strongly motivated to give back, particularly because I have a fat government pension. Mine was split through divorce, but it's still fat compared to other people. I'm not greedy. I do a bit of consulting, I also volunteer." With regard to the waiver of tuition fees for seniors, Gramma MJ had this to say:

If that hadn't happened, I don't think I would've finished. I applied for Canada Pension at 60 anyway. And I continued the sessional teaching, although I found that the sessional teaching even one course, and they asked me to teach two one year, took up so much time.

In a discussion with the other participants, a tuition waiver for seniors came up and it elicited a range of points of view. Some of the women were for it, some against. I have left that discussion for chapter seven.

The "Nitty Gritty" of the Doctoral Journey

All seven participants expressed satisfaction with their doctoral student experience. While there were bumps in the road and disappointments and challenges along the way, all expressed satisfaction that they had met the goal(s) they had set for themselves. The women were very interested in talking about their doctoral research. However, the day-to-day activities of doctoral study, what I called the "nitty gritty" of the doctoral journey seemed, in the participants' telling, less significant than their reasons for doing a PhD late in life and their relationships with faculty and peers, detailed in the section that follows. The women mentioned a course they may or may not have enjoyed, a way of teaching they agreed or disagreed with, or a faculty member they liked or did not like. But overall they viewed such events as passing, and when problems arose they felt able to deal with them. Jean felt that as we get older our focus is different: "As you get older, you're much less inclined to focus on things that seem to you to be meaningless. And there's lots of that going on at university," she added with a chuckle. Betty brought her work experience to bear on the way she negotiated her doctoral student life: "With my work experience, my thought was, like everything else in life, this is kind of a game, that you have to play and so you just get on with it." Gini called upon her work experience as well:

> It's not my first rodeo. . . . After you've worked 30 some years, you've developed some radar for what's going to be in your best interest. How much you can concede, how much you can compromise, when you have to stand firm.

The day-to-day events did not loom large in the women's conversations. There was however one notable exception. For some of the women both their lack of familiarity with academic theory, language, and writing and their desire to make their work readable for the general public were issues they discussed at some length.

Jean spent her working life analysing and writing ministerial policy documents but as she said, "it was a world without Foucault." Since she stretched out her PhD over a much longer period of time than was the norm, she had time to take a few theory courses at the undergraduate and master's level in order to catch up. She also had some younger PhD students help her with "a sort of Coles notes of all these philosophers and theorists." With regard to the challenge of writing for the academy, once again, in the jobs the women held, they wrote reports and prepared documents that required a high degree of analysis and synthesis, but they were not written in what Jean called

> highfalutin" language. . . . There is a sort of writing, you know, with this language and everything. You wonder who they [academics] are writing for, it's a very elite audience, very much part of the class system, very classist.

In Jean's opinion, academics use language "to keep themselves in and outsiders out and maintain this kind of cloistered elitist system." Jean reflected, as well, on what she believed was the impact the use of this academic language was having on young students. "I hate when I hear young people spouting this meaningless jargon it just drives me insane, what are we doing? Why are we wasting time teaching kids to talk this way when there's so many enormous problems to solve?" On the matter of language, Millie felt as strongly as Jean that the language academics use separates them from people outside the academy. She

> just wasn't going to go there. . . . I'm a very practical person so I just wasn't going to go there. What I came up with was very practical. The idea that there's a whole language, an academic language I just did not buy into phenomenology and epistemology and blah, blah, blah. These words you know, when you're talking to normal people, they're just words that make [no sense] so I avoided them. I was able to make it through that system and that's all, that's what you have to do. So, I figured out how you make it through that system.

Gramma MJ talked, as well, about how she wanted her dissertation to be readable by a wide cross-section of people so she was especially pleased when one of her sisters read it and said, "Oh, I could actually read it and understand it." She went on to say that she was told at points that her language was not "theoretical enough or it wasn't this or that." Her response was, "my goal is to prepare a document that town council can read, that people in the town can read, that I can understand. I am not throwing in language that's not my own. But that did concern me."

Support for writing and research skills was available to all participants through a combination of faculty-led writing and research skills workshops, student colloquiums for sharing research and receiving feedback, peer writing groups, and, of course, supervision. Gramma MJ attended both a writing workshop and research colloquiums, and Alexandra attended writing groups outside the university. Jean remarked that she was working in Ottawa and the university she attended was several hours away so she "wasn't hanging around the library much as she would have liked to." As a consequence, she was not able to attend the "writing jams and the technical courses on research the library offered; it would have helped instead of stumbling my way along."

Relationships with Advisors, Supervisors, Committee Members, and Peers

The overwhelming majority of participants (six out of seven) agreed that you had to have someone who was in your corner, and that person was the supervisor.

Rose Marie emphasized the important role of departmental support. "I really felt like the department had my back." For her, the relationship with her supervisor was "everything":

144

I saw my supervisor at the minimum once every two weeks, usually every week. And I would send him stuff all the time. I would just send him a few pages and he would look at them and comment and send them back.

Alexandra had a very similar relationship with her supervisor:

This is a debt I owed my supervisor. We developed a rhythm. I submitted a chapter to her, and she had it back to me in a couple of days. Just to keep up that relentless rhythm enabled me to complete.

Gini expressed gratitude that in a time of transition as several faculty were retiring, she was "under the supervision of the so-called old guard. They had a vision, a vision of what they wanted the program to be, what they saw in me. I'm glad that I was able to graduate with their support." Millie, on the other hand, found her supports outside the university and she offered these insights into the supervisory relationship: "My supervisor was a good person to talk to, but I had to find my own supports outside the university. The people that I talked to were other practitioners, running ideas by them then my supervisor got it." Millie saw herself as a peer in her relationship with her supervisor. She wanted to "bring something to the department that was not there before." She wanted to "influence" the department. "I think because my main advisor and I were able to collaborate, we were able to get access to two fairly significant grants. I think this benefitted the department, benefited him professionally too." She felt that as a result of their relationship his main job of supervising her work "was pretty easy": "I think in terms of getting the dissertation moving forward, as I started pulling things together, he did a very good job of helping me simplify and focus the writing. So that was, that was useful." Jean, too, spoke of an "expectation of reciprocity" and of not wanting to be "talked down to." She expected to give to the university as well as receive because she came in with "a really rich background on the precise things she was writing about." Her advisors acknowledged her expertise and kept telling

her, "you know more about this than anybody, so don't be so self-deprecating." Yet Jean felt she was walking a "tightrope": "You've got the expertise and . . . I would suspect you're pretty high up on the self esteem curve, but that may be threatening to some professors."

Rose Marie, in contrast to Millie and Jean, had a different position on the supervisory relationship. She described it this way: "The Academy is so hierarchical, right? So, you have to buy into that. It's hierarchical and knowing your place and you know, earning that next step." She went on to say that "there should be some deference and respect for people who are training you and teaching you and sharing their knowledge with you and who, let's face it, have the power to help your career or sink your career." Rose Marie stated as well that she still refers to the professors she worked with as doctor.

With regard to challenges that arose, some of the women (four out of seven) experienced stress over changes in supervisors and committee members, personal and interpersonal difficulties among committee members, less than supportive feedback from committee members, a lack of clarity about the PhD process, and a lack of a cohort with which to interact. Clearly, since all of the women successfully defended their dissertations, those difficulties were resolved, but in many cases only with the direct intervention of the participant's supervisor. The women were disheartened by such negativity. It cast a shadow on what was overall a positive experience. Alexandra had a committee member who "spent an entire weekend writing scurrilous messages all over it [my dissertation], baloney in a couple of cases." Gramma MJ shared that one committee member's feedback on her final draft arrived in her inbox at ten o'clock at night. He was the only male on the committee. "He had put the words redundant or not needed, not needed, cut, he had put lines through things on at least half the pages on what my supervisor and other committee members had agreed was my final draft."

146

Betty found the "end game" was made difficult by a change in supervisor, a committee that shifted over time, and what appeared to her to be "friction on the part of the supervisor and some committee members." Rose Marie had to contend with a committee member who "disappeared." "He got a job at another institution and was not answering emails, things were getting out of control, everyone was emailing him, leaving phone messages. Where are you? We've got chapters here, no response." Millie brought up her "perception of academia" as a barrier, explaining it this way: "What is it that I'm supposed to produce at a PhD level? There's not a lot of clarity." Her observation that there was a lack of clarity is illustrated in the following comment she made: "I just feel like there are hidden expectations. They're not, at least for me, they were not made clear. What are the expectations for how things are done? Information was not forthcoming. It should be more forthcoming for success." As well, she expressed disappointment that there was no cohort with which she could participate. There was one other older learner, a little bit older than Millie, so she wasn't the only older person in the courses that she was taking, and as she said, "I did come to know some people there for sure, but because a cohort didn't exist, it felt like I was on my own. To me that felt like a big hole, like I was on my own journey." She added, "I think a cohort could have been useful."

Both Millie and Alexandra remarked that because of their life and work experience, they were careful to not take over class discussions. Millie said that she "in some ways held back. I held my comments back because it felt like I was adding more to the conversation than I should. Judging when to speak and when not to speak was something I had to remember." Alexandra likewise felt that she needed to "discipline" herself not to dominate.

With regard to peer relationships, like Jean who lived some distance from her university, Rose Marie lived outside the city in which her university was located, and she wondered if that

147

was why she did not attend doctoral meetings. She noted that in her master's programs she actively engaged with her peers; less so in her doctoral program. Betty had a small cohort and four of them lived close to her. There were people she could count on. But like Gini, Betty commented that when you are in that "final push" and "everybody else is in the same boat you are kind of on your own." Gini noted that at the proposal and comprehensive exam stage you want peer support. But as you approach the finish line "[when] it gets to the end of the dissertation process… I swear, I didn't want to talk to anyone,. then it was basically, writing, writing." How some of the women dealt with the solitary nature of the "final push" is detailed in the following comments. Gramma MJ talked about "a room of her own":

> I found the solitude exactly what I liked. When I was reading or writing or even just thinking about it, the radio was off, no TV, definitely no TV, no music, no radio. And what I loved was the fact that as an empty nester, and I hate that term, it's as if was there something wrong if, if the nest wasn't full, you know, such a dreadful term. But anyway, my children, our children do not live at home anymore. So, the room I'm in right now used to be my daughter's room. It's my computer room now. This room is my room.

Rose Marie remarked that she had always been a loner: "perhaps being an only child had something to do with that, you become more resilient. You know, you played by yourself, you did things by yourself. So, doing things on my own all the time, I still do." Jean pointed out how being alone does not necessarily mean feeling lonely nor does it mean being apart from others: "I'm on a farm with my dog and my cat writing this thing, but I was totally immersed in multi-stakeholder conference calls and discussions and fights. In many ways that was continually nourishing me with fresh facts and insights." In light of how the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered universities around the globe and forced students and faculty to be together while apart and how

it has forced students and faculty to find new and innovative ways to conduct doctoral supervision, research, and writing, Jean's observations are timely.

While the issue of attrition is outside the scope of this study, three of the seven participants raised this issue. Their comments are, therefore, noteworthy. Rose Marie suggested that successfully completing a PhD requires a great deal of introspection and self-reflection and that it can be "terrifying." In her opinion, "anybody who isn't scared in a PhD program, I don't know, they have superpowers or something. But for the rest of us, I think it's pretty terrifying and that can account for some of the attrition." She went on to say that doing a PhD is "relentless because you're never off. It's just this incessant weight, the sword of Damocles hanging over your head. It doesn't go away on Saturdays, Sundays or during March break or whatever, you never have a day off." Alexandra spoke about age and attrition and the "final sprint." "I suspect that some of my even younger contemporaries were having problems finishing. It's that final sprint." Of the six students in Gini's cohort three of them dropped out. Aside for the personal reasons that make continuing impossible, Gini noted that her vision for her PhD program and the vision other students had no longer fit with the institution's vision. She persevered, other doctoral students did not. "They [the institution] actually want this to be much more of an applied program, this is the emphasis right now at the government level and then that feeds down to the university. It's money. Funding is tied to the employability of graduates."

Age, Ageing, and an Older Woman's Place in a Doctoral Program

"Now sexism crosses with ageism so you have two battles instead of one" (Alexandra). Alexandra is correct, but ageism is internal as well. Rose Marie's comment highlights that we have internalized ageist tropes:

When I went into the PhD program, I remember saying to one of my professors, I don't know if I'm doing the right thing by being here at my age. And he said, and what else would you be doing? And I thought, he's right. What else would I be doing? Then I thought this isn't what else would I be doing, it's what else would I like to be doing? So, I thought, you know, he's absolutely right.

Gramma MJ recounted how someone on her committee asked her, "So, what do you say your next steps are in your hobby?" Gramma MJ's response was, "hobby, no! and I actually met with that person again later to challenge her comment." While Alexandra stated that my own research on older women pursuing s PhD was "heartening," she wondered "how much solid ground" I was on:

The possibility of mental decline is really, really scary. And I think myself and my contemporaries spend a lot of time worrying about it and looking for signs of it. We do decline neurologically. Your message is very hopeful about this and I am inclined to agree that, that strategies can be found to, to offset that neurological decline. But the stats are kind of against us.

On the topic of age and cognitive decline, Jean had this to say: "I don't lose any sleep over it. I joke about it. All of my friends joke about it. If we wander into a room and can't remember why we went there, you know." She pointed out, however, that "it doesn't mean we're ready for a home and a locked door." Gramma MJ noticed on a daily basis that since doing her PhD, her memory seemed better. "All I did was just keep myself quite organized. And I made sure I had lots of post-it notes over things." She joked that if her memory was to get really bad perhaps her doctor would give her several months' worth of estrogen something that would "perk up the brain." She wondered if it would have been a good idea to take some estrogen going into her comps. She and I had a laugh over that. Gramma MJ suggested that the medical system "makes you, it gives you a feeling of a lack of confidence." Gini mentioned how "the media and

150

advertising, politics, and the government policies they reflect, they shape our values. You're old, you're going to lose your mind. Right. And you definitely need pills or God knows what." She then shared an anecdote about her husband's 98-year-old aunt who is learning German: "She's read my thesis; we have discussions every time I go over. She's interested, she's interested, interested. And nobody said, sorry, you're 98 years old. I'm not going to talk to you about this because you can't read this."

Millie made a thought-provoking comment: "When I decided to do PhD work, to me, it felt like I was entering a different phase of my life." When I asked her to explain what she meant by "entering a different phase of life," Millie said,

> Well, the moving from 50 to 60, suddenly when you're 62 your perception of yourself is slightly different than when you turned 50. When I turned 60, I said I'll try to finish this [my PhD] by the time I turn 65 because there's this weird sort of magical 65 thing that we have in terms of perceptions of who we are. Well it's all artificial. Who you are and how you feel at various ages and everything? Because lots of people experience it in different ways.

Alexandra also made several provocative comments. "When you finally do come to do that PhD, there is a sense that you're running out of time, which is a realistic assessment, you are running out of time." She explained, "When you are our age and you are not building a career; you can take more risks academically and espouse views that in academic circles wouldn't get a good reaction." She continued, "Since you are not on that paycheck treadmill, I would suggest that you could be more creative in the subjects you want to study and the way you want to study them." Alexandra saw a connection between the neo-liberal market-driven university of today and the decline of the humanities: "The marketplace is dominating and it's dominating in the students' choice of courses, it's a wonderful age for business schools and engineering schools

151

but it's not great for people like me who want to study dead Anglo-Saxon men." Alexandra positioned herself as an "outlier" who could afford to take on an unfashionable subject. If she were building a tenure-track position on her research interests she asserted that it likely wouldn't happen.

The focus of universities today on applied programs especially in STEM and business engendered an interesting discussion with Alexandra about history, her field of study, the power of stories, and the humanities. She stated: "I was studying history, the essential humanism of it, I found it very reassuring. You find all kinds of inspirational stories. You find the human story in all its complexities and details." She added that "everyone writes about themselves even though they think they're writing history." She sees the declining interest in the arts and the humanities as tragic: "I think that if all we value is money and the economic narrative and nothing else, we will fall." Alexandra noted that she sees hope for the humanities with more older women returning to university to pursue advanced graduate degrees: "They just might enter academic rather than applied fields ensuring the humanities go on a little longer," she said. "They're not building careers so they can pursue learning for the sake of learning, for the pursuit of knowledge."

Summary

In chapter six I once again drew on participant quotations to ensure the women's reality was accurately represented. By using the participants' own words, I built the reader's confidence that my findings were credible. I first tapped into the inner journey the women engaged in. Their self-reflections shone a light on why they chose to pursue a PhD late in life. Next, I used

participant quotations to illustrate findings on the five emergent themes of family, gender, economics, learning and age, and the place of older adult learners in doctoral programs.

There are several key lessons learned from this chapter. Age was clearly not a barrier to the women's success. Rather, their personal and professional trajectory provided them with transferable skills and knowledge they could call upon as they proceeded through their program. Their strong desire to contribute their skills and knowledge to their faculty, department, and university is an important takeaway for faculty and university administration. That finances remained an issue and could have derailed plans to pursue a PhD is something universities also need to keep in mind. Older adult learners have much to contribute. If finances prevent their return to university, the loss of their accumulated years of experience would be a loss not only to the university but to society as a whole.

In chapter seven I look in detail at what my findings mean in relation to my research questions, the literature, and my theoretical framework.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

ANALYSIS—FINDING MEANING IN THE WOMEN'S STORIES

We're the keepers of history, just as we understand our mothers and our fathers better as we get old, we also understand the passage of time and how things happen and how things come around again. (Jean)

In my study, I explored how a sample group of seven women experienced their PhD studies. They all returned to university to pursue a PhD in early to mid-2000 when they were over 50 years of age, and they graduated between 2010 and 2018. In addition to asking about their overall degree of satisfaction with their doctoral studies, I wanted to learn why they entered a doctoral program late in life, what barriers could have derailed their pursuit of a PhD, what facilitated their progress, how they used their agency to challenge, resist, and navigate through structures that stood in their way, what role gender played, and what they learned. In other words, I wanted to know the details of their doctoral journey and what their successful completion of a rigorous academic degree tells us about late-life learning and the frequent depictions of old age as a time primarily of loss and decline.

I collected data by conducting in-depth, open-ended interviews in tandem with supportive data such as artifacts, email correspondence, field notes, and reflections. I then organized the data into codes, categories, and themes. In this chapter I analyze the data by considering what they mean in relation to my research questions, the literature, a life course framework viewed through a feminist theory and research, feminist political economy, social reproduction theory lens, and my analytic themes. My findings contribute to an important conversation about the doctoral student experience of women over 50, ageing, ageism, late-life learning, and how the second half of life can be a time of renewed strength, opportunities, and beginnings however each person defines those for themselves. There is no right way to age.

Where chapters five and six focused on retelling the participants' stories of their doctoral student experience, chunking the data, and separating out pieces of the women's stories, chapter seven brings the stories of the women's doctoral experiences back together into an integrated whole as I provide interpretive insights into my findings. This chapter reflects a synthesis of the findings detailed in the previous two chapters.

I begin this chapter with a brief summary of the key findings from chapters five and six. Next, I provide a visual representation of the links between my research questions, the literature, my theoretical frameworks, and emergent themes. I used these to inform the analysis of my findings. I follow that with a fulsome discussion of the findings in relation to the literature and my theoretical framework, and I conclude chapter seven with my reflections.

Summary of Key Findings

In terms of my question regarding the participants' satisfaction with their doctoral studies, all expressed satisfaction with their doctoral student experience. As to why a doctoral degree late in life, all seven participants shared their inner journey as they considered a return to university: why they chose to pursue a PhD in the second half of life, what pursuing a PhD meant to them, and what their success says about late-life learning, age, and ageism. They spoke of their life-long love of learning, their hopes for a post-secondary education after high school, about self-fulfillment and leaving a legacy, and of contributing their accumulated knowledge and their new knowledge to the university and society at large.

The barriers that could have derailed their studies were documented in the summary to chapter three, but they bear repeating here. They include insufficient individual or family support for post-secondary education, finances and child and adult family care obligations, long gaps

between university degrees, the "leap into the middle class" when participants entered university, the wage gap and the cumulative disadvantage over the life course, a shift in the university culture that speaks to an underlying shift in values from the university as a social good to the university as market driven, and an income model of saving when earnings are high/living on savings post retirement, which is gendered and not relevant today for many except high earners. That the participants in my study graduated with a PhD speaks to the factors that facilitated their progress: their resilience and ability to use individual and collective agency to successfully navigate their way around the barriers that stood in their way.

What facilitated their progress and what participants spoke most positively about was the support they received from their chosen family. While all of the participants received little support from their parents for their desire to pursue post-secondary education, the majority of the women spoke positively about the support they received from their husbands, partners, and children. What facilitated their progress as well was their social support network of friends, colleagues, coworkers, and acquaintances, opportunities to collaborate with faculty, transparency about processes and expectations, clarity about "the road to success," timely and constructive feedback from supervisors and committee members, and opportunities to share their expertise.

The role of gender figured prominently in the women's stories. The "60s shift," as Gini called it, meant changes with more to come, but in their early adulthood the women who participated in my study still felt bound by the "old" expectations for girls and women insofar as education and family life were concerned. New ideas take time to germinate, and in later life the women could draw comparisons between the past, how things were for them then and how things are for them today. "We come with ideas from the 60s shift. . . . Society isn't going to define who I am as a woman" (Gini).

With regard to what participants learned, what I call the "nitty gritty" of PhD study, some participants expressed concern about their lack of familiarity with academic theory, language, and writing and the stress they experienced because of the requirements set for academic writing and/or their choice of dissertation subject matter. Their desire to make their work readable for the general public was met with questions about academic rigor. All highlighted the importance of receiving support from their supervisor and committee members.

And finally while age was not seen as a barrier to their return to university nor their progress through their doctoral program they did see it as a barrier in society generally. Some participants were critical of the admission criteria and the application process that they saw as designed for the young adult learner who did not have their extensive career and personal life experience, nor their decades' long gap between university degrees.

Links

What follows is a visual representation of the interactions between the sources I drew on in order to derive meaning from my findings. It illustrates the back and forth in which I engaged (see Figure 7.1). Finding the deeper meanings and putting the pieces of the women's stories together in order to arrive at a synthesis and a focus on the larger social issues was not a linear process.

Figure 7.1

A Visual Representation of the Interaction Between Sources
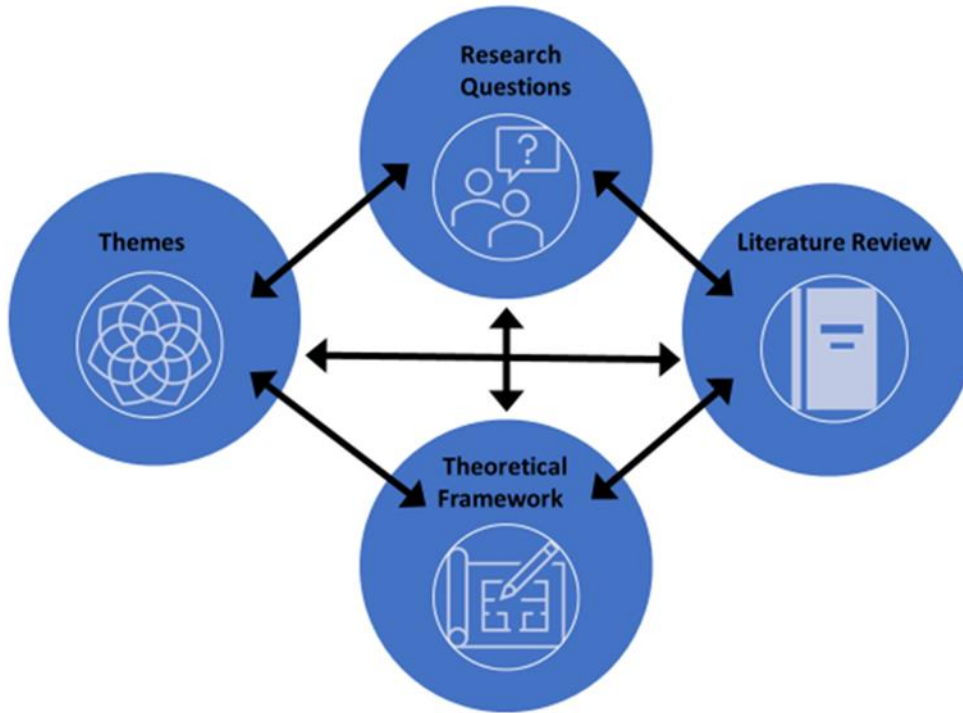
As I (re)turned to my research questions, I reviewed the literature, reconsidered my theoretical framework and the analytic themes derived from my data, asked new questions, and sought out further readings. I reviewed the literature as I progressed through the stages of my study in order to see if the contributions of other researchers confirmed the data that emerged and my analytic themes. I went deeper into the findings in order to answer my research questions and integrate my findings with the literature, research, and practice. Importantly, I engaged in discussions with colleagues about how my findings could be interpreted. There is a tension in qualitative research as the analysis and interpretation are both science and art (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 287). Critical thinking and reflective practice are key.

What Meaning did I Draw From the Participants' Stories?

The women's doctoral journeys and student experiences were actually a tale of three journeys with stops along the way. Journey one was a journey back in time to when the women were growing up. It was a story about their families of origin, growing up, moving on, and pursuing post-secondary education before their PhD. It was a story about how the past shapes the future. It was documented in chapter five. Journey two was a journey inward that entailed a search by the women for understanding why they undertook such an arduous challenge late in life, what sacrifices would be involved, to what end had they had embarked, and did they have what it took to see it through. It was documented in chapter six. Journey three was their journey through their PhD program and life post-PhD, documented as well in chapter six. I have elected to introduce each journey with a sketch. I refer the reader to the section "Artifacts" in chapter four for a brief discussion of visuals in dissertations and, in particular, the work of Kearney and Hyle (2004) cited in that section. Their study is significant for their inclusion of naive art produced by those unschooled in visual art techniques.

Since there is a paucity of research on women who began their PhD studies at age 50 or older and who successfully defended their dissertation, the experiences of these seven women provide a window into how they used agency, personal and professional resources, and institutional supports to successfully navigate a rigorous academic undertaking later in life. While the experiences of these women as a cohort confirmed some of the findings in the literature on younger doctoral student, their journey to their PhD and their experiences once in a doctoral program were unique to them and spoke of their decades of life experience and changes over time in how we view family, gender role expectations, economics, learning, and age. My exploration of the emergent themes elicited common threads as well as divergent experiences

and perceptions of the women. I now consider their three journeys and the themes that emerged from and gave meaning to the women's stories.

Journey One—Growing up and Moving On

Figure 7.2

Growing up and Leaving Home
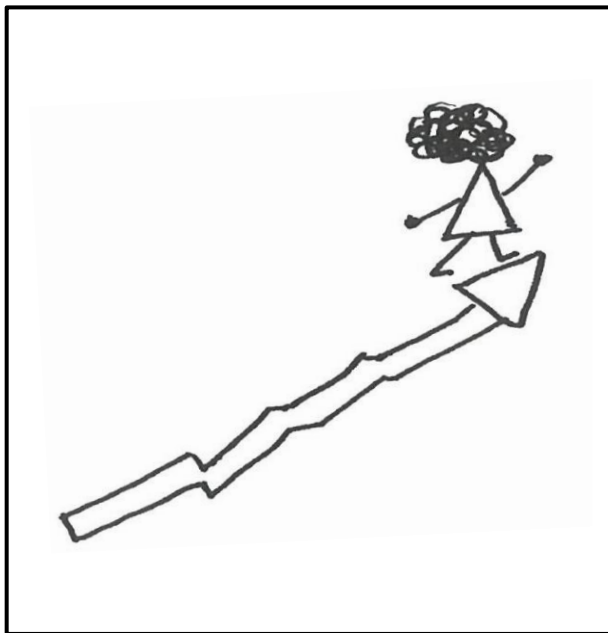
This is a tale of family and the pursuit of a post-secondary education. The parents of the overwhelming majority of my study participants did not attend university, and some did not complete elementary or high school. They also held views consistent with a time in history when post-secondary education for girls was not viewed by many as expected or even desirable. Young women received contradictory messages. They might be expected to work outside the home for a short time as salesclerks, hairdressers, secretaries, or possibly teachers or nurses after which they were expected to settle down, marry, and raise a family (O'Conner & Goodwin, 2004). For working-class families, post-secondary education was often out of reach financially (see Statistics Canada, 2020a). "What do you think we are the Rockefellers?" was the answer Rose Marie received when she asked her parents about applying to university.

First-Generation Students

Gardner and Holley's (2011) research on first-generation students who pursued a PhD is particularly relevant to my work. The stories shared by Gardner and Holley's participants and the stories shared by the women I interviewed offer clues to the myriad challenges such students face. Pursuing post-secondary education for first-generation students involves what Gallacher et al. (2002) called "sociocultural boundary-crossing" (p. 493). Alexandra characterized this as "jump[ing] into the middle class." She went on to explain that for her this meant there was a "whole bunch of not only intellectual but social vocabulary" she didn't have.

What occurred to me when I heard the stories participants told was how individual agency and social networks acquired in personal lives and careers that spanned decades, mitigated some of the issues faced by the participants in Gardner and Holly's study. Rose Marie credited the training she received in a theater group as a 15 to 17-year-old and her career as a professional musician in a touring rock band for her ability to get along with a wide cross-section of people. She explained that you learn in these situations to "strike a leadership role for yourself." The metaphor of "breaking the chain" used by one of the participants in the Gardner and Holley study aptly describes the participants in my study (Gardner and Holley, 2011, p. 82). All of them went through considerable personal hardship and sacrifice on the road to a PhD, yet they sustained a love of learning and a willingness to return to formal education despite, for some of them, unhappy and less than satisfying early educational experiences. They persevered in spite of a lack of support, financial and otherwise, from parents who did not see education beyond high school as possible for them or for their children.

The majority of participants shared the struggles their parents experienced, especially their mothers, who felt constrained by expectations that left them feeling unfulfilled. Jean said,

161

"You know, my poor mother, I understand her now. I know she'd had a boring life as an officer's wife. They never worked." She paused, then went on, "Yeah, she could have broken out of that all, but we have to remember what they went through in the war. Not everybody comes out of that experience unscathed." Sustaining hope and holding fast to their dreams in the face of both difficult personal circumstances and socio-cultural and institutional barriers was something well understood by the women I interviewed.

What enabled the participants in my study to persist was, as Alexandra said, a "profound question." Yosso's (2005) research on the different forms of capital unrecognized and unacknowledged but available to socially marginalized groups through the family and community knowledge provides one answer. Woven throughout the women's stories and excerpted in my findings chapters, I found evidence of Yosso's (2005) unrecognized and unacknowledged forms of capital. While not always overtly expressed, they were present in the women's stories. Rose Marie's comments illustrate Yosso's forms of capital. I included Rose Marie's quotation in chapter five, but it bears repeating here:

> My mother was a hairdresser with a grade 8 education; my father a lumber jack with a grade 4 education. Both had to work early in life. Both were intelligent problem-solvers with whip-smart senses of humour. Education wasn't an option.

Rose Marie described her father's can-do attitude and his "you've got to make that go," even though, as Rose Marie added, "it was not the straightforward trajectory it was for someone else." It became Rose Marie's "battle cry" as she left home to live on her own in Toronto at the age of 15. She described herself as a "survivor . . . doing, you know, cash under the table jobs, this and that, nearly failing." As an adult she completed two community college programs in the arts, built a career in the arts, married, divorced, filed for bankruptcy, experienced mental health

challenges and unstable housing, and went on to earn two master's degrees and a PhD in rapid succession.

Yosso (2005) did not speak directly to post-secondary education or the doctoral student experience, but she provided important insights, using critical race theory, into how it is possible to shift thinking from a "deficit view" (what individuals, families, and communities lack) to the strengths they possess that enable them to move forward with their lives. The women I interviewed learned lessons from their parents in how to transgress and overcome, or not, since children also carry with them their parents' unfinished business. As Jean reminded us: "Doing this PhD, there's a lesson you can give your children, it's to carry on and aim for things and do them." The women I interviewed were taught those lessons in words and by example. Those lessons, along with the support the women found later among members of their chosen families, served them well as they moved forward with their lives.

Gender

While participants were never asked to comment specifically on how gender impacted their lives, it figured prominently in their stories of growing up in their families, their desire to pursue an education beyond high school, and their educational and career trajectories. In fact, gender loomed larger than age in the stories of all the participants. By virtue of women's different place in the social structure, their experiences are different from men's. As women, we regularly experience social, educational, economic, and political inequality and oppression and see it reflected in the media and advertising (Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Hesse-Biber, 2013; Kuttner, 1989; Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011; Stanley & Wise, 1991). As we age, we experience the normalized double standard of sexism and ageism sometimes in such subtle ways that we fail to

163

notice it (Achenbaum, 2015; Calasanti, 2008; Calasanti et al., 2006; Morganroth-Gullette, 2013, 2017; Sontag, 1972). Noteworthy is Lendon and Silverstein's (2012) study in which they examined "gender role ideology and life course transitions" among a cohort of baby boom women from 1971 to 2005 using data from a longitudinal study carried out in California. That particular time period is especially important because it covered the 1970s and early 1980s when the 1960s shift referenced by my study participants was at its ascendance. With the mid to late 1980s gender role egalitarianism weakened. Lendon and Silverstein's (2012) study showed how life course transitions have a mediating effect on ideas about gender role egalitarianism and confirmed a key tenet of the life course framework that early life experiences have a "long reach." Their study, according to the authors, had implications for women's well-being and economic status over the life course and especially as they aged.

Finances

A lack of financial resources was a concern for the women I interviewed as it posed a barrier to pursuing post-secondary education in early and mid-adulthood. Patriarchal structures and capitalism, especially neo-liberalism with its focus on smaller government, meant that the women I interviewed, consistent with the scholarly literature, were needed to provide the lion's share of unpaid labour in the home (Bakker, 2007; Bezanson & Luxton, 2006; Harrington Meyer & Herd, 2007; Hochschild, 1989; Luxton, 1981). Some of the women I interviewed spoke about the necessity of assisting their families financially when they were growing up. Other women, when they had families of their own, found themselves interrupting jobs and university programs in order to care for children. If a woman elected to take time away from her job or work part-time in order to care for children, she saw her earnings decrease and her chances for promotion

164

decrease as well, all of which impacted her ability to finance further education. Women earned less and continue to earn less than men, and they continue to advance more slowly, if at all, up the career ladder (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2018). The women in my study with or without children who built a career either with a large public corporation or in the public service fared better. Maternity leaves, support for further education, job security, and a retirement pension provided a greater measure of financial stability.

Journey Two—Looking Inward: Participant Reflections on why a PhD Late in Life

Figure 7.3

Why a PhD: Why Now?

Participants provided a variety of reasons for pursuing a PhD late in life. However, with the exception of one participant who stated that pursuing a PhD was a necessary prerequisite for her goal of a career in the academy, six participants gave multiple personal reasons not related to launching or growing a career. Their reasons included seeking a challenge, searching for meaning, fulfilling a life-long love of learning, proving oneself at the highest level, giving something back, making concrete one's life work, leaving something for future generations [generativity], self-fulfillment, proving they had the "staying power," and in Millie's words "continuing to produce and not simply consume." Rose Marie spoke about the imposter syndrome, which she has suffered from all of her life. She doubted her abilities even when the evidence indicated that her abilities were genuine. Completing a PhD was a huge boost to her

self-esteem. In her words, "getting to the end of this trail was just such a boon for my self-esteem, I just felt like I did something amazing and I am still tickled by it."

Non-Career Reasons for Pursuing a PhD

It is significant that only one participant began doctoral studies with a goal of building an academic career. Of the six remaining participants, one left teaching at her university to spend more time with her family, and five continued running their own businesses and/or researching, writing, and presenting after they had completed their PhD. One is actively pursuing teaching "a course or two" at a community college. Gini commented, and it was noted in chapter six, that she had had a "big career, a fabulous career," and the PhD was the "follow-up" to her career. She "didn't want to take someone's job away." She understood the need for young PhD students to launch themselves in life: "I know how tough it is for young, very bright young people in the PhD program and for them setting themselves up they need it for the next 20 years or so, I don't and I'm okay with that." She did not come to her doctoral studies "for employability"; she "came for the vision."

Betty began her master's degree with a view to using it to further her career, but once she was engaged in research on a topic that excited her she decided to pursue a PhD and begin a new chapter in her life. As noted in chapter six, her PhD student experience was a part of what she called her "spiritual journey." Lauzon (2011) recounted a similar story about Jane, one of his supervisees. She entered a graduate program in order to build on the skills she had and further her career. Once in the program and upon much soul searching, her goals changed as did the focus for her research and her life trajectory.

McWhinney and Markos's (2003) study supports Gini's, Betty's, and Jane's perspective that many who return to post-secondary education in mid-life and older do not do so to further their careers. They may give furthering their career as their reason when talking with friends and family, when applying to a PhD program, or at the start of their program, but once engaged in their graduate program some admit that that was just "a personal cover story to allow them to embark on an unrational journey into their own soul" (McWhinney & Markos, 2003, p. 32). That they felt the need for a "cover story" raises an important question for me about whether it is considered unseemly to purse a PhD for what a participant in my study called "selfish reasons." The women I interviewed reported that when they announced their decision to pursue a PhD, friends and family responded in one of two ways: either they were supportive or they were perplexed. Why, friends, family, and acquaintances wondered, would someone in their 50s or 60s want to undertake something like that and for what purpose? Doing so is out of the norm for people of a certain age.

Brownie's (2014) study, like mine, showed that women 60 years of age and older embark on a PhD later in life for similar non-career related reasons (see also Lauzon, 2011; McWhinney & Markos, 2003). When participants in her study were asked what motivated them to pursue tertiary education, they mentioned "a love of learning, an interest in the subject matter along with a desire for stimulating activity, wanting to give something back, wanting a challenge, contributing to confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth" (pp. 731–732). Brownie's observation that with increased age came a decreased desire for the acquisition of skills and knowledge as a reason for pursuing tertiary education is especially striking. Brownie's study and mine also confirm Burdett's (2008) phenomenological study of women over 60 who pursued a master's degree. Burdett stated that a love of learning was the "pull" that brought the women back to

university, that "attending graduate school was an intense, self-reflective time in their lives . . . [and] that they completed their graduate programs for self-fulfillment" (pp. 64–65). Lin (2011) stated in the conclusion to her study that such non-career reasons "fit with older adults' development . . . [and] meet their late-life development needs" (p. 768). Erikson (1982), Jung (cited in Hollis, 1993, p. 111), Tam and Chui (2016), and Tornstam (2005) have lent credence to Lin's point of view, as have critical gerontologists (Baars et al., 2006; Freixas et al., 2012; Ray 1999, 2004, 2007; Ray and Cole, 2008). Scholars in the field of literary gerontology, the understanding of age and ageing through first-person narratives and fiction, agree as well (Morganroth Gullette, 2003; Sarton, 1992; Waxman, 1990; Zellig, 2012), as do I, based on my professional and personal experience.

Later-Life Personhood

It is especially important that we do not deny old people their personhood in an effort to "make em like us . . . pretending that there is nothing special to the human condition that older age can offer" (Biggs, 2008, p. 117). I acknowledge the risks of massifying people since it leads to stereotyping, and I am cognizant of the socio-cultural construction of both age and developmental stages and the dangers inherent in the age stage trap. However, I believe, as noted in chapter one, that an unwillingness to acknowledge that "growing into old age has its very own meaning and character" (Tornstam, 2005, p. 3) is to reify the fear of growing old, old age, and death so prevalent in North American society (Butler, 1969; Copper, 1988; Morganroth Gullette, 2013, 2017; MacDonald & Rich, 2001; Nelson, 2005).

Generativity and Generative Acts

Kim et al. (2017) have argued that generativity and generative acts occur among people of all ages and are not solely the purview of the old. I agree. Neither, I would add, is it solely the purview of the old to seek a challenge, respond to a lifelong love of learning, look for self-fulfillment, or any of the other reasons the participants in my study and other studies noted for returning to university. However, it would seem that they are the driver for older adults who pursue a PhD. For younger students, the driver is more likely to be their career.

Journey Three—The PhD Journey and Life Post-PhD

Figure 7.4

The Doctoral Journey and Next Steps

I begin my discussion of this journey with a brief return to finances. For a few participants, this was a matter of concern as they entered into and proceeded through their doctoral studies. As noted earlier, the tuition waiver for seniors facilitated the return to university for one student. Another at great personal sacrifice sold her house, gave up her income, and took a reduced government pension at age 60 to finance her doctoral studies. For some, finances continue to be a barrier to post-secondary education regardless of age. What follows is a discussion of the participants' experiences as they proceeded through their doctoral studies and looked ahead to life post-PhD.

Overall Doctoral Student Experience

All of the women I interviewed agreed that their doctoral student experience was positive overall. All of them credited life experience, prior post-secondary experience, and long careers in which they worked with a variety of people in a variety of roles for the skills they needed to navigate through their program. That did not mean that there were no bumps in the road, but they were able to overcome them and were not derailed from accomplishing their goal.

With regard to their presence in classes with younger students, two participants commented that they held back from speaking so that they would not dominate the discussion. One participant noted that younger students also had life experiences to share, which were as meaningful as hers, and they needed to be heard. What was especially interesting was that the interruptions in the women's educational trajectory meant that all the participants had a view of post-secondary education over decades and so they were cognizant of what had changed in that time. They had the long view. Millie, who returned to the university of her undergraduate studies, remarked in her interview how not much had changed in her university department in 40 years. Leonard (2000) argued that the gains made in the field of creativity, which feminists (and others) have been working to understand over three decades, are masked by the disregard that continues to be shown for women's endeavours. Winslow's (2016) study lends credence to Millie's observation that in 40 years little had changed in her faculty "from a gender perspective—mostly men." As Winslow argued, "gender inequality manifests and unfolds throughout the academic career life course, from graduate school experiences, through initial academic appointments, into the associate professor years, and finally, to women's experiences as full professors and administrators" (p. 404). Additionally, university policies and "subtle biases" more than overt discrimination maintain gender inequality (p. 404).

Relationships with Faculty, Supervisors, and Committee Members

What was most important to all of the women with regard to their progress through their doctoral program was their relationships with faculty, and to a lesser degree, peers. Especially important were their relationships with their supervisor and committee members, although the women held divergent views on how to conduct those relationships. Rose Marie deferred to faculty, acknowledging her place in the hierarchy of supervisor, committee members, and other faculty as well as the knowledge and skills they generously shared with her. She referred to them as doctor, even after she became doctor. Millie, on the other hand, saw herself as a peer in a reciprocal relationship with faculty. She wanted, as noted earlier, to "bring something to the department" and "influence" it. Of importance as well is the issue of "hidden expectations" Millie spoke about. She wanted clarity on "how things were done." McAlpine (2013) addressed the issue of what she called the "the invisible, unknown (and unknowable?) curriculum," and she argued for a negotiation of power within the supervisory relationship so that processes, procedures, and curricula were "demystified" and there was greater clarity.

Supervision

The work of Lauzon (2011) has shed light on the complexity of supervising older graduate students who, it is important to remember, belong to a heterogeneous group of people who pursue a PhD for various reasons and have varied interests, abilities, and needs. While Lauzon provided no answer to the question he posed about who was best suited to supervise these students, an honest and open conversation between the student and her potential supervisor about their personal and professional backgrounds and their expectations for the supervisory relationship would be an important *starting* point. I emphasize starting point because, as

171

McAlpine and Norton (2006) argued, supervisory difficulties and, I might add, supervisory

successes, do not only reside in the individual student or supervisor; the supervisory relationship

must be viewed systemically within what McAlpine and Norton (2006) have called "nested

contexts." This includes the student, department or discipline, institution, and society at large

(pp. 5–6). Supervision, as stated in chapter one, is a "collective institutional responsibility"

(McAlpine, 2013, p. 260).

All the participants in my study wanted a supervisor who appreciated the impact of

intense doctoral work on the student's body and mind. They wanted a supervisor who had their

back, was approachable, and would be a knowledgeable guide through the doctoral process.

Participants also wanted their supervisor to be someone who responded to their work in a timely

manner with constructive feedback. The extent to which a supervisor can meet these expectations

is dependent to some extent on forces beyond the supervisor's control. In a similar fashion, the

extent to which a student is able to meet their obligations in the supervisory relationship is

dependent to some extent on forces beyond the student's control (McAlpine et al., 2012). Rose

Marie described a situation that arose in her committee that required the intervention of the

university staff person responsible for graduate and post-doctoral studies. A committee member

"disappeared,"; he ceased answering phone calls and emails, and as the situation dragged on, it

became apparent that she and her supervisor could not resolve this issue alone.

Grant's (1999) metaphor of a "rackety bridge" and Jean's metaphor of "walking a

tightrope" are germane. In my opinion, achieving the delicate balance of being supervisor,

mentor, and colleague can be especially challenging when the supervisee is someone

transitioning back to the role of student from the role of professional. It is not, as Gini said, their

"first rodeo." In light of the fact that the significant challenges highlighted by some of the

participants in my study and detailed in chapter six centred on difficulties that arose with supervisors and committee members, the search for solutions required the consideration of the bigger picture. That students act agentively to solve difficulties, on their own, sometimes at great cost to their physical and emotional well-being, could be part of why systemic problems persist (McAlpine, 2013, p. 261; McAlpine & Norton, 2006; McAlpine et al., 2012). Since students often solve problems alone or with peer support, problems are rendered invisible to the supervisor. McAlpine et al.'s (2012) point reminds me of what Calasanti and King (2011) said about older adults. When we portray them as strong, capable, and agentic, living life fully on their own terms, we risk the possibility that those in power will "sidestep consideration of ageist exclusion itself and fail to attend to the effects of the accumulation of lifelong inequalities" (p. 67). All is well, they will argue, at least until adults enter advanced old age. They are ignoring, of course, those young-old for whom all is not well nor has it been well on an institutional, systemic level, sometimes for all of their lives.

I do not want the take away from this discussion of supervision to be that it is impossible to complete a doctoral program successfully if the student has the wrong supervisor. I refer the reader to Jazvac-Martek et al. (2011), discussed in my literature review, who question the assumed centrality of the supervisory relationship. The supervisory relationship is nested in several contexts that all play a part in an individual student's success as does the social support students receive from family, friends, colleagues, coworkers, and acquaintances.

Social Support: Family, Friends, Colleagues, Coworkers, and Acquaintances

While faculty relationships stood out as central to the doctoral student experience for the women I interviewed, my study confirmed as well what other researchers have found: the importance of social support networks, family, friends, colleagues, coworkers, and acquaintances

to the successful completion of doctoral study (Brailsford, 2010; Frances, 2009; Maher et al., 2004; Mantai, 2019; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Wendover, 2006; see also the section "Fit and Belonging and Social Support Networks," chapter 2)

Abbey et al. (1997) highlighted the benefits of peer collaboration in their reflection on a weekly study group they formed to prepare for their comprehensive examinations. Their paper ended with one of the participants reflecting on how group members would continue to support each other through the dissertation phase. The work of Abbey et al. is highly relevant to my own experience since I organized a peer support group for women over 50 who were pursuing a PhD. The group began with four women and quickly grew to six from several faculties in York University. We met monthly over a working lunch to "thaw the chill" (Hannah et al., 2002) and figure out things we only heard "through the grapevine" (Gardner, 2007). In between we kept in touch by text, email, snail mail, and Zoom. We shared experiences, problem-solved concerns, celebrated successes, updated each other on conferences, publishing opportunities, and important deadlines, and acted as critical friends for writing in progress. We encouraged collaborative autonomy as we saw each other through our comprehensive examinations and dissertation writing. Positive peer relationships as well as positive student-faculty and student-supervisor relationships can enhance fit and a sense of belonging and mitigate many of the internal and external challenges inherent in the doctoral journey (Abbey et al., 1997; Bryant & Jaworski, 2015; Dombroski et al., 2017; Maher et al., 2004; O'Keefe, 2013; Wall, 2008; Waller, 2006).

McAlpine et al. (2012), however, have countered the dominant perspective that highlights the importance of the support students receive from peers. They argued that while social supports can facilitate progress through the doctoral program, they can also constrain. That support can have both favourable and unfavourable consequences is understandable since support networks,

depending on the nature and purpose of the relationship, are based on reciprocity and some measure of give and take. Although none of the participants in my study provided a specific example of how members of their social support networks hindered their PhD progress, they remarked that when they and others were at the chapter writing stage, the desire for peer interaction fell off dramatically while the need for supervisor support rose. One participant remarked that in her post-research and dissertation writing stage she found requests from friends for social outings and support for personal issues intrusive as she needed solitude to concentrate on her work. I had to chuckle when I reread McAlpine et al.'s (2012) article. It brought me back to the summer when I received a text from my dissertation doula asking if it was okay for us to take time away from my work at our next editing session so I could provide her with input on a journal article she and a colleague were submitting at the end of the month. How could I say no?

Tornstam (2005) observed that with age we do not, as previously understood, disengage from society. Rather, he argued, we become more selective about what we chose to do, when we choose to engage, and with whom. Perhaps, too, some of us become better at asserting our need for solitude. Consistent with the scholarly feminist literature I reviewed, the women I interviewed described incredibly busy lives with multiple demands on their time, energy, and especially their caring (see Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Gouthro, 2009, 2010; Heinrich et al., 1997; Luxton, 1981; Lynch, 2010; Wall, 2008). As Jean expressed in the quotation that opened chapter six, "And you have to feed yourself at some point . . . sometimes we got so busy . . . and the time is now, and the time is now."

Solitude

The notion of the doctoral journey as a solitary journey has support in the literature (Bryant & Jaworski, 2015; Gardner, 2008). Burford and Hook's (2019) article on balancing doctoral study from home with child and elder care work is especially relevant to our time. Solitude, however, is complex and nuanced. One can feel alone in a crowd or content alone. The sense that one is alone on the journey can be due to a number of factors. It can be something as global as the COVID-19 pandemic or something as specific as negotiating the minutiae of dissertation writing. It can arise when the doctoral student feels like an outsider, a stranger in a strange land, or when the doctoral student lacks faculty support for their vision of how their journey is meant to unfold (Acker & Haque, 2015). A lack of peer support, in particular a cohort group of other PhD students, can also exacerbate the sense of aloneness even when there are other people around. At the same time, feeling alone but not lonely or isolated—positive solitude—must also be acknowledged. Little scholarly literature specifically addresses solitude and the doctoral student experience of women over 50. My exploratory study filled that gap. The women I interviewed responded in a variety of ways to the matter of solitude and the doctoral journey as a solitary venture. While one participant described the final push as "gruelling" and "lonely and solitary" (Betty), the overwhelming majority of women did not see the solitary nature of their doctoral journey, in particular the dissertation writing phase, as burdensome. In fact, a few welcomed the solitude.

Rose Marie reflected on how she was always a "loner" and an "only child" who was used to doing things on her own, a pattern she continued as an adult. Jean mentioned how technology kept her engaged with multiple work-related "conference calls, discussions and fights," all of which provided fresh insights for her doctoral work. So while she wrote her dissertation alone

she did not feel alone. Gramma MJ spoke about being an "empty nester" and taking over one of her children's rooms to create a room of her own. She found the solitude "peaceful" and "exactly what she liked." For Gini, "it was basically, writing, writing I remember, my family, they learned, I'd look at people and I'd be growling. I'd be at the cottage and I'd be sitting on the dock and people would see if I had my headphones on, it was classical music, I would just be zoning out." Frequent contact with their supervisor and quick, constructive feedback from supervisors and committee members kept Rose Marie and Alexandra engaged and feeling less alone. Alexandra commented that the issue was not the solitary nature of scholarly work; she agreed that completing a PhD is in part a solitary, individual undertaking. The issue as she saw it was that some individuals deal with it better than others. Finally, Millie pointed out the lack of a cohort that she could participate in: "[it] felt to me like a big hole. . . . I did come to know some people there for sure, but because it [a cohort] didn't exist, it really felt like I was on my journey on my own."

While each woman's journey was experienced by her alone, such a multilayered journey does not happen in isolation. If that is how it is perceived or actually unfolds, then there is a need for departments/faculties and universities to look at what part they play in this isolation and what they can do to lessen the sense of disconnect from the life world of the academy felt by some students. Supervisors, other faculty, outside researchers, peers, friends, and family can all be "co-travellers" on the doctoral journey (Elliot et al., 2020, p. 129). Services tailored to the needs of diverse communities within the academy, group as well as individual supervision, student-faculty collaborations, social gatherings, research colloquia, peer support groups, and collaborative ventures with outside research communities, all mediated today by technology

because of the pandemic, can lessen the sense of being on a solitary journey (Elliot et al., 2020; Fenge, 2012; Hutchings, 2017; Janta et al., 2014; Mantai, 2019; Scott et al., 2019).

That solitude can be positive, what Ost Mor (2019) calls "soulitude," is important to keep in mind. Her study on the differences in attitudes towards solitude between younger and older adults (results pending) raised an important question for me. I wondered if the age of the participants in my study had a bearing on their comfort level with the solitary aspects of their program and if it did, to what extent did it do so. Across the lifespan there are always times when, despite being social creatures, we seek solitude. According to research conducted by Lay et al. (2020), older adults do not spend more time alone than younger people. However, when they seek solitude, it has positive implications for them. For younger adults, solitude is often associated with low mood. One could speculate that the low mood experienced by younger adults is reflective of their busy lives and multiple pressing demands. So, while solitude and time for emotional renewal may be desired by younger adults, even needed, it may be out of reach. The women in my study, like many older women, continue to lead busy lives with multiple demands: some were involved in their children's and grandchildren's lives, all were pursuing further education, and some were employed or volunteering. Yet despite these demands they still had more discretionary time than when they were younger and so had more time to seek solitude now. As the women in my study aged, they also become more agentic, able, and willing to seek what it was that they needed and wanted. As Gini noted, they may not have been able to do many things when they were younger because there were fewer options then for girls, but now they saw options and they were no longer prepared to say no to what it was they desired for themselves.

Gaps in Theory and Academic Writing

An issue raised by the women I interviewed was their concern that there were gaps in their knowledge of theory and in their ability to produce scholarly writing. The skills-based perspective on writing means that students are expected to possess the skills they need and if they don't, then the problem lies with the student and the skill deficits they bring to their doctoral writing. Burford's (2017) critique of the literature challenged this skills-based view. He called for a reconceptualization of doctoral writing as an affective political practice. McAlpine and Norton's (2006) integrative framework of "nested contexts" is as relevant to writing as it is to supervision, and it aligns with Burford's view. McAlpine's (Inouye & McAlpine, 2019) later work on writing and feedback also aligns with Burford's view.

In the knowledge economy, what students write about, for what purpose, how they write, the style of their writing, the time frame within which they are expected to produce their written work, the subjects they are permitted to write about, and the ideas deemed acceptable, all reside within mezzo, macro or micro contexts. Doctoral writing is an inherently affective and political act reflective of our current neo-liberal times. Alexandra's comments about the difficulty she would have had with her research interests if she were a younger doctoral student looking ahead to a tenure-track position speak directly to these issues. As an educator, I understand the importance of doctoral students acquiring the skills they must have for the various kinds of academic writing expected of them. At the same time I see, like McAlpine and Norton (2006), Inouye and McAlpine (2019), and Burford (2017), that those skills exist within a complex web of social, cultural, political, economic, and affective factors that impact directly the doctoral student's perception of themselves as writers and their identity as scholars able to claim a place for themselves in a community of scholars.

Sexism and Ageism: The "Double Standard"

Regrettably, as Alexandra commented, "sexism crosses with ageism now so you have two battles instead of one." While ageism may not have been a barrier to participants' entry into, or their progress through, their doctoral program, it is pervasive in society. Gramma MJ highlighted a faculty member's remark about her pursuit of a PhD as a "hobby." After Gramma MJ reflected on that remark, she concluded it was ageist. She wondered as well if it was gendered and if such a descriptor would be applied to the pursuit of a PhD by an older man. Participants also highlighted the issue of internalized ageism. Rose Marie asked a professor if she was "doing the right thing" by undertaking a PhD at her age, and Alexandra wondered about "how much solid ground [my] study was on" given that "we do decline neurologically."

While bodily changes occur at all ages over the life course and age-related cognitive changes also occur, dementia is different from age-related memory loss. Gramma MJ's remark about decline is distressing. She commented that all the talk in the media of a dementia tsunami and all the ads for anti-ageing products "erode your confidence." A body of research has emerged that addresses what has come to be called "dementia worry" (Grady, 2012; Kessler et al., 2012; Molden & Maxfield, 2016). The stories the seven women in my study told tell a different story; they are encouraging stories of growing into old age. Rose Marie recounted how "her life went off the rails and bad things happened, and negative experiences occurred," but then she reached a point where she decided she could do better. "I'm doing this. I'm all in. This is for me, me alone . . . it wasn't for anybody else . . . just for me, personal best. I'm a late bloomer but look at all the great people who arrived late, did amazing things."

The summative meaning I derived from the women's stories is that they "broke the chain" (Gardner and Holley, 2011, p. 82) and held fast to their dream of an education for

themselves. Age was not a barrier. Rather, it was a catalyst for embarking on a PhD and a facilitator of their progress through their program. They did not let their dreams die. In the words of Adrienne Rich (1977), they "claimed an education" as "the rightful owner" of that education (par. 1).

Coda: Researcher's Reflections

For most of my life I have been on an arduous journey to physical and mental well-being. I have a debt to pay first to myself and then to the strong women and gentle men who continue to walk beside me on that journey. Beside my desk I keep a copy of Adrienne Rich's "Claiming an Education" and a copy of my favourite poem, "Harlem," by Langston Hughes, which begins with the line, "What happens to a dream deferred?" Had the women's stories and mine ended where they began, had we deferred our dreams of an education and let them die, good things might still have happened. We likely had other dreams, and those dreams would have come to fruition. But as Jean said, the dreams we defer "niggle" like a "bit of bone in the throat" or a "burr under a saddle."

After a graduate diploma in assessment and counselling, a master's degree in counselling psychology ABD, and two master's degrees, one in library and information studies and one in environmental studies, why at age 70, I was often asked, did I decide to pursue a PhD. Perhaps because I am responding to the task Jung set out for the second half of life: to answer what my soul asks of me. Or perhaps, since I have far fewer years ahead than behind me, I discovered, as Rose Marie said, that "death makes life a thing of value." I continue to have difficulty articulating a reason even to myself.

181

But the fact that I was unsure is what inspired me more than anything else to discover what kept me reaching for this goal and what moved other women my age to do the same. What made it possible for us to take on this huge commitment and see it through? What message did we have for others who consider following in our footsteps? I am intrigued by uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

I have always lived in my head. Growing up, I felt estranged from my body and from other people. I even began to describe myself as a head with legs. I found comfort in intellectual pursuits. When I imagine a good death, I imagine myself in advanced old age, still at my desk, tapping away on my computer, a cup of coffee and a notebook beside me.

Solitude was something I sought as I proceeded through the writing of my dissertation. The literature I read and the comments of my study participants affirmed that as we age we do not retreat from the world. Rather, many of us with more discretionary time seek moments of "soulitude" (Ost Mor, 2019). I moved to Montreal from June to September, a city I love and continue to call home, in order to complete a first draft of my dissertation. I returned to Montreal in December for a few more months to make needed revisions and prepare for my dissertation defence. For those months there was just me and my writing, the comfort of a childhood friend, and other chosen family close by.

Neomi, my childhood friend and dissertation doula, completed her PhD at age 60. She was my role model, mentor, critical friend for my writing, and physical and emotional support person. She also held my feet to the fire. Every Saturday we would meet to grocery shop and then review what I had written that week. In the evening she, her husband, and I would have dinner before I returned to my apartment refreshed, renewed, and ready to begin another week of writing (see Figures 7.5, 7.6, and 7.7).
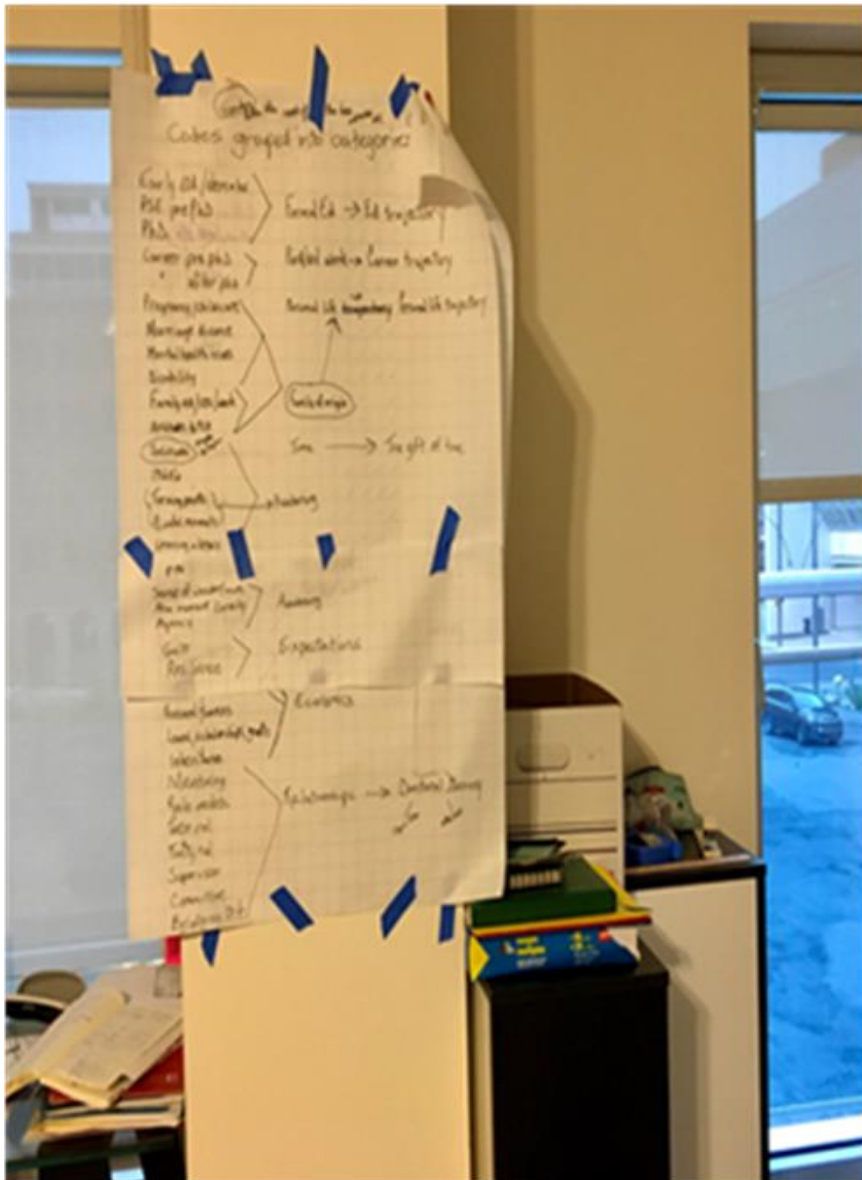
182

Figure 7.5

My Writer's Retreat and a View of the Gates of Chinatown From my Desk

Figure 7.6

Another View From my Desk, my Wall Art, and a Glimpse of the Palais des congrès

Figure 7.7

Me and my Dissertation Doula at a Saturday Editing Session

I also counted on my partner in life who remained in Toronto. She was my muse and my artist in residence. Through text, email, and phone calls we exchanged ideas, argued over some of those ideas, and agreed on many. Peer support was vital. At the same time I appreciate what the women I interviewed had to say about their decreased need for peer support and their increased need for supervisory support as the finish line approached. My friend in Montreal and my partner in Toronto knew the no-contact rule during the day unless I initiated contact. Emails and phone calls from my supervisor, however, were always appreciated as was the opportunity

she provided for group advising via Zoom, even more important in this time of COVID-19 and enforced isolation.

Gini likened the dissertation writing stage to running a marathon. She pointed out that the greatest need for someone to be present to encourage a runner was not at the finish line but the point at which the runner sees the end but can barely push their way through:

> My daughter ran half marathons, but you know, I never met her at the finish line. It's about a kilometer or two from the finish line when every step hurts, and you don't, you think you're not going to get there. My God, that's not pleasant. But you know you can't give up because you're there. That's where she needs me.

To circle back to the question I was asked about why at age 70 I decided to return to university. Mention must be made of how material means, not available when we were younger, made a return possible for me and for the women I interviewed. As I noted, money continues to be a barrier to post-secondary education even into the later years especially for women. Although I spent decades working in education, I, like other women, cashed in the early portion of my teacher's pension to support my husband through his doctoral degree and had broken service as a result of relocations to other provinces. But I was fortunate. The university I attend provides a tuition waiver for seniors. I was receiving my government pension and a much reduced teacher's pension. I also received a SSHRC grant, Ontario Government Scholarships, and a scholarship from the Canadian Association on Gerontology.

I received the scholarship from the Canadian Association on Gerontology based on the relevance of my research to the field of gerontology and my commitment to practice and volunteer service with older adults. My volunteer contribution over 12 years was the establishment of the Anne and Louis Pritzker Wellness Library, a free lending library of

consumer health resources for older adults. It was housed in a Toronto research and teaching hospital for the elderly.

I came to that hospital in 2000 when I was dependant on a power wheelchair for mobility and I required pool therapy. In discussions with physiotherapy staff, I learned of their plans to create a consumer health library for patients, clients, family, staff, and the community. When they learned of my master's degree in library and information studies, they approached me about assuming responsibility in a volunteer capacity for such a library. I agreed without hesitation. I needed, more than ever, to feel engaged and challenged. I wanted my skills used. I also believed strongly in the mission of such a library, and I welcomed the opportunity to work with the librarian on site in the hospital's medical library, professional staff in various departments of the hospital, and volunteers. In a short time, we had a donor for the library, and the library became "the little library that grew." Money was now available for resources, furniture, and a new and larger location in the hospital.

My personal story exemplifies how institutions can meet individual needs to the benefit of the organization. In 2011, in recognition of my work as a volunteer in the success of the "little library that grew," I received the Judy Gwartz Volunteer Leadership Award. I left in 2012 to return to university. To bring it back to the participants in my study, an overwhelming majority felt that giving back enriched their lives generally and, in particular, it enriched their doctoral student experience. It also benefitted the university. It is important for the university to tap into the life experiences, skills, and knowledge older adults bring to their department/faculty, the university, and society.

Colleagues were and remain encouraging about my professional and academic endeavours, as are friends. However, some of my friends wondered aloud about my undertaking

187

a PhD, something they could not imagine for themselves as they approached their mid-70s. Good for me, they said, but not for them. My students have been unfailingly supportive and encouraging. I never cease to be amazed at their interest in how I came to such a demanding academic undertaking this late in my life. Education students especially appreciate the long view I have of education. I started teaching in Montreal in 1965 at the age of 19 with just one academic year of training at a teacher's college. Much has changed, but much remains the same as one of the women I interviewed observed. A professor (not at the university to which I was applying) who I met on occasion in the lobby of my condo had an entirely different perspective from the one held by friends and my students. When I shared my decision to apply for a PhD, she responded by saying that I would have no trouble being accepted. Wow, I thought, that was an ego boost! She went on to add that that was because I would not be competition. After all, what could I possibly expect to do with a PhD at my age. Her comment gave me pause.

I went home, sat down at my computer, and pulled up the application documents I had been working on. I was stopped in my tracks. *What was I thinking, starting a PhD at my age?* Two days later I had an epiphany; I was giving voice to my own internalized ageism. The thought of pursuing a PhD had always been at the back of my mind. It was my "niggle." What held me back from embarking on such a journey in the 1980s when I was living in Saskatchewan was not geographic distance; it was the distance from my own true self. It was heart distance-soul distance that kept me from taking advantage, at a much younger age, of what would have been a life changing opportunity. The not so small details of where I would go to pursue graduate work, how I would finance such an expensive venture as a soon-to-be single woman, and what would happen to my daughter who was living with my husband in Toronto if I was accepted at a university far from Toronto seemed to take a back seat to the larger existential struggle. My

188

formal education as a child growing up in the 1950s and 1960s taught me several painful lessons that have resonated throughout my life. I learned not to trust an educational system that was unwelcoming. I learned not to trust my own abilities. I was sure I would leave behind a legacy of unfulfilled dreams. Like the women I interviewed, there was, however, a quiet voice, a whisper, that urged me forward. That whisper, after much struggle, became a roar. I completed the application and moved forward. "It's never too late, first of all, because you're going to get older anyway, so it's inevitable. You might as well be doing what you want to be doing. Right?" (Rose Marie).

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

I've begun to realize that behind every story there is a gap that nourishes wisdom with great strength. And people misunderstand it as the end. (Efrat Cybulkiewicz, 2019a, 2019b)

The purpose of my study was to provide an exploratory analysis of an under-examined area of research, the doctoral student experience of women who began their doctoral program in early to mid 2000 when they were 50 years of age or older and who graduated between 2010 and 2018. As stated in chapter one, the purpose of my research was also to critique gender, class, and age discrimination and the social, institutional, economic, and political factors influencing older women's position in society and in institutions of higher learning. I limited the number of participants to seven women who graduated from universities across Ontario (excluding York University). What I discovered and what became most important was what the women revealed about their inner journey on the road to achieving their PhD.

In this chapter I provide information about my study framework and how my study relates to the theories I used. I provide my conclusions on the reasons older women decide to return to university in order to obtain a PhD, the application process, finances and funding, student engagement, and intergenerational learning. Recommendations follow. While participants were not asked directly for their recommendations, embedded in their conversations were their concerns, clues to solutions, as well as what facilitated their progress through their program. Their input merits inclusion because it is based on their decades long experience in and out of Ontario post-secondary institutions as well as their more recent experience as doctoral students. My contributions to scholarship are next, and I conclude chapter eight with a discussion of the scope of my study and suggestions for future research.

Study Framework

I grounded my study in a life course framework viewed through a feminist research and practice, feminist political economy, social reproduction lens. A life course framework was most suitable because it highlighted, through the voices of the women, structure, and agency, growth, change over time, , socio-historical, socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic changes. It also highlighted personally significant and important life events experienced over time by the women and made visible how the past influenced the future. This was most important because there was no one reason alone that could explain the women's return to university later in life. Since the interactions between study participants and the researcher and my personal feelings, values, and beliefs impacted the outcomes of this study, the voices of the participants and my own voice were highlighted, giving clarity and authenticity to my study's findings. As well, since a life course framework makes clear the cumulative nature of life experiences, how the financial difficulties the women brought into their old age impacted their ability to finance further education is explained.

My study breaks new ground and advances a life course framework in that I examined the educational trajectory of older adult learners. By doing so I challenge the commonly held belief that with age comes a significant decline in cognitive abilities and a desire to disengage from social interaction. My study also challenges the current mission of universities to meet market demands. It complicates universities' thinking about their mission, and it raises questions for universities about how best to serve a demographic that enters graduate programs for non-career, non-employability reasons. It raises questions for the university about how it can meet the needs of this new demographic from the application stage to graduation and beyond.

Themes—Change Over Time

What emerged from third-level coding was that change happens over the life course in family, gender, economics, our understanding of late-life learning, age, ageing, and old age. The impact of changes in structural conditions became apparent. What became apparent as well was the impact these changes have on women's educational trajectories. My work adds to the body of literature on this. There has been a shift over 70 to 80 years in how family has come to be defined. Similarly, how gender roles have come to be viewed has undergone change (Statistics Canada, 2014, 2016). Non-linearity, a characteristic of our time, and the need to balance work and home responsibilities has had an impact on an individual's daily and long-term financial dealings (Hazel, 2018; Patterson, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2017; Yssaad & Ferraro, 2019). And then there is the concept of lifelong learning. The boomer generation as a cohort stresses enhancing mental and physical well-being in later life. To accomplish this, they seek a range of learning opportunities, including a return to post-secondary degree programs deferred until late in life, especially by women (Davey, 2002; Thompson & Foth, 2003). Learning across the lifespan is, therefore, different from what many people understood it to be in the past.

Conclusions

What the women I interviewed had to say about their doctoral student experience reflects the deeply personal and complex nature of doctoral study later in life. Their input reflects their self reflection as they contemplated pursing a PhD and their experiences as they returned to university after a break, in some cases of decades. Much had changed in their personal and professional lives, and some things had changed in the university. At the same time, what remained constant was their dream of pursuing post-secondary education and achieving at the

192

highest level academically. What remained constant as well were their transferable skills, acquired over a lifetime, that they brought with them to the university.

On the basis of participant input and my analysis of the data, I detail my conclusions about several aspects of the doctoral journey. Those include the reasons older women decide to return to university to obtain a PhD, the application process, finances and funding, student engagement, and intergenerational learning. Despite being highly competent people in their personal and work lives, in the university the voices of the women I interviewed were often barely a whisper because of their position as students. I am pleased, therefore, to foreground their input.

Reasons for Pursuing a PhD Late in Life

I concluded on the basis of participant input, my analysis of the data, and my review of the scholarly literature that the majority of older adult learners do not pursue a PhD in order to launch a new career or build on a past career even though they plan to continue working post-PhD. Participants in my study and in studies that have included participants over 50 years of age, highlighted their reasons as wanting to give back, wanting to make their life work concrete, fulfilling a long-held dream, proving something to oneself and other people, challenging oneself, and finding meaning (Brailsford, 2010; Brownie, 2014; Frances, 2009; Lauzon, 2011; Tam & Chui, 2016; Thompson & Foth, 2003; Wendover, 2006). As one participant in my study said, "It wasn't the end I was so much interested in, it was the journey" (Alexandra).

The Application Process

I concluded that age is not necessarily a barrier to the pursuit of a doctorate. However, the application process can be problematic for older adult learners returning to pursue further studies. This is especially the case if their previous graduate and undergraduate degrees were obtained decades ago. The application processes of universities, designed as they are for the young adult learner, do not always reflect a broad demographic (Lauzon, 2011).

Gramma MJ spoke about the anxiety she experienced obtaining the required references to support her application since she completed her master's degree in 1978. She had two concerns: How would she reach her advisor, and if she was able to reach him, would he remember her? As it turned out a friend knew him. Her friend contacted him and gave Gramma MJ his email address. She emailed him and he sent on the required reference. As Gramma MJ noted, this was the first barrier and she hadn't even left the starting gate. Gini highlighted another concern related to the application process. She expressed great disappointment that she was turned down by the university she had attended for her master's degree because they made her admission to the PhD program conditional on her grades in the master's program. She explained why the emphasis on grades obtained many years ago did not tell the whole story: "I was an A student in my undergrad, then I had a family, raised kids. And I ended up doing my master's part-time. My father passed away, my mother needed care, you know, life happens." Women's non-linear education and career trajectories do not appear to be factored in when they return to post-secondary education as older adult learners. Once again, the gendered reality of women's lives is overlooked in hegemonic, androcentric processes.

Jean's application experience contrasted markedly from Gini's and offers clues to what may be a more meaningful way to assess the eligibility of older applicants. As noted in chapter

six, Jean's undergraduate and master's degree grades were "nothing to write home about." Like Gini and many other women, she was juggling children, work outside her home, and university classes. When she applied for her PhD, her work experience was prioritized. Her knowledge in the field she was considering for her dissertation, the book she had written, and the outstanding reviews she received from referees were all given greater weight than her earlier grades. Her application and admission experience, she acknowledged, may not have been everybody's experience. Perhaps though it needs to be if the university wants to attract back older adult learners.

Finances and Funding

I concluded based on participant input, analysis of my data, and other research, that funding doctoral studies can be problematic even in late life. The idea that the later years of everyone's life is the same and everyone moves seamlessly from retirement to a comfortable old age or that everyone's life course follows a linear trajectory does not hold (Phillipson, 1991). Modigliani's "life cycle income hypothesis" is, as Komp (2011) argued, most applicable to high earners with large disposable incomes. The traditional economic model developed by Modigliani in the 1950s of an individual borrowing during the lean years and saving during times of greater earnings in order to finance their post-retirement years no longer holds for many people. Modiglliani's work, as noted earlier, has withstood the test of time, but today's economic reality, precarity, and the non-linear career course of women, which often results in reduced earnings, savings, and pensions, were not under consideration in the 1950s (Acker & Haque, 2015; Coates, 2018; Dannefer, 2003; Gazso, 2005; Gouthro, 2009, 2010; Harrington Myer & Herd, 2007; Mandell, 2008; Wendover, 2006).

For some of the participants in my study, the importance of the tuition waiver for seniors and the need for funding that would enable older women to pursue doctoral studies unimpeded by a lack of finances cannot be dismissed. The tuition waiver for seniors enabled one of my study participants to complete doctoral studies, while another participant whose university did not offer such a waiver sold her home and liquidated her assets to finance her studies, and a third used an inheritance.

Engagement in Academic Life

I concluded from the research and comments by my study participants, that the current ideological direction of universities renders collaboration, collegiality, and slow scholarship difficult to achieve. A competitive atmosphere exists in today's university, driven as universities are by market principles. This makes collegial sharing of research among students and between students and faculty challenging (Acker & Haque, 2015; Mountz et al., 2015; Wall, 2008). One participant in my study thought this was more of a problem for young academics who were working towards tenure. A lack of clarity about how to proceed through the program and a lack of a cohort were also cited as barriers to successful completion. That faculty is time crunched was evident as well in studies I reviewed (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Gill, 2010; Mountz et al., 2015; Simard-Gagnon, 2016). A faculty member in Acker and Armenti's (2004) study said if she "didn't have to sleep she'd be fine" (p. 3). The issue of a time crunch was also evident in my study. Gini mentioned that she kept sending "little notes" to the graduate director saying, "this is what we should do, we need to do this. . . . But everybody on faculty he approached responded, I don't want to, I don't have time, don't have time, don't have time." A lack of interest in the doctoral graduate's work after graduation was also viewed as disappointing by some of the

women I interviewed. However, in light of the demands on faculty and how time crunched they are, one can hardly be surprised by their seeming lack of interest in the work of recent graduates. The interest may indeed be there; the time, however, is not.

I identified based on participants' comments, several factors that facilitated progress through doctoral studies: opportunities to collaborate with faculty, transparency about processes and expectations, clarity about "the road to success," timely and constructive feedback from supervisors and committee members, opportunities to develop and deliver courses in students' area of expertise, and opportunities to share research. In addition, the informal support they could provide younger women juggling competing demands on their time, energy, and caring facilitated their own doctoral journey. One participant suggested that older women who have recently graduated could be invited back to share how they juggled multiple demands at home, places of work, and the university. Returning as mentors was also suggested by two other participants. The conclusions of other research studies confirm my conclusions (Elliot et al., 2020; Fenge, 2012; Hutchings, 2017; Janta et al., 2014; Mantai, 2019; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2007, 2009; Scott et al., 2019).

Intergenerational Learning

Today, with four generations sharing work and learning spaces, the demographics of the university is changing. Intergenerational learning is happening. While this generational diversity is exciting and holds enormous potential, it is important for universities to keep in mind that individuals bring generational similarities but also individual differences. Recognizing "age as difference" requires that we grow in our ability to accept difference "neither as something to be

feared nor something to which superiority or inferiority attaches (Cruikshank, 2008, p. 150). The women I interviewed spoke persuasively on this subject. As Gini said,

> I think that the sixties generation was able to shape new values about sexuality, about marriage, about women's role, social roles, all these things. And I think that this millennial generation is also very forward thinking and thinks very differently. I think it is a great combination, there could be a real rapprochement between the millennials and the boomers.

In conclusion, the implications for education, educators, educational leaders, and researchers are far reaching. More attention needs to be paid by the university and department/faculty to the complexity of generational similarities and individual differences within generations. While the challenges doctoral students face in their doctoral journey cannot be attributed solely to generational differences, those differences are not always insignificant. Institutions of higher education need to find a way to lead and manage across generations if they are to attract, engage, and retain older adult students.

Recommendations

In light of the research and my study participants' experiences, I offer several recommendations. I do so mindful of the importance of the complex web of departmental, institutional, and societal relationships that impact the doctoral student experience and the need for "considering contexts not presently in our focal area" (McAlpine & Norton, 2006, p. 6). Therefore, while I focused on what brought the women to pursue a PhD late in life, what their experiences were as they progressed through their program, what their academic experiences were post-PhD, to honour their voices, I provide recommendations at the level of the department, institution, and broader society. I address their concerns through my recommendations regardless

198

of whether the suggested changes are within the scope of my research or not. And while an integrative approach to change requires that there be "communicat[ion] across contexts" (McAlpine & Norton, 2006, p. 14) in order to break down the siloed nature of how change is conceptualized, interviewing people at the departmental/faculty and institutional levels was beyond the scope of my study. I suggest it for future research. It is my hope that the necessary communication will happen among all stakeholders.

I make these recommendations mindful as well that "without reshaping the organizational culture[what you do] is an assimilationist endeavor prone to failure. Increasing diversity demands structural change" (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993, p. 72). And I make these recommendations cognizant of the tensions that exist in universities between the university as market driven and the university as driven by the lofty goal of the social good. So while structural change can be slow in coming if it comes at all, some of what the women in my study would have liked to see happen can happen on a departmental/faculty level. When there is the will to resist and to challenge the status quo, changes can happen. It is my wish that by presenting these recommendations I will start a conversation about age, ageing, late-life learning, and in particular, the doctoral student experience of women over 50.

Departmental/Faculty Recommendations

1. I recommend that departments/faculties work to build communities as a way of sharing the caring. They can build such communities directly through faculty-led initiatives, for example, group advising or supervision sessions, writing groups, regular research sharing opportunities where both faculty and students share their research, wellness seminars for faculty and students, and faculty–student get togethers. Faculty can also encourage and support student

initiatives such as the peer support group I began for women doctoral students in their 50s, 60s, and 70s. Pursuing a PhD is an emotionally demanding endeavour. It can also be a solitary undertaking as doctoral students pore over mountains of reading and spend hours alone writing. It can, however, be an opportunity to build community. For the older adult learner, peer support is important and welcome but what has greater resonance for them are opportunities to collaborate with faculty and use their personal and career experiences in reciprocal relationships.

2. I recommend a fulsome discussion between graduate program directors/advisors and prospective doctoral students about their reasons for pursuing a PhD later in life and what their life and career experiences have been, all with a view to understanding what they bring to the table. What is it they would like to contribute to the department or faculty? What does the graduate advisor/program director see as their contribution? Such a discussion would be in addition to the usual discussion about what the university/department/faculty has to offer, program requirements, expectations, timelines, sources of support, and where they can find answers to questions and concerns as they move through the program. I recommend that a discussion like this take place again when the student is in the program and meeting their prospective supervisor and committee members. Universities need to consider, to their benefit and to the student's, not only what they have to offer the older adult leaner but what the older adult learner brings to the university. Such a discussion would impact how the doctoral program unfolds and what happens post-PhD for the student.

3. I recommend, in addition to the theory, methodology, and academic writing courses available to students in their doctoral program, cohort specific workshops and opportunities to audit upper-level undergraduate and master's level courses in theory, methodology, and academic

writing be made available. This would address the anxiety older adult learners bring to their

doctoral studies about gaps in their knowledge in those areas. Support from doctoral

candidates who would act as critical friends for writing and understanding readings is also

recommended and would take some of the responsibility away from faculty who are juggling

multiple demands.

4. I recommend that there be courses offered on the theories and practices of educating adults.
Such courses would bookend courses already offered in early childhood education.

5. I recommend that there be interdisciplinary courses offered on critical feminist gerontology,
on age, ageing, death and dying and that students interested in educating adults be
encouraged to take such courses.

Institutional Recommendations

1. I recommend an ongoing review of the criteria for acceptance into a university's doctoral
program. Such a review would reflect the greying of Canada's population and the possibility
that more older women will choose to return to university after long careers and lengthy gaps
between university degrees. Such a perspective would impact not only the application
process, but the older learner's progress through their doctoral program.

2. I recommend that the tuition waiver for seniors be maintained. Due to financial constraints
growing up, deferred education and interrupted work lives as a result of childcare/dependant
adult care responsibilities, unpaid work on the home front, the gender wage gap and in many
cases no private pension, many women enter old age poor. If they are single or divorced,
caring for or raising grandchildren, differently able, Indigenous, Black, Brown, or
LGBTQ2S, their chances of being poor in old age are even greater. Education is a right and

for many older women today who enter old age poor post-secondary education remains out of reach.

3. I recommend that universities develop recruitment materials which show prospective students that universities are places where older adult learners are welcome. Print and electronic media that feature universities as places that welcome diversity must also include images of older adults learning in classrooms, labs, and studios alongside younger adult students. Recruitment materials also need to state directly that the university is a place where intergenerational learning is encouraged and supported. That the university's mandate includes meeting the educational needs of older adults must be articulated. An invitation to older adult learners to attend an orientation day in which they tour the campus, meet current students including other older learners, and talk with faculty, administration, and staff about degree offerings is suggested.

    We have grown in our awareness that not representing certain people in print, websites, blogs, and social media sends a message that they do not belong. Therefore, universities must work to include older learners in their material. Ageism has yet to receive the attention it requires. The university, as it has done with other equity issues, can take an important step in addressing this equity issue since regardless of gender, race, ethnic origin, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, or (dis)ability, all of us, if we live long enough, will be old.

Societal Recommendations

1. Researchers and educators need to close the gaps in the scholarly feminist and gerontology literature on ageing and on ageing women in particular. This is both a societal

recommendation and a departmental/faculty and institutional recommendation. However, in order to do this, we must first examine our own beliefs about age, ageing, old age, and death.

2. The gendered nature of unpaid work on the home front and the gendered wage gap for work outside the home calls for governments to reduce the gender wage gap, provide income supports for parents who wish to remain at home with their children until they reach school age, and implement a national day care strategy. Otherwise, many women like the women I interviewed, will continue to defer higher education, or let the dream of a university education die.

3. Government needs to expand affordable housing and income supports and universal health care to include medications, dental care, foot care, and other medically necessary care. Women continue to live longer than men, and many enter old age poor. Since employer-paid health plans are not available to large segments of Canada's population and private health insurance, while available, is expensive, the class divide deepens. Health care, like education, is a basic right. Education deferred when women were younger may, in the absence of a tuition waiver or other sources of funding, be out of reach for older women as they struggle to meet day-to-day expenses.

4. Lifelong learning beyond basic literacy and numeracy skills and skills development for the workplace needs to be on the radar of the federal and provincial governments. Because Canada is a decentralized federalism, responsibility for education initiatives directed to lifelong learning resides with the provinces. This includes learning for those 50 and older in a variety of settings. As I noted earlier federal-provincial partnerships are needed in order for Canada to move forward with a pan government agenda for lifelong learning.

Contributions to Scholarship

In my study I drew extensively on the scholarly literature in order to highlight the paucity of research on women over 50 years of age who have graduated with a PhD. Through the voices of the seven women I interviewed, I have advanced scholarship in an under-examined area of research. I would have been more successful in advancing scholarship if I could have included in my participant pool a diversity of women from across Canada. Time and financial constraints made that impossible.

Using a life course framework for my study, I contributed to the literature on the life course as a theoretical framework. Once again, because there was very little literature on older women learners pursuing a PhD, information had to come from my study. I was breaking new ground. In some of the studies I looked at on education, gender, feminist research, and neo-liberalism, life course was not stated as the method used. However, the content was suggestive of a life course perspective (Gallacher et al., 2002; McAlpine, 2013; Ng, 2017; O'Connor & Goodwin, 2004; Simard-Gagnon, 2016). Gouthro (2009, 2010) looked at women's learning trajectory but not the doctoral journey specifically, and Giles and Reid (2005) looked at ageism across the lifespan but again not related to education or the doctoral journey. By using a life course framework to study the doctoral journey of older women learners, I was able to locate their lives within socio-historical, socio-economic, and socio-cultural events. I showed how social connections impacted their lives, and I situated the women's lives in time to show how their past shaped their future. Importantly, I was able to show how the women used their agency in pursuit of their goal of a post-secondary education and, later in life, a PhD. Nori et al., (2020) in their study of Finnish doctoral students noted as well that while the past bears on the present and the future, the influence of a woman's childhood family and her doubts about her abilities

and her accomplishments may lessen as she ages, acquires more life experience and as she draws on her own determination and inner strength.

Through participant comments and an analysis of my data, my study added to the literature on the feminist political economy, social reproduction, and the impact of dominant discourses of gender, class, and age on women's lives and educational trajectories. I showed, through the accomplishments of the seven women I interviewed and indirectly through my dissertation, that age is not necessarily a barrier to the pursuit of a rigorous academic degree. The barriers are institutional and societal and reflect a gendered, classist, and ageist society. In chapters five and six, the women spoke poignantly about the limitations placed on them as girls and how as adults they did not allow those limits to define them. Consistent with the scholarly literature, they spoke about how they fit their university classes in with pregnancy, childcare, care of elderly or sick family members, and their unpaid labour in the home (Bezanson & Luxton, 2006; Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012; Hochschild, 1989; Kuttner, 1989; Merrill, 2009; Richardson et al., 2004; Stanley & Wise, 1979). But even when they were free of "a million obligations" and had decided to pursue a PhD late in life, they questioned their entitlement to that education and their ability as older women to succeed in such a venture.

One participant expressed "guilt" about pursuing a PhD for "selfish" reasons. Another felt the need to reassure younger students that she was not seeking to take away a job in the academy that they needed to start career. One woman questioned whether she might be the oldest student in the department. Some worried about the gaps in their knowledge of theory and academic writing. And one woman wondered if perhaps a couple of months worth of estrogen would have perked up her brain when she sat for her Comps. This was said with a laugh and led

to a digression about of the power of the medical pharmaceutical industrial complex responsible, via the media, for fuelling anxiety over a loss of cognitive ability as people age.

In showcasing the successes of the participants in my study, I have contributed to the debunking of some of the myths about old age that we have come to accept as truths. A youth-oriented culture, denial of ageing and old age, the double standard of sexism and ageism, and a fear of dementia have the potential to derail long-held dreams in the second half of life (Biggs, 2008; Calasanti, 1992, 2008; Calasanti& King, 2011; Calasanti et al., 2006; Chrisler, 2019; Grady, 2012; Kessler et al., 2012; Molden & Maxfield, 2016; Morganroth-Gullette, 2013; Sontag, 1972). Dementia, viewed mistakenly as a normal part of the ageing process, is a medical term for a set of symptoms that impact thinking, speech and language, memory, and personality. While age is a risk factor for dementia, dementia does not result from the normal changes in the brain that occur over time (Alzheimer Society of Canada, 2020). Even with this information, "dementia worry" fuelled by doomsday stories in the media about a tsunami of dementia, creates anxiety and is made worse by negative stereotypes internalized over time to become self-stereotypes or internalized ageism.

The participants in my study have a message for universities and society, which is their big contribution to the literature. All the women in my study came from modest beginnings at a time when opportunities for girls were limited, especially for girls from working-class families where gender constraints bumped up against financial constraints to preclude a university education. Undaunted, they persevered. On their own or with their chosen families they built careers and pursued post-secondary education, often part-time while caring for children and adult family members. Through resistance and persistence, they found their way back to formal education. They held on to their dream of a PhD, they are the "firebirds" of the education system

206

(Hoult, 2012, p. 1). Now they want their life and career experiences both acknowledged and used. All of them want to contribute and give back. That is their message and their challenge. I would add, reflecting on Yosso's (2005) article "Whose culture has capital," that many students regardless of their age bring much to the university that is unacknowledged and therefore under used. In conclusion, it behoves universities to consider the lost potential and act upon it. That is my message and challenge to universities.

Limitations of Study

My study is an exploratory study of an area of research for which there is a paucity of literature. Within the parameters I set for my study, I can claim the following. That while the small number of participants could be construed as a limitation, each participant produced such thick, rich data I am satisfied my study accomplished my goal of providing a window into how universities serve a new and growing constituency. I can claim that age does not appear to be a barrier to the pursuit of a rigorous academic degree. Further, that age enriched the student experiences of the women I interviewed and that this was especially the case when the women had opportunities to work collegially with their supervisors and other faculty. Opportunities to contribute their accumulated skills and knowledge to their faculty, department, and university enhanced their doctoral experience. I identified areas of concern to participants specifically their lack of background in theory and comfort level with academic writing. While they were able to access courses in theory and methods and some participants attended research colloquia and writing groups, these were areas of concern for the women and something about which doctoral programs needed to be cognizant.

While it was outside the scope of my study to provide an in-depth examination of the theories and strategies for doctoral student teaching and learning with regard to teaching, one participant observed that the physical set up of the classrooms and the teaching style of many of the professors were "not really based on what [she] considered to be adult education principles," (Millie). This concerned her. My research opened a door to further discussions on this issue.

I can claim as well that while participants' reasons for pursuing a PhD later in life varied, their reasons were not career focused. They were not pursuing a PhD to start a new career or build on the career they had. Their reasons were inner driven: a need for self-fulfillment, a love of learning, a need to leave a legacy, a desire to give back by creating and contributing new knowledge, and to prove to themselves and others that they could achieve at a high academic level. Their reasons for returning reflect long-held beliefs, currently under threat, about the university as a place of learning for the sake of learning and for the creation of new knowledge; a social good in the service of creating what Nicotra and Patel (2016) called the "good citizen."

I can also claim that the application process does not always make allowances for students returning to pursue advanced graduate degrees after a prolonged absence from university. Greater flexibility on the part of universities is needed at the application stage. Participants spoke of their disappointment when their application to the university of their choice was denied based on master's grades obtained while they were juggling their studies with paid work, unpaid work within their home, childcare responsibilities, and care for aged and or ill family members. They also expressed frustration at having to produce letters of recommendation from advisors and supervisors some 30 years after they had had contact with them. As one participant noted, this was the first hurdle, and she hadn't even left the starting gate. The paucity

208

of research on older doctoral students' experience has meant that this issue has not been acknowledged. My research filled that important gap.

The high rate of attrition, while also outside the scope of my study, was discussed by the participants. They talked about reasons people leave ABD (all but dissertation) and what kept their own doctoral journey on track. There is a large body of research that examines the high attrition rate by looking at what facilitated students' progress through their program. But there is a dearth of literature examining why they drop out (Charbonneau, 2013; De Clou, 2016; Devos et al., 2017; Elliot et al., 2020; Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2000; Haynes, 2008; Lovitts, 2001; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Tamburri, 2013; White, 2004). Haynes (2008) identified this as a "gap" (p. 1). Noteworthy is that, with the exception of Devos et al. (2016) and Gardner (2008), the age of doctoral students was not mentioned by scholars whose work I have cited here. In Devos et al.'s study, participants ranged in age from 23 to 34 with one participant being 40. Gardner's participants ranged in age from 25 to 58. It would be difficult, therefore, to draw any conclusions about the age of older doctoral students as a factor in whether they are PhD or ABD. I can claim, however, that for the women I interviewed, their persistence, resilience, freedom from earlier family and career obligations, and their ability to navigate their way through the difficulties they encountered lends credence to the idea that older doctoral students stay the course and graduate.

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated a great deal of research interest. While it was outside the scope of my study to examine the economic, social, and educational impact of the pandemic on older adult learners in doctoral studies, that there has been an impact is obvious. I raised some of those impacts in my study, in particular, the digital divide, working and studying from home, and the notion of solitude and how solitude is viewed through a different lens by many in the second half of life.

And finally, while it was beyond the scope of my research to explore autoethnography as a research method and apply it as a method for studying my own doctoral student journey, within the limits I set for my study, I was able to share parts of my doctoral journey. I did so in ways that enriched my study while not implicating faculty, staff, or other students at my university. I was also able to add another method to my data collection thus ensuring greater trustworthiness.

Future Research

The baby-boom generation, the largest, most educated generation, will have a significant impact on society and on post-secondary education for the next two decades. Long held but deferred dreams of returning to university can be realized in the second half of life. Universities need to find ways to serve this population. The limitations of my study and the dearth of scholarly research on older women doctoral students open the door to further research in a number of important areas.

First, a repeat of this study with a larger, older, and more diverse participant pool, drawn from across Canada is recommended. I would like to interview women who began their doctoral studies at age 65 and older and who graduated in 2010 to 2020. In addition to interviews, since they are also a form of narrative I would like to include participant-produced drawings, collages, photographs, or artifacts that represent their doctoral journey. Questions would include: What were the women's reasons for pursuing a PhD late in life? How did they find the application and admission process given that they were returning after a lengthy gap? How did they finance their doctoral degree? What degree of overall satisfaction did they report with their student experience? What facilitated and what impeded their progress through the program? Did age

matter and, if so, how and to what extent? And specifically, what role did age play in the supervisory relationship?

What about teaching and learning? My research confirmed studies that highlight questions about how best to meet the learning needs of the older adult (Grady, 2012; Imlach et al., 2017; Tam, 2013; Wu et al., 2016.). To what extent did the classroom setup and the professors' teaching styles impact their experience, keeping in mind that they only took a few classes in their program of study. Valuable as well would be an examination of how adult education principles were applied outside the classroom in the supervisory relationship, in other teaching and learning situations such as workshops, research colloquium, and writing groups, and in other faculty and peer support initiatives. To what extent were faculty–student relationships non-hierarchical, and to what extent were faculty and students cognizant of the impact of sexism, ageism, classism, racism, and other isms of domination on teaching and learning? How was power shared and collaboration emphasized in those relationships? What opportunities did older students have to contribute their knowledge and skills in meaningful ways? What happened after graduation with regard to their engagement with the university?

Faculty, administration, and staff could also provide important information on the participation of older women learners in their university's doctoral programs, whether about application and admission to doctoral study or engagement with the university before and after graduation. There is a need for demographic information that includes age. Understanding that some applicants may be reluctant to state their age fearing that they would be excluded from the applicant pool, universities need to make clear that they value diversity in their student population, which also includes age. Of interest as well for further research is universities' understanding of and interest in intergenerational learning, which would shine a light on what

universities can offer older women returnees and what the returnees can offer universities in the way of life and career experiences to mentor and support younger students. The perspective of university faculty and administrators on lifelong learning and universities' role in supporting lifelong learning both formal and non-formal is critically important in light of the ageing of the population.

The concept of solitude in this time of a global pandemic would benefit from study. How have sheltering at home and the closure of universities impacted doctoral studies? Questions arise that range from the practical, to the physical, to the emotional in particular for older doctoral students most at risk of COVID-19. The digital divide and the inability of some students to easily access the technology required for remote teaching and learning, supervision, and faculty and peer support comes to mind immediately. The level of familiarity with technology is another part of the digital divide equation. Then there is the matter of working from home while caring for children and other family members who are sheltering in the same place as the student. How does one carve out a study space in small, shared spaces? How does one manage feelings of loneliness, isolation, and alienation when sheltering alone, cut off from family, friends, and support networks? How does one stay well physically and emotionally under such conditions? The doctoral student experience is, in the words of Elliot et al. (2020), an "intellectually challenging, emotionally charged journey" under the best of circumstances (p. 129). How do doctoral students navigate such a demanding venture under these challenging circumstances?

Giles and Reid (2005) and Kornadt et al. (2019) have noted that our views on age and ageing have their roots in childhood, evolve over the lifespan, and impact life decisions. To date much of the research on ageism focuses on the perceptions of the middle aged and those older. To change minds and hearts, more than words are needed. Today for the first time, four

generations are working and studying together. They are sharing offices, break rooms, classes, and meeting spaces (Fitch & Van Brunt, 2016). Further research is needed on the impact of intergenerational learning on young university students who will be our future researchers and professionals. What exposure to older adults have they had over their life course? What attitudes have they brought with them on age, ageing, and ageism? What exposure in the university have they had to older adults, and what is their perception of the contributions of older students working and learning alongside them?

The focus of my research has been on older women learners returning to university to pursue a doctorate but researching the experience of a diverse group of women of the same generation who entered university for the first time and graduated with an undergraduate degree is also important. There is a body of research on first-generation students navigating university undergraduate programs, but there is a paucity of research on such students who enter at age 60 or older. For such a study, I would use the same theoretical framework and ask many of the same questions I asked in my study: What brought these women to pursue an undergraduate degree late in life? How did they find the application and admission process? How did they finance their degree? How satisfied were they with their student experience? What facilitated and what impeded their progress through the program? What opportunities did they have to contribute their knowledge and skills in meaningful ways? Did age matter and, if so, how and to what extent? What happened after graduation with regard to their engagement with the university?

And finally, while it was beyond the scope of my research to explore in depth autoethnography as a research method, I suggest it for future research. There is little research on women who pursue advanced graduate degrees late in life. There is even less that is a personal reflection. I am suggesting an examination of my own doctoral journey from the perspective of

an older woman in the middle of the seventh decade of life reflecting on what it means to have accomplished this goal. What does it mean to be this age looking back, while also looking at life today and ahead to the future? How do I plan to use my remaining years, and where does my newly minted PhD fit in?

In Closing

Figure 8.1

"It's a Wrap"
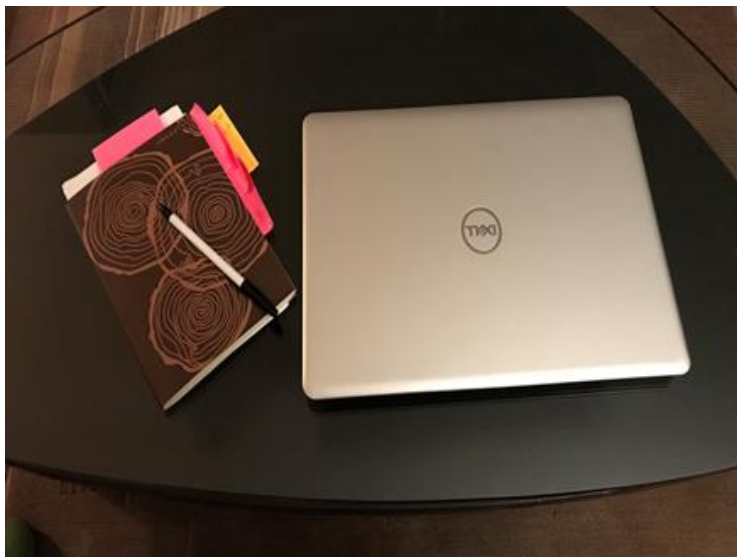
This then marks the end of my dissertation but not the end of my story nor the end of the stories of the seven women I interviewed. As McAdams et al. (2001) stated in chapter three, "until death stops it all, human lives are always in transition" (p. xv) and so there are always stories. The "gap" behind the women's stories is our challenge to reflect on what the seven women's stories tell us and to build on the "wisdom and strength" they impart (Efrat Cybulkiewicz, 2019b). The "gap" is also my challenge to myself and to the reader to reflect and build on the "wisdom and strength" uncovered by this, my own doctoral journey.

REFERENCES

Abbey, S., Bailey, B., Dubrick, J., Moore, K., Nyhof-Young, J., Pedretti, E., & Saranchuk, R. (1997). Multiparadigm voices of doctoral students: Shifting the boundaries of learning through a collaborative study process. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *10*(1), 101–115.

Achenbaum, W. (2015). A history of ageism since 1969. *Generations—Journal of the American Society on Aging*, *39*(3), 10–16.

Acker, S., & Armenti, C. (2004). Sleepless in academia. *Gender and Education*, *16*(1), 3–24.

Acker, S., & Haque, E. (2015). The struggle to make sense of doctoral study. *Research and Development*, *34*(2), 229–241.

Adams, V. (2015). Caring labor and caringscapes at the margins of academic work. In L. Bryant & K. Jaworski, (Eds.), *Women supervising and writing doctoral theses: Walking on the grass* (pp. 85–96). Lexington Books.

Aitchison, C., & Mowbray, S. (2013). Doctoral women: Managing emotions, managing doctoral studies. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *18*(8), 859–870.

Alzheimer Society Canada. (2020). About dementia. https://alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia/what-dementia

Baars, J., Dannefer, D., Phillipson, C., & Walker, A. (2006). Introduction: Critical perspectives in social gerontology. In J. Baars (Ed.), *Aging, globalization, and inequality: The new critical gerontology* (pp. 1–16). Baywood.

Baars, J., Dohmen, J., Grenier, A., & Phillipson, C. (2014). *Ageing, meaning and social structure: Connecting critical and humanistic gerontology*. Bristol University Press.

Bakker, I. (2007). Social reproduction and the constitution of a gendered political economy. *New*

Political Economy, *12*(4), 541–556.

Bakker, I. (2015). Towards gendered global economic governance: A three-dimensional analysis of social forces. In S. Gill (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on the crisis of global governance* (pp. 134–161). Palgrave Macmillan.

Barata, P., Hunjian, S., & Leggatt, J. (2005). Ivory tower? Feminist women's experiences of graduate school. *Women's Studies International Forum 28*(2–3), 232–246.

Bégin, C., & Géarard, L. (2013). The role of supervisors in light of the experience of doctoral students. *Policy Futures in Education*, *11*(3), 267–276.

Bell, E. (2010). Operationalizing feminism: Two challenges for feminist research. *Women and Language*, *33*(1), 97–102.

Bennett, T., & Gaines, J. (2010). Believing what you hear: The impact of aging stereotypes upon the old. *Educational Gerontology*, *36*(5), 435–445.

Bensimon, E., & Marshall, C. (1997). Policy analysis for postsecondary education: Feminist and critical perspectives. In C. Marshall (Ed.), *Feminist critical policy analysis: A perspective from post-secondary education II* (pp. 1–21). Falmer Press.

Berger, J. (2013). *Understanding a photograph*. Aperture.

Bezanson, K., & Luxton, M. (2006). *Social reproduction: Feminist political economy challenges neo-liberalism*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Biasin, C., & Evans, K. (2019). Agency, identity and learning at turning points in women's lives: A comparative UK-Italian analysis. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *10*(1), 47–63.

Biesta, G, & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the life course: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *39*(2), 132–149.

Biggs, S. (2008). Aging in a critical world: The search for generational intelligence. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *22*(2), 115–119.

Biggs, S., Lowenstein, A., & Hendricks, J. (2003). *The need for theory: Critical approaches to social gerontology*. Baywood.

Black, A., & Garvis, S. (2018). *Women activating agency in academia.* Routledge.

Blair-Loy, M., Hochschild, A., Pugh, A., Williams, J., & Hartmann, H. (2015). Stability and transformation in gender, work, and family: Insights from the second shift for the next quarter century. *Community Work & Family, 18*(4), 435–454.

Bloomberg, L., & Volpe, M. (2008). Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end. Sage.

Bloomberg, L., & Volpe, M. (2019). Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end. Sage.

Bloomer, M., & Hodkinson, P. (2000). Learning careers: Continuity and change in young people's dispositions to learning. *British Educational Research Journal*, *26*(5), 583–597.

Bordo, S. (1990). Feminism, postmodernism, and gender-skepticism. In L. Nicholson, (Ed.), *Feminism/postmodernism* (pp. 133–156). Routledge.

Bordo, S., Klein, B., & Silverman, M. (1994). Missing kitchens. In H. Nast & S. Pile (Eds.), *Places through the body* (pp. 54–68). Routledge.

Boud, D., & Lee, A. (2007). "Peer learning" as pedagogic discourse for research education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *30*(5), 501–516.

Brailsford, I. (2010). Motives and aspirations for doctoral study: Career, personal, and inter-personal factors in the decision to embark on a history PhD. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 5*, 15–27.

Brantlinger, E. (2007). (Re)turning to Marx to understand the unexpected anger among

    "winners" in schooling: A critical social psychology perspective. In J. Van Galen & G.

    W. Noblit (Eds.), *Late to class: Social class and schooling in the new economy* (pp. 235–

    268). State University of New York Press.

Brown, P., & Brown, C. (2015). Transformative learning theory in gerontology: Non-traditional

    students. *Educational Gerontology, 41*(2), 136–148. ERIC.

Brownie, S. (2014). Older Australian's [sic] motivation for university enrollment and their

    perception of the role of tertiary education in promoting healthy aging: A national cross-

    sectional study. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *40*(10), 723–736.

Brulé, E. (2004). Going to market: Neo-liberalism and the social construction of the university

    student as an autonomous consumer. In M. Reimer (Ed.), *Inside Corporate U: Women in

    the academy speak out* (pp. 247–264). Sumach Press.

Bryant, L., & Jaworski, K. (2015). *Women supervising and writing doctoral theses: Walking on

    the grass*. Lexington Books.

Burdett, J. (2008). *A phenomenological study of the graduate school experience of women age

    60 and older* [PhD Dissertation]. Texas State University, San Marcos.

Burford, J. (2017). Conceptualising doctoral writing as an affective-political practice.

    International Journal of Doctoral Studies, *12*, 17–32.

Burford, J., & Hook, J. (2019). Curating care-full spaces: Doctoral students negotiating study

    from home. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *38*(7), 1343–1355.

Butler, R. (1969). Age-ism: Another form of bigotry. *Gerontologist*, *9*(4), 243–246.

Butler, R. (1995). Ageism. In G. L. Maddox Ed.), *Encyclopedia of aging: A comprehensive

    resource in gerontology and geriatrics* (2nd ed., pp. 35–36). Springer.

Butler-Kisber L., & Poldma T. (2010). The power of visual approaches in qualitative inquiry: The use of collage making and concept mapping in experiential research. *Journal of Research Practice, 6*(2), 1–16.

Bystydzienski, J, & Schacht, S. (2001). Forging radical alliances across difference: Introduction. In *Forging Radical Alliances Across Difference: Coalition Politics for the New Millennium* (pp. 1-17). Rowan & Littlefield.

Calasanti, T. (1992). Theorizing about gender and aging: Beginning with the voices of women. *The Gerontologist*, *32*(2), 280–282.

Calasanti, T. (1993). A socialist feminist approach to aging. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *7*(2), 107–109.

Calasanti,T. (2008). A feminist confronts ageism. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *22*(2), 152–157.

Calasanti, T. (2016). Combating ageism: How successful is successful aging? *The Gerontologist*, *56*(6), 1093–1101.

Calasanti, T., & King, N. (2011). A feminist lens of the third age: Refining the framework. In D. Carr & K. Komp (Eds.), *Gerontology in the era of the Third Age: Implications and next steps* (pp. 67–86). Springer.

Calasanti, T., & King, N. (2015). Intersectionality and age. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of cultural gerontology* (pp. 193–200). Routledge.

Calasanti, T., Slevin, K., & King, N. (2006). Ageism and feminism: From "et cetera" to center. *NWSA Journal*, *18*(1), 13–30. https://doi.org/10.2307/4317183

Calasanti, T., & Zajicek, A. (1993). A socialist-feminist approach to aging: Embracing diversity. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *7*(2), 117–131.

Calixte, S., Johnson, J., & Motapanyane, M. (2010). Liberal, socialist, and radical feminism: An

introduction to three stories about women's oppression and social change. In N. Mandell & J. Johnson (Eds.), *Feminist issues: Race, class, and sexuality* (pp. 1-39). Pearson.

Campbell, R., & Wasco, S. (2000). Feminist approaches to social science: Epistemological and methodological tenets. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *28*(6), 773–791.

Canaan, J., & Shumar, W. (2008). Higher education in the era of globalization and neoliberalism. In J. Canaan & W. Shumar (Eds.), *Structure and agency in the neoliberal university* (pp. 1–32)*. Routledge.

Canadian Council on Learning. (2008). *State of learning in Canada toward a learning future*. Canadian Council on Learning.

Canadian Women's Foundation. (2018). *Fact sheet: The gender wage gap in Canada.* https://www.canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Gender-Wage-Gap-Fact-Sheet_AUGUST-2018_FINAL1.pdf

Caretta, M. A., Drozdzewski, D., Jokinen, J. C., & Falconer, E. (2018). "Who can play this game?" The lived experiences of doctoral candidates and early career women in the neoliberal university. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *42*(2), 261–275.

Carlson, S. (1999). An exploration of complexity and generativity as explanations of midlife women's graduate school experiences and reasons for pursuit of a graduate degree. *Journal of Women and Aging*, *11*(1), 39–51.

Carney, G, & Gray, M. (2015). Unmasking the "elderly mystique": Why it is time to make the personal political in ageing research. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *35*, 123–134.

Carrière, Y., & Galarneau, D. (2011). *Delayed retirement: A new trend?* (Catalogue no. 75-001-X; Perspectives on Labour and Income, pp. 1–16). Statistics Canada.

Chang, H. (2007). Autoethnography: Raising cultural consciousness of self and others. In

Methodological developments in ethnography (1st ed.). Elsevier JAI.

Charbonneau, L. (2013, February 12). PhD completion rates and times to completion in Canada: Elusive data from the U-15. *Academic Matters*.

Chen, L., Young, S., & Moon, P. (2008). A Review and Critique of the Portrayal of Older Adult Learners in Adult Education Journals, 1980–2006. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *59*(1), 3–21.

Chrisler, J. C. (2019). Sexism and Ageism. In *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging* (pp. 1–7). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69892-2_603-1

Coates, E. (2018). *Pre-Boomer Students On Campus: An Exploratory Study of How Students Born Before 1946 Experience the Youth-Oriented Campus Culture at UNM* [PhD Dissertation]. University of New Mexico.

Cole, T., Kastenbaum, R., & Ray, R. (2000). *Handbook of the humanities and aging* (Second Edition). Springer.

Cole, T., Ray, R., & Kastenbaum, R. (2010). *A guide to humanistic studies in aging*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Cook, J, & Fonow, M. (1986). Knowledge and women's interests: Issues of epistemology and methodology in feminist sociological research. *Sociological Inquiry*, *56*(4), 2–29.

Copper, B. (1988). *Over the hill: Reflections on ageism between women*. Crossing Press.

Cosco, T., Stephan, B., & Brayne, C. (2013). Deathless models of aging and the importance of acknowledging the dying process. *Canadian Medical Association. Journal*, *185*(9), 751–752. https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.121720

Cotterall, S. (2011). Doctoral students writing: Where's the pedagogy? *Teaching in Higher Education*, *16*(4), 413–425.

Cotterall, S. (2013). More than just a brain: Emotions and the doctoral experience. *Higher Education Research & Development, 32*(2).

Council of Ministers of Education Canada. (2012). *Adult Learning and Education Canada: Progress Report for the UNESCO Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* (pp. 1–59). Council of Ministers of Education Canada.

Creely, E., & Laletas, S (2019). Transitions, transformations and finding success. A phenomenological analysis of the experiences of a doctoral student in early candidature. *Higher Education Research & Development 39*(3).

Cruce, T., & Hillman, N. (2012). Preparing for the silver tsunami; The demand for higher education among older adults. *Research in Higher Education*, *53*, 593–613.

Cruikshank, M. (2013). *Learning to be old: Gender, culture, and aging* (2nd ed., Ed.). Rowman & Littlefield Pub.

Cuddy, A., & Fiske, S. (2002). Doddering but dear: Process, content, and function in stereotyping of older persons. In T. Nelson, (Ed.), *Ageism: Stereotyping and prejudice against older persons* (pp. 3–26). MIT Press.

Cybulkiewicz, E. (2019a). America-Israel Cultural Foundation. https://aicf.org/artist/efrat-cybulkiewicz/

Cybulkiewicz, E. (2019b). *Efrat Cybulkiewicz > Quotes*. Goodreads Quotes. https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9618524-i-ve-begun-to-realize-that-behind-every-story-there-is

Dallos, R., & Stedman, J. (2009). Flying over the swampy lowlands: Reflective and reflexive

practice. In J. Stedman & R. Dallos (Eds.), *Reflective practice in psychotherapy and counselling* (pp. 1–22). McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

Dannefer, D. (2003). Cumulative advantage/disadvantage and the life course: Cross-fertilizing age and social science theory. *Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, *58*(6), S327–S337.

Davey, J. (2002). "Active ageing" and education in mid and later life. *Ageing & Society*, *22*(1), 95–113.

Davidson, J, Dottin, Jr., J., Penna, S., & Robertson, S. (2009). Visual sources and the qualitative research dissertation: Ethics, evidence, and the politics of academia—Moving innovation in higher education from the center to the margins. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, *10*(27), 1–40.

Deaton, A. (2005). Franco Modigliani and the life-cycle theory of consumption. *Banca Nazionale Del Lavoro Quarterly Review, 58*(233/234), 91–107.

De Clou, L. (2016). Who stays and for how long: Examining attrition in Canadian graduate programs. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, *46*(4), 174–198.

Deutsch, N., & Schmertz, B. (2011). "Starting from Ground Zero:" Constraints and experiences of adult women returning to college. *Review of Higher Education*, *34*(3), 477–504.

De Vault, M., & Gross, G. (2007). Feminist interviewing: Experience, talk and knowledge. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis* (pp. 173–198). Sage.

Devos, C., Boudrenghien, G., Van der Linden, N., Azzi, A., Frennay, M., Galand, B., & Klein, O. (2017). Doctoral students' experiences leading to completion or attrition: A matter of sense, progress, and distress. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 32*(1), 61–77. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-016-0290-0

Devos, C., Van der Linden, N., Azzi, A., Boudrenghien, G., Frenay, M., Galand, B., & Klein, O. (2016). Misfits between doctoral students and their supervisors: (How) are they regulated? *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *11*, 467–486.

Dombroski, K., Watkins, A. F., Fitt, H., Frater, J., Banwell, K., Mackenzie, K., Mutambo, L., Hawke, K., Persendt, F., Turković, J., Ko, S. Y., & Hart, D. (2017). Journeying from "I" to "we": Assembling hybrid caring collectives of geography doctoral scholars. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 42*(1), 80-93, https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2017.1335295

Dowling, R., & Wilson, M. (2017). Digital doctorates? An exploratory study of PhD candidates' use of online tools. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *54*(1), 76–86.

Eisenkraft, H. (2013, October 9). Examining the roots of the perennial gender gap in the STEM disciplines. *University Affairs*.

Elder, G. H. (1995). The life course paradigm: Social change and individual development. In P. Moen, G. H. Elder, Jr., & K. Lüscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (p. 101–139). American Psychological Association.

Elder, G. H. (1998). The life course as developmental theory. *Child Development*, *69*(1), 1–12.

Elder, Jr., G. H., & Giele, J. Z. (2009). Life course studies: An evolving field. In *The Craft of Life Course Research* (pp. 1–24). Guilford Press.

Elder, Jr., G. H., Johnson, M., & Crosnoe, R. (2006). The emergence and development of life course theory. In J. Mortimer & M. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the life course* (pp. 3–19). Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Elliot D., Bengtsen S., Guccione K., & Kobayashi S. (2020) Beyond surviving: Towards thriving. In *The Hidden Curriculum in Doctoral Education* (pp. 129–145). Palgrave

Pivot.

Ellis, C., & Bochner A. (2005) Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: researcher as
subject. In Denzin N and Lincoln Y, eds *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*.
Sage.

Ellis, C., Adams, T.., Bochner, A. (2011). *Autoethnography: An Overview*. Forum: Qualitative
Social Research. Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095

England, M. (2016). Being open in academia: A personal narrative of mental illness and
disclosure. *Canadian Geographer*, *60*(2), 226-231. https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12270

Erickson, J. (1996). Older women in the academy: Games we learn to play coping with systems
of inequity. *ERIC Document*, 21. ERIC.

Erikson, E. (1982). *The life cycle completed*. W.W. Norton.

Evans, M. (1990). The problem of gender for women's studies. *Women's Studies International
Forum*, *13*(5), 457–462.

Ewing R., & Hughes J. (2008). Arts-informed inquiry in teacher education: Contesting the
myths. *European Educational Research Journal*, *7*(4), 512–522.

Fallis, G. (2007). *Multiversities, ideas and democracy*. University of Toronto Press.

Fenge, L. (2012). Enhancing the doctoral journey: The role of group supervision in supporting
collaborative learning and creativity. *Studies in Higher Education*, *37*(4), 401–414.

Ferguson, S. (2016). *Women and Education: Qualifications, Skills and Technology* (pp. 1–31).
Statistics Canada.

Field, J. (2006, December 7). *Learning transitions in the adult life course: Agency, identity, and
social capital*. Conference of the European Society for Research in the Education of

Adults. Learning Careers and Identities Network, Université de Louvain-la-Neuve.

Fine, M. (1992). Passion, politics, and power: Feminist research possibilities. In *Disruptive voices: The possibilities of feminist research* (pp. 205–231). University of Michigan Press.

Fine, M. (1998). Working the hyphen: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), The landscape of qualitative research (pp. 130-155). Sage.

Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: The opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, *2*(2), 209–230.

Fisher, D., Rubenson, K., Shanahan, T., & Trottier, C. (2014). *The development of postsecondary education systems in Canada: A comparison between British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, 1980–2010*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Fitch, P., & Van Brunt, B. (2016). *A guide to leadership and management in higher education: Managing across the generations.* Routledge.

Frances, S. (2009). Older adults and life-long learning: Women over 50 engaged in post-baccalaureate study—A Phenomenological inquiry. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Argosy University.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Herder and Herder.

Freixas, A., Luque, B., & Reina, A. (2012). Critical feminist gerontology: In the back room of research. *Journal of Women & Aging*, *24*(1), 44–58.

Friesen, J. (2020, May 6). Ontario shelves plan for performance-based postsecondary funding, while Alberta pushes ahead. *Globe and Mail*. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-ontario-shelves-plan-for-performance-

based-postsecondary-funding/

Fung, A., Southcott, J., & Siu, F. (2017). Exploring mature-aged students' motives for doctoral study and their challenges: A cross border research collaboration. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *12*, 175–195.

Gallacher, J., Crossan, B., Field, J., & Merrill, B. (2002). Learning careers and the social space: Exploring the fragile identities of adult returners in the new further education. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, *21*(6), 493–509.

Galloway, M. (2020, March 30). *The Current*. CBC Radio. *With more people staying at home, COVID-19 recession is first in history that's service-driven – and women will be hit hardest, economists say.* Guests: Armine Yalnizyan, Frances Donald. https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-march-30-2020-1.5514566/mar-30-2020-episode-transcript-1.5515476

Gardner, S. (2007). "I heard it through the grapevine": Doctoral student socialization in chemistry and history. *Higher Education*, *54*(5), 723–740.

Gardner, S. (2008). Fitting the mold of graduate school: A qualitative study of socialization in doctoral education *Innovative Higher Education*, *33*(2), 125–138.

Gardner, S., & Holley, K. (2011). "Those invisible barriers are real": The progression of first-generation students through doctoral education. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 44*(1), 77–92.

Gazso, A, A. (2005). The poverty of unattached senior women and the Canadian retirement income system: A matter of blame or contradiction? *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 32*(2), 41–62. https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/ps/i.do?p=EAIM&u=yorku_main&id=GALE%7CA13377

[4837&v=2.1&it=r](4837&v=2.1&it=r)

George, L. (2011). The third age: Fact or fiction—and does it matter? In D. Carr & K. Komp (Eds.), *Gerontology in the era of the third age: Implications and next steps* (pp. 245–260). Springer.

Giddens, Anthony. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. University of California Press.

Giele, J. Z., & Elder, Jr., G. H. (1998). Life course research: Development of a field. In *Methods of life course research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (pp. 5–27). Sage.

Giles, H., & Reid, S. (2005). Ageism across the lifespan: Towards a self-categorization model of ageing. *Journal of Social Issues*, *61*(2), 389–404.

Gill, R. (2010). Breaking the silence: The hidden injuries of neo-liberal academia. In R. Ryan-Flood & R. Gill (Eds.), *Secrecy and silence in the research process: Feminist reflections* (pp. 228–244). Routledge.

Golde, C. (2000). Should I stay or should I go? *Review of Higher Education*, *23*(2), 199–227.

Gouthro, P. (2009). Understanding women's learning trajectories: Examining life histories of women learners in Canada. In B. Merrill (Ed.), *Learning to change? The role of identity and learning careers in adult education* (pp. 97–112). Peter Lang Publishing.

Gouthro, P. (2010). Women, learning and equity: Recognizing non-linear life trajectories for women learners in political life and in higher education. In S. Jackson (Ed.), *Innovations in lifelong learning* (pp. 93–110). Routledge.

Grady, C. (2012). The cognitive neuroscience of ageing. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, *13*(7), 491–506.

Grant, B. (1999, July 12). Walking on a rackety bridge: Mapping supervision. HERDSA Annual International Conference, Melbourne, Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia, Melbourne, Australia.

Grant, C., & Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, selecting, and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research: Creating the blueprint for your "house." *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research, 4*(2), 12–26.

Grant, R. (Host.). (14 October 2015). *Kate Atkinson on The Penguin Podcast* [Audio podcast] *https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2015/kate-atkinson.html*

Gray, M., & Crosta, L. (2019). New perspectives in online doctoral supervision: A systematic literature review. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *41*(2), 173–190.

Haley, K., & Lohr, K. (2018). Novice and expert: Challenging professional education. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, *66*(3), 200–203.

Hannah, E., Paul, L., & Vethamany-Globus, S. (2002). *Women in the Canadian academic tundra challenging the chill.* McGill-Queen's University Press

Harrington Meyer, M., & Herd, P. (2007). *Market friendly or family friendly? The state and gender inequality in old age*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Hartung, C., Barnes, N., Welch, R., O'Flynn, G., Uptin, J., & McMahon, S. (2017). Beyond the academic precariat: A collective biography of poetic subjectivities in the neoliberal university. *Sport, Education and Society*, *22*(1), 40–57.

Hayes, E., & Flannery, D. (2000). *Women as learners: The significance of gender in adult learning.* Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Haynes, K. (2008). Reasons for doctoral attrition. Graduate School Technical Report, University

of Georgia.

Hazel, M. (2018). *Labour statistics at a glance: Reasons for working at 60 and beyond*. Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-222-x/71-222-x2018003-eng.htm

Heaney, T., & Ramdeholl, D. (2015). *Reimaging doctoral education as adult education: New directions for adult and continuing education*. Jossey-Bass.

Heinrich, K. (2000). The passionate scholar: A mid-life, woman doctoral student's quest for voice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *13*(1), 63–83.

Heinrich, K., Rogers, A., Haley., R., & Taylor, A. (1997). Mid-life women doctoral students recover "voice" in a community of scholarly caring. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, *13*(6), 352–364.

Hemmings, C. (2011). *Why stories matter: The political grammar of feminist theory.* Duke University Press.

Hendricks, J. (2012). Considering life course concepts. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, *67B*(2), 226–231.

Hennessy, T., & Yalnizyan, A. (2009, July). Canada's "he-cession": Men bearing the brunt of rising unemployment. *Behind the Numbers: Economic, Facts, Figures and Analysis*, *10*(4). Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

Hepworth, M. (2000). *Stories of ageing.* Open University Press.

Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2012). Feminist Research: Exploring, Interrogating, and Transforming the Interconnections of Epistemology, Methodology, and Method. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis* (pp. 2–26). Sage.

Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2013). *Feminist research practice: A primer.* Sage.

Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Piatelli, D. (2007). From theory to method and back again: The synergistic

praxis of theory and method. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis* (pp. 143–154). Sage.

Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Piatelli, D. (2012). The synergistic practice of theory and method. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis* (pp. 176–186). Sage.

Hochschild, A. (1989). *The second shift:* The working parents and the revolution at home. Penguin.

Hollis, J. (1993). *The middle passage: From misery to meaning*. Inner City Books.

hooks, b. (2015). *feminism is for everybody: passionate politics.* Routledge.

Hooyman, N., Browne, C., & Ray, R. (2002). Feminist gerontology and the life course. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, *22*(4), 3–26.

Hopwood, N. (2010). A sociocultural view of doctoral students' relationships and agency. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *32*(2), 103–117.

Hopwood, N., & Paulson, J. (2012). Bodies in narratives of doctoral students' learning and experience. *Studies in Higher Education*, *37*(6), 667–681.

Hori, S., & Cusack, S. (2006). Third-age education in Canada and Japan: Attitudes toward aging and participation in learning. *Educational Gerontology*, *32*, 463–481.

Hoult, E. (2012). *Adult learning and la recherche féminine: Reading resilience and Hélène Cixous*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hughes, L. (1999) Harlem. In *Hughes Poems* (p. 238). Everyman's Library.

Huston, K. (2011). *Cultivating late life potential: A heuristic study of 60 to 75-year-old adults in doctoral and psychoanalytic education* [unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Institute of Transpersonal Psychology.

Hutchings, M. (2017). Improving doctoral support through group supervision: Analysing face-to-face and technology-mediated strategies for nurturing and sustaining scholarship. *Studies in Higher Education*, *42*(3), 1–18.

Imlach, A., Ward, D., Stuart, K., Summers, M., Valenzuela, M., King, A., Saunders, N., Srikanth, V., Robinson, A., & Vickers, J. (2017). Age is no barrier: Predictors of academic success in older learners. *Nature Partners Journal Science of Learning*, *2* (Article no. 13).

Inouye, K., & McAlpine, L. (2019). Developing doctoral identity: A review of the literature on doctoral writing and feedback. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *14*, 1–31.

Jackson, S. (2016, March 1). Women's studies, gender studies, and feminism. *Discover Society*. https://discoversociety.org/2016/03/01/womens-studies-gender-studies-and-feminism/

Janta, H., Lugosi, P., & Brown, L. (2014). Coping with loneliness: A netnographic study of doctoral students. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *38*(4), 553- 571.

Jazvac-Martek, M., Chen, S., & McAlpine, L. (2011). Tracking the doctoral student experience over time: Cultivating agency in diverse spaces. In L. McAlpine & C. Amundsen (Eds.), *Doctoral education: Research-based strategies for doctoral students, supervisors, and administrators* (pp. 17–36). Springer.

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2012). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Jones, J. (2015). You gotta be: Embracing embodied knowledges in doctoral study. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, Fall 2015*(147), 71–80.

Jones, M. (2013). Issues in doctoral studies—Forty years of journal discussion: Where have we been and where are we going? *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *8*, 83–104.

Jordan, J. (1992, April 1). Relational resilience. Paper presented in the Stone Center Colloquium Series.

Jung, C. G. (1966). *Collected works: The structure and dynamics of the psyche.* (2d ed., rev.augm., Vol 8). Pantheon Books.

Jung, C.G. (2009). *The Red Book Liber Novus: A Reader's Edition* (M. Kyburz, J.Peck & S.Shamdasani, Trans.). Norton.

Kamler, B. (2006). Older women as lifelong learners. In C. Leathwood & B. Francis (Eds.), *Gender and lifelong learning: Critical feminist engagements* (pp. 153–163). Routledge.

Kasworm, C., Sandman, L., & Sissel, P. (2000). Adult learners in higher education. In A. Wilson & E. Hayes (Eds.), *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp. 449–463). Jossey-Bass.

Kearney, K, & Hyle, A. (2004). Drawing out emotions: The use of participant-produced drawings in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Research*, *4*(3), 361–382.

Kessler, E., Bowen, C., Baer, M., Froelich, L., & Wahl, H. (2012). Dementia worry: A psychological examination of an unexplored phenomenon. *European Journal of Ageing*, *9*(4), 275–284.

Kim, S., Hee Chee, K., & Gerhart, O. (2017). Redefining generativity: Through life course and pragmatist lenses. *Sociology Compass*, *11*.

Kincheloe, J., & McLaren, P. (2005). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N.K.Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds),*The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 303–342). Sage.

Kivnick, H., & Pruchno, R. (2011). Bridges and boundaries: Humanities and arts enhance gerontology. *Gerontologist*, *51*(2), 142–144.

Komp, K. (2011). The political economy of the third age. In D. Carr & K. Komp (Eds.),
Gerontology in the era of the Third Age: Implications and next steps (pp. 52–66).
Springer.

Komp, K., & Marier, P. (2015). The state in ageing Canada: From old age policies to life course
policies. In K. Komp & S. Johansson (Eds.), *Population ageing from a life course
perspective: Critical and international approaches* (pp. 221–238). Policy Press.

Kornadt, A., Kessler, E., Wurm, S., Bowen, C., Gabrian, M., & Klusmann, V. (2019). Views on
ageing: A lifespan perspective. *European Journal of Ageing*.
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-019-00535-9

Kuttner, R. (June 25, 1989). She minds the child, he minds the dog. *New York Times*, *Section 7,
Page 3.*

Lamb, S. (2013). Permanent personhood or meaningful decline? Toward a critical anthropology
of successful aging. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *29*, 41–52.

Lareau, A. (2002). Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and
White Families. *American Sociological Review*, *67*(5), 747–776.

Lather, P. (1992). Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural
perspectives. *Theory Into Practice*, *31*(2), 87–99.

Lauzon, A. (2011). The changing nature of graduate education: Implications for students in the
second half of life. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *30*(3), 287–307.

Law Commission of Ontario. (2012). A framework for the law as it affects older adults:
Advancing substantive equality for older persons through law, policy, and practice: Final
report. Law Commission of Ontario. https://cleoconnect.ca/resource/research/framework-
law-affects-older-adults-advancing-substantive-equality-older-persons-law-policy-

practice/

Lay, J., Pauly, T., Graf, P., Mahmood, A., & Hoppmann, C. (2020). Choosing solitude: Age

differences in situational and affective correlates of solitude-seeking in midlife and older

adulthood. *Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, *75*(3), 483–493.

Lendon, J., & Silverstein, M. (2012). Gender role ideology and life course transitions of baby-

boom women. *Advances in Life Course Research*, *17*(4), 191–198.

Leonard, D. (2000). Transforming doctoral studies: Competencies and artistry. *Higher Education

in Europe*, *25*(2), 181–192.

Leonard, D. (2010). The doctorate in the life course. In M. Walker & P. Thomson (Eds.), *The

Routledge doctoral supervisor's companion* (pp. 171–184). Routledge.

Levaque, S. F. (2012). *An examination of instructors' perceptions of older adult learners*

[Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Capella University.

Levy, B. (2001). Eradication of ageism requires addressing the enemy within. *Gerontologist*,

41(5), 578–579.

Levy, B. (2003). Mind matters: Cognitive and physical effects of aging self-stereotypes. *Journals

of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, *58*(4), 203–211.

Levy, B. (2009). Stereotype embodiment: A psychosocial approach to aging. *Current Directions

in Psychological Science*, *18*(6), 332–336.

Lin, Y.Y. (2011). Older adults' motivation to learn in higher education. Adult Education

Research Conference, Toronto, ON Canada, Conference Proceedings.

http://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3184&context=aerc

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Sage.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging

confluences. In *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 163–188). Sage.

Little, W. (2012). *Introduction to Sociology – 2nd Canadian Edition.* Open Textbook. BC

Ministry of Advanced Education.

https://opentextbc.ca/introductiontosociology2ndedition/chapter/chapter-13-aging-and-

the-

elderly/#:~:text=The%20older%20adult%20population%20can,young%2Dold%20of%20

previous%20generations.

Long, C., & Averill, J. (2003). Solitude: An exploration of benefits of being alone. *Journal for
the Theory of Social Behaviour*, *33*(1), 21–44.

Longfellow, H.W. (2009).Morituri Salutamus: Poem for the fiftieth anniversary of the class of

1825 in Bowdoin College. In *The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth

Longfellow* (n.p.). Project Gutenberg. (Original work published 1825)

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1365/1365-h/1365-h.htm#link2H_4_0246

Looker, E. (2018). *41st and 44th statistical report,* Canadian Association for Graduate Studies.

Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Crossing Press.

Lörz, M., & Mühleck, K. (2018). Gender differences in higher education from a life course

perspective: Transitions and social inequality between enrolment and first post-doc

position. *Higher Education, 77*(3), 381–402.

Lovitts, B. E. (2001). *Leaving the ivory tower: The causes and consequences of departure from

doctoral study*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Luxton, M. (1981). Taking on the double day: Housewives as a reserve army of labour. *Atlantis*,

7(1), 12–22.

Lynch, K. (2010). Carelessness: A hidden doxa of higher education. *Arts and Humanities in*

Higher Education, *9*(1), 54–67.

MacDonald, B., & Rich, C. (2001). *Look me in the eye: Old women, aging and ageism.* Spinsters, Ink.

MacKenzie, S., & Wolf, M. (2012). Layering sel(f)ves: Finding acceptance, community and praxis through collage. *Qualitative Report*, *17*, 1–21.

Maguire, P. (1987). *Doing participatory research: A feminist approach*. University of Massachusetts Press.

Maher, D., Seaton, L., McMullen, C., Fitzgerald, T., Otsuji, E., & Lee, A. (2008). "Becoming and being writers": The experiences of doctoral students in writing groups. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *30*(3), 263–275.

Maher, M., Ford, M., & Thompson, C. (2004). Degree progress of women doctoral students: Factors that constrain, facilitate, and differentiate. *Review of Higher Education*, *27*(3), 167–190.

Malveaux, J. (1993). Race, poverty, and women's aging. In J. Allen & A. Pifer (Eds.), *Women on the front lines: Meeting the challenge of an aging America (*pp. 167–190*)*. Urban Institute.

Mandell, N., & Duffy, A. (2017). Challenging old age: Women's next revolution. In N. Mandell & J. Johnson (Eds.), *Feminist issues: Race, class, and sexuality* (6th ed., pp. 229–283). Pearson Education Canada.

Mandell, N., Duffy, A., & Wilson, S. (2008). *Connection, compromise, and control: Canadian women discuss midlife*. Oxford University Press.

Mantai, L. (2019). "A source of sanity": The role of social support for doctoral candidates belonging and becoming. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *14*, 367–382.

Mauthner, N., & Doucet, A. (2003). Reflexive accounts and accounts of reflexivity in qualitative data analysis. *Sociology*, *37*(3), 413–431.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Sage.

McAdams, D., Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (2001). *Turns in the road: Narrative studies of lives in transition*. American Psychological Association.

McAlpine, L. (2013). Doctoral supervision: Not an individual but a collective institutional responsibility. *Infancia y Aprendizaje, 3*6(3), 259–280.

McAlpine, L., & Amundsen, C. (2007). Academic communities and developing identity: The doctoral student journey. In P. Richards (Ed.), *Global issues in higher education* (pp. 57–84). Nova Science Publishers.

McAlpine, L., & Amundsen, C. (2009). Identity and agency: Pleasures and collegiality among the challenges of the doctoral journey. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *31*(2), 109–125.

McAlpine, L., Jazvac-Martek, M., & Hopwood, N. (2009). Doctoral student experience in Education: Activities and difficulties influencing identity development. *International Journal for Researcher Development*, *1*(1), 97–109.

McAlpine, L., & Norton, J. (2006). Reframing our approach to doctoral programs: An integrative framework for action and research. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *25*(1), 3–17.

McAlpine, L., Paulson, J., Gonsalves, A., & Jazvac-Martek, M. (2012). "Untold" doctoral stories: Can we move beyond cultural narratives of neglect? *Higher Education Research & Development*, *31*(4), 511–523.

McCracken., G. (1988). *The Long Interview*. Sage.

McIlveen, P. (2008). Autoethnography as a method for reflexive research and practice in

vocational psychology. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 17*(2), 13–20.

McWhinney, W., & Markos, L. (2003). Transformative education: Across the threshold. *Journal of Transformative Education*, *1*(1), 16–37.

Mehlman, M., Binstock, R., Juengst, E., Ponsaran, R., & Whitehouse, P. (2004). Anti-aging medicine: Can consumers be better protected? *Gerontologist*, *44*(3), 304–310.

Merrill, B. (2009). Moving beyond access to learning careers and identity. In B. Merrill (Ed.), *Learning to change? The role of identity and learning careers in adult education* (pp. 9–16). Peter Lang Publishing.

Metcalfe, A. (2010). Revisiting academic capitalism in Canada: No longer the exception. *Journal of Higher Education*, *81*(4), 489–514.

Mies, M. (2014a). Colonization and housewifization. In *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale: Women in the international division of labour* (pp. 74–111). Zed Books.

Mies, M. (2014b). Housewifization international: Women and the new international division of labour'. In *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale: Women in the international division of labour* (pp. 112–144). Zed Books.

Miller, N. (2007). Developing an auto/biographical imagination. In L West, P. Alheit, A. Siig Anderson, & B. Merrill (Eds.), *Using biographical and life history approaches in the study of adult and lifelong learning: European perspectives* (pp. 167–186). Peter Lang Publishing.

Minkler, M., & Holstein, M. (2008). From civil rights to . . . civic engagement? Concerns of two older critical gerontologists about a "new social movement" and what it portends. *Journal of Aging Studies (special issue) 22*(2),196–204.

Mitchell, D. (2004). *Cloud atlas*. Random House.

Moen, P. (2011). A life course approach to the Third Age. In D. Carr & K. Komp (Eds.),

    Gerontology in the era of the Third Age: Implications and next steps (pp. 13–32).

    Springer.

Molden, J., & Maxfield, M. (2016). The impact of aging stereotypes on dementia worry.

    European Journal of Ageing, *14*(1), 29–37.

Monbiot, G. (2011, October 24). Sucking out our brains through our eyes. *The Guardian*.

    https://www.monbiot.com/2011/10/24/sucking-out-our-brains-through-our-eyes/

Monk, S, & McKay, L. (2017). Developing identity and agency as an early career academic:

    Lessons from Alice. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *22*(3), 223–230.

Morganroth Gullette, M. (2003). From life storytelling to age autobiography. *Journal of Aging*

    Studies, *17*(1), 101–111. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0890-4065(02)00093-2

Morganroth Gullette, M. (2008). What exactly has age got to do with it? My life in critical age

    studies. *Journal of Aging Studies (special issue)*, *22*(2), 189–195.

Morganroth Gullette, M. (2013). *Agewise: Fighting the new ageism in America*. University Of

    Chicago Press.

Morganroth Gullette, M. (2017, April). *Ageism—The attacks, the hurt, the opposition* [Keynote

    Address]. Cultural narratives, processes, and strategies in representations of age and

    aging, University of Graz, Medical University of Graz, Austria.

    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAj5DfRAXeg

Mountz, A., Bonds, A., Mansfield, B., Loyd, J., Hyndman, J., Walton-Roberts, M., Basu, R.,

    Whitson, R., Hawkins, R., Hamilton, T., & Curran, W. (2015). For slow scholarship: A

    feminist politics of resistance through collective action in the neoliberal university.

    ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies, *14*(4), 1235–1259.

Mullings, B. (2016). Cultivating an ethic of wellness in geography. *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, *60*(2), 161–167.

Munoz-Rodriguez, J., Serrate-Gonzalez, S., & Navarro, A. (2019). Generativity and life satisfaction of active older people: Advances (keys) in educational perspective. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, *59*(1), 94-114.

Nelson, T. (2005). Ageism: Prejudice against our feared future self. *Journal of Social Issues*, *61*, 207–221.

Ng, I. (2017). When (inter)personal becomes transformational: (Re-)examining life course-related emotions in PhD research. *Area*, *49*(4), 409–414.

Nicotra, A., & Patel, F. (2016). Contesting the political economy of higher education: Educating the good citizen. *Journal of International and Global Studies*, *7*(2), 22–39.

Nori, H., Peura, M., & Jauhiainen, A. (2020). From imposter syndrome to heroic tales: Doctoral students' backgrounds, study aims, and experiences. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 15*, 517–539.

Oakley, A. (1981). Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms. In H. Roberts (Ed.), *Doing feminist research* (pp. 30–61). Routledge.

O'Connor, H., & Goodwin, J. (2004) "She wants to be like her mum": Girls' experience of the school-to-work transitions In the 1960s, *Journal of Education and Work, 17(*1), 95–118.

O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, *47*(4), 605–613.

Olsen, V. (2011). Feminist qualitative research the millennium's first decade: Developments, challenges, prospects. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 129–146). Sage.

Ontario Government: Colleges and Universities. (2020). *Promoting Excellence: Ontario Implements Performance Based Funding for Postsecondary Institutions. New approach will help students obtain the education and skills needed for in-demand jobs* [News release]. https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/59368/promoting-excellence-ontario-implements-performance-based-funding-for-postsecondary-institutions

Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Education, and Citizenship and Immigration. (2017). *Strengthening Ontario's adult education system. A discussion paper to guide public consultation about ways to improve adult education in Ontario* (pp. 1–39). Government of Ontario.

O'Reilly, J. (1972). Click! The housewife's moment of truth. in F. Klagsbrun (Ed.), *The First Ms Reader* (pp. 11-22). Pantheon Books.

Ost Mor, S. (2019, October 25). *Differences in younger and older adults' attitude towards positive solitude: A qualitative study*. Canadian Association on Gerontology, Navigating the Tides of Aging Together, 48th Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting, Moncton, NB.

Pallas, A. (2003). Educational transitions, trajectories, and pathways. In J. Mortimer & M. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the life course* (pp. 165–184). Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Palmore, E. (1999). *Ageism: Negative and positive.* Springer.

Palmore, E. (2001). The ageism survey: First findings. *Gerontologist*, *41*(5), 572–575.

Palmore, E. (2004). Research note: Ageism in Canada and the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, *19*(1), 41–46.

Parizeau, K., Shillington, L., Hawkins, R., Sultana, F., Mountz, A., Mullings, B., & Peake, L.

(2016). Breaking the silence: A feminist call to action. *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, *60*(2), 192–204.

Parker-Jenkins, M. (2018). Mind the gap: Developing the roles, expectations, and boundaries in the doctoral supervisor–supervisee relationship. *Studies in Higher Education*, *43*(1), 57–71.

Parr, J. (2000). *Identity and education: The links for mature women students*. Routledge.

Patterson, M. (2018). *Labour statistics at a glance: Who works part time and why?* Statistics Canada.

Pettinger, T. (2019). Life-cycle income hypothesis. *EconomicsHelp.org* https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/27080/concepts/life-cycle-hypothesis/

Philips, D. (2010). The women's liberation movement at forty. *History Workshop Journal*, *70*, 293–297.

Phillips, E. (2019). A phenomenological study of advanced age individuals pursuing a doctoral degree. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Liberty University.

Phillipson, C. (1991). The social construction of old age: Perspectives from political economy. *Reviews in Clinical Gerontology*, *1*(4), 403–410. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959259800002902

Phillipson, C. (2006). Aging and globalization: Issues for critical gerontology and political economy. In J. Baars (Ed.), *Aging, globalization, and inequality: The new critical gerontology* (pp. 43–58). Routledge.

Phillipson, C. (2015). The political economy of longevity: Developing new forms of solidarity for later life. *Sociological Quarterly*, *56*(1), 80–100.

Pichette, J., Tamburri, R., McKeown, J., Blair, K., & MacKay, E. (2019). *Lifelong learning in*

Ontario: Improved options for mid-career, underserved learners. The Higher Education

    Quality Council of Ontario.

Piercy, M. (1990). Unlearning to not speak. *Human Studies 13*(2), 147–161.

Pinsker, J. (2020, January 27). When does someone become "old"? It's surprisingly hard to find

    a good term for people in late life. *The Atlantic*.

    https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/01/old-people-older-elderly-middle-

    age/605590/

Pothen, J, Dore, E., & Idler, E. (2019). Social characteristics of the fourth age. *Innovation in

    Aging*, *3*(Supplement 1), S696–S697.

Price, D., & Livesy, L. (2015). Money and later life. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge

    handbook of cultural gerontology* (pp. 305–312). Routledge.

Pyhältö, K., Vekkaila, J., & Keskinen, J. (2012). Exploring the fit between doctoral students' and

    supervisors' perceptions of resources and challenges vis-à-vis the doctoral journey.

    International Journal of Doctoral Studies, *7*, 395–413.

Pyhältö, K., Vekkailaa, J., & Keskinen, J. (2015). Fit matters in the supervisory relationship:

    Doctoral students and supervisors' perceptions about the supervisory activities.

    Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 52(1), 4–16.

Radtke, H., Young, J., & Van Mens-Verhulst. (2016). Aging, identity, and women: Constructing

    the third age. *Women & Therapy*, *39*, 86–105.

Randall, W., & McKim, A. (2008). *Reading our lives: The poetics of growing old.* Oxford

    University Press.

Ray, R. (1999). Researching to transgress: The need for critical feminism in gerontology. In J.

    Garner (Ed.), *Fundamentals of feminist gerontology* (pp. 171–183). Haworth Press.

Ray, R. (2004). Toward the croning of feminist gerontology. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *18*, 109–121.

Ray, R. (2007). Narratives as agents of social change: A new direction for narrative gerontologists. In M. Bernard & T. Scharf (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on ageing societies* (pp. 59–72). Policy Press. https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781861348906.003.0005

Ray, R., & Cole, T. (2008). Coming of age: Critical gerontologists reflect on their own aging, age research, and the making of critical gerontology. *Journal of Aging Studies (special issue)*, *22*(2), 97–210.

Reimer, M. (2004). *Inside Corporate U: Women in the academy speak out*. Sumach Press.

Reinharz, S., & Davidman, L. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. Oxford University Press.

Rich, A (1977). Claiming an education. Speech delivered at the convocation of Douglas's College. https://docplayer.net/8536767-Claiming-an-education-by-adrienne-rich-speech-delivered-at-the-convocation-of-douglass-college-1977.html

Rich, A. (1986). Invisibility in academe. In *Blood, bread, and poetry: Selected prose, 1979–1985*. Norton.

Richards, L., & Morse, J. (2007). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Richardson, G., Brown, D., & Paige, S. (2004). Rejecting Pygmalion: The social and culture capital of working-class women PhD students. *Race, Gender & Class, 11*(3), 36–53.

Risman, B. (2004). Gender as a social structure: Theory wrestling with activism. *Gender and Society*, *18*(4), 429–450.

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A., & Spaulding, L. (2014). *Navigating the doctoral journey: A handbook of strategies for success.* Rowan and Littlefield.

Ropers-Huilman, R., & Winters, K. (2011). Feminist research in higher education. *Counterpoints*, *82*(6), 667–690.

Rosenthal, E. (1990). *Women, aging and ageism*. Routledge.

Rowntree, M. (2015). The emotional space of the doctoral supervisory relationship: Safe to feel vulnerable. In L. Bryant & K. Jaworski (Eds.), *Women supervising and writing theses: Walking on the grass* (pp. 97–108). Lexington Books.

Sacks, O. (2013, July 6). The joy of old age. (no kidding.). *The New York Times Sunday Review*. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/07/opinion/sunday/the-joy-of-old-age-no-kidding.html

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.

Sarton, M. (1992). *As we are now: A novel*. Norton.

Sayer, A. (2005). Class, Moral Worth and Recognition. *Sociology, 39* (5), 947-963.

Schmidt, M., & Hansson, E. (2018). Doctoral students' well-being: A literature review. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, *13*(1). https://doi.org10.1080/17482631.2018.1508171

Schuetze, H., & Slowey, M. (2002). Participation and exclusion: A comparative analysis of non-traditional students and lifelong learners in higher education. *Higher Education*, *44*, 309–327.

Scott, C., Ritter, N., Fowler, R., & Franks, A. (2019). Developing a community of academic writers: Using social media to support academic accountability, motivation, and productivity. *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, *20*(2), 61–96.

Shanahan, T., Nilson, M., & Broshko, L. (2015). *Handbook of Canadian higher education law*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Simard-Gagnon, L. (2016). Everyone is fed, bathed, asleep, and I have made it through another day: Problematizing accommodation, resilience, and care in the neoliberal academy. *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, *60*(2), 219–225.

Sinner, A., Leggo, C., Irwin, R., Gouzouasis, P., & Grauer, K. (2006). Arts-based educational research dissertations: Reviewing the practices of new scholars. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *29*(4), 1223–1270.

Sissel, P., Hansman, C., & Kasworm, C. (2001). The politics of neglect: Adult learners in higher education. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, *91*, 17–27.

Slevin, K. (2010). "If I had lots of money . . . I'd have a body makeover": Managing the aging body. *Social Forces*, *88*(3), 1003–1020.

Smith, B. (1999). *The learning experiences of older adults as university students*. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Sontag, S. (1972, September 23). The double standard of aging. *Saturday Review of The Society*, 29–38.

Spaulding, L., & Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J. (2012). Hearing their voices: Factors doctoral candidates attribute to their persistence. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *7*, 199–219.

Spotton Visano, B., & Taylor, K. (2009). *Room to grow: Celebrating Atkinson's living legacy*. York University Publications.

Sprague, J. (2016). *Feminist methodologies for critical researchers: Bridging differences.* Rowman & Littlefield.

Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1979). Feminist research, feminist consciousness, and experiences of

sexism. *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, *2*(3), 359–374.

Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1991). Feminist research, feminist consciousness, and experiences of

sexism. In M. Fonow, & J. Cook (Eds.), *Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as

lived research* (pp. 265–283). Indiana University Press.

Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (2000). But the empress has no clothes! Some awkward questions about

the "missing revolution" in feminist theory. *Feminist Theory*, *1*(3), 261–288.

Statistics Canada. (2011). Education in Canada: Attainment, Field of Study and Location of

Study.

https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011001-eng.pdf

Statistics Canada. (2014). Fertility: Fewer children, older moms (Canadian Megatrends).

https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2014002-eng.htm

Statistics Canada. (2015, July 1). Canada's population estimates: Age and sex.

http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/150929/dq150929b-eng.htm

Statistics Canada (2016). Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census: Families, households and

marital status. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-

spg/Facts-CAN-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=4

Statistics Canada. (2017). Working seniors in Canada. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-

recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016027/98-200-x2016027-eng.cfm

Statistics Canada (2020a). Intergenerational income mobility: The lasting effects of growing up

in a lower-income family. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-

m2020053-eng.pdf

Statistics Canada. (2020b). Seniors and aging statistics. https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/subjects-

start/seniors_and_aging

Stivers, C. (1993). Reflections on the role of personal narrative in social science. *Signs, 18*(2), 408–425.

Sverdlik, A., Hall, N., McAlpine, L., & Hubbard, K. (2018). The PhD experience: A review of the factors influencing doctoral students' completion, achievement, and well-being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *13*, 361–387.

Tam, M. (2013). Perceptions of successful ageing and implications for late-life learning. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *35*(3), 281–298.

Tam, M. (2014). A distinctive theory of teaching and learning for older learners: Why and why not? *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *33*(6), 811–820.

Tam, M., & Chui, E. (2016). Ageing and learning: What do they mean to elders themselves? *Studies in Continuing Education*, *38*(2), 195–212.

Tamburri, R. (2013, February 6). The PhD is in need of revision. *University Affairs*, *6*. https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/the-phd-is-in-need-of-revision/

Thompson, G., & Foth, D. (2003). The boomers are coming: Trends in older adult education. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*, *29*(1), 9–27.

Thompson, N. (2018). Tackling ageism: Moral imperative or current fad? In J. Morgan (Ed.), *Ethical issues in the care of the dying and bereaved aged* (pp. 23-34). Routledge.

Thomson, P., & Walker, M. (2010). Doctoral education in context: The changing nature of the doctorate and doctoral students. In M. Walker & P. Thomson (Eds.), *The Routledge doctoral supervisor's companion* (pp. 9–26). Routledge.

Tierney, W., & Rhoads, R. (1993). Enhancing promotion, tenure and beyond: Faculty socialization as a cultural process. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 6.

Association for the Study of Higher Education.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, 1–120.

Tomasz, J., & Denicolo, P. (2013). Doctoral education: A review of the literature monitoring the doctoral student experience in selected OECD countries (mainly UK). *Springer Science Reviews*, *1*(1), 41–49. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40362-013-0011-x

Tornstam, L. (1992). The quo vadis of gerontology: On the scientific paradigm of gerontology. *Gerontologist*, *32*(3), 318–326.

Tornstam, L. (2005). *Gerotranscendence: A developmental theory of positive aging*. Springer.

Twigg, J. (2004). The body, gender, and age: Feminist insights in social gerontology. *Journal of Ageing Studies, 18*(1), 59–73.

Twigg, J., & Martin, W. (2015). The challenge of cultural gerontology. *The Gerontologist*, *55*(3), 353-359.

Twitchell, S., Cherry, K., & Trott, J. (1996). Educational strategies for older learners: Suggestions from cognitive aging research. *Educational Gerontology*, *22*, 169–181.

Vacek, K., Donohue, W., Gates, A., Lee, A., & Simpson, S. (2019). Seeking balance within personal writing ecologies: A collaborative autoethnography of a doctoral student writing group. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2019.1703670

Van den Hoonaard, D. (2018). Learning to be old: How qualitative research contributes to our understanding of ageism. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*(Special Issue), 1–8.

Van Rhijn, T., Lero, D., Bridge, K., & Fritz, V. (2016). Unmet needs: Challenges to success from the perspectives of mature university students. *Canadian Journal for the Study of*

Adult Education, *28*(1), 29–47.

Van Rhijn, T., Lero, D., Dawczyk, A., de Guzman, J., Pericak, S., Fritz, V., Closs, J., & Osborne, C. (2015). Student pathways and supports: Investigating retention and attrition in mature university students (pp. 1–41). Research report. Government of Ontario through the Ontario Human Capital Research and Innovation Fund, 2014–2015. University of Guelph.

Villar, F., & Celdra´n, M. (2012). Generativity in older age: A challenge for universities of the Third Age (U3A). *Educational Gerontology*, *38*, 666–677.

Walker, A. (2006). Re-examining the political economy of aging: Understanding the structure/agency tension. In J. Baars (Ed.), *Aging, globalization, and inequality: The new critical gerontology* (pp. 59–80). Baywood Publishing.

Wall, K. (2019). *Persistence and representation of women in STEM programs* (pp. 1–18). Statistics Canada.

Wall, S. (2008). Of heads and hearts: Women in doctoral education at a Canadian university. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *31*(3), 219–228.

Waller, R. (2006). I don't feel like "a student," I feel like "me"! The over-simplification of mature learner's experience(s). *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 11*(1), 115–130.

Warren, K., & Cheney, J. (1991). Ecological feminism and ecosystem ecology. *Hypatia*, *6*(1), 179–197.

Waxman, B. (1990). *From the hearth to the open road: A feminist study of aging in contemporary literature*. Greenwood Press.

Wegener, C., Meier, N., & Ingerslev, K. (2016). Borrowing brainpower—sharing insecurities. Lessons learned from a doctoral peer writing group. *Studies in Higher Education*, *41*(6),

1092–1105.

Welch, N. (2015). Educating for austerity: Social reproduction in the corporate university. *International Socialist Review*, *98*. https://isreview.org/issue/98/educating-austerity

Wellington, J., Bathmaker, A., Hunt, C., McCullough, G., & Sikes, P. (2005). Learning on the doctoral journey. In *Succeeding with your doctorate*. Sage.

Wendover, W. E. (2006). Roles negotiated and transitions navigated: Challenges and success strategies of midlife women in doctoral education programs [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Denver.

West, L., Alheit, P., Andersen, A., & Merrill, B. (2007). Introduction: Why this book and why now? In *Using biographical and life history approaches in the study of adult and lifelong learning; European perspectives* (pp. 11–25). Peter Lang.

Weston, M. (1988). "Can academic research be truly feminist?" In D. Currie (Ed.), *From the margins to the centre: Selected essays in women's studies research* (pp. 142–150). The Women's Studies Research Unit, University of Saskatchewan.

White, K. (2004). The leaking pipeline: Women postgraduate and early career researchers in Australia. *Tertiary Education and Management*, *10*(3), 227–241.

Winslow, S., & Davis, S. (2016). Gender inequality across the academic life course. *Sociology Compass, 10*(5), 404–416.

Wolf, M. (2009). Older adult women learners in transition. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, *122*, 53–62.

Woodspring, N. (2018). *Baby boomers, time, and ageing bodies*. Policy Press.

Woolf, V. (1938). *Three guineas*. Harcourt Brace.

Wright, T. (2003). Postgraduate research students: People in context? *British Journal of*

Guidance & Counselling, *31*(2), 209–227.

Wu, R., Rebok, R., & Lin, F. (2016). A novel theoretical life course framework for triggering

cognitive development across the lifespan. *Human Development*, *59*(6), 342–365.

Yamagishi, N. (2002). Postgraduate journal: Blood, sweat and tears. In E. Hannah, L. Paul, & S.

Vethamany-Globus (Eds.), *Women in the Canadian academic tundra* (pp. 257–260).

McGill-Queen's University Press.

York Stories Collective. (2000). *York stories: Women in higher education*. Tsar.

Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital. A critical race theory discussion of community

cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69–91.

Yssaad, L., & Ferrao, V. (2019). Labour statistics at a glance. Self-employed Canadians: Who

and why? Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-222-x/71-222-

x2019002-eng.htm

Zeilig. H. (2012). The critical use of narrative and literature in gerontology. *International*

Journal of Ageing and Later Life, *6*(2), 7–37.

Zhan, M., & Pandey, S. (2002). Postsecondary education and the well-being of women in

retirement. *Social Work Research*, *26*(3), 171–184.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Ethics Approval

YORK U

UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF
RESEARCH
ETHICS (ORE)
5ᵗʰ Floor, Kaneff
Tower

4700 Keele St.
Toronto ON
Canada M3J 1P3
Tel 416 736 5914
Fax 416 736-5512
www.research.yorku.ca

Certificate #:	STU 2019-060
Approval Period:	06/04/19-06/04/20

ETHICS APPROVAL

To: **Lois Kamenitz**
Graduate Student of Education, Faculty of Education
xxxx@xxxxxxx.xx

From: Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor, Research Ethics
(on behalf of Veronica Jamnik, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)

Date: Tuesday, June 4, 2019

Title: Pursuing a PHD Later in Life: The Challenges and the Rewards for Women
Over Fifty-five

Risk Level: ☒ Minimal Risk   ☐ More than Minimal Risk

Level of Review: ☒ Delegated Review   ☐ Full Committee Review

---

I am writing to inform you that this research project, **"Pursuing a PHD Later in Life: The Challenges and the Rewards for Women Over Fifty-five"** has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Note that approval is granted for one year. Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics (xxx@xxxx.xx) as soon as possible.

For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, **"RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE".**

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: xxx-xxx-xxxx or via email at: xxxx@xxxxxxx.xx

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM
Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor,
Office of Research Ethics

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

York University Researcher wishes to interview women who began their PhD studies at age 50 and older and have graduated within the past ten years.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: take part in a confidential, in-depth interview about your return to graduate school late in life and how you experienced your participation in PhD study. Anonymity will be assured through the use of pseudonyms; participants and their universities will not be identified.

Your participation is **entirely voluntary** and would take up approximately an hour and a half of your time *over one occasion at a place of your choosing, in person or by Skype or Zoom*.

By participating in this study, you will help us to: fill gaps in the scholarly literature on older adult learners in higher education generally and in Canadian doctoral programs specifically. You will also contribute to the advancement of a view of aging and of adult learners that enriches society.

To learn more about this study, or to participate in this study, please contact:

Principal Investigator:
Lois Kamenitz
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education
York University
xxxxx@xxxxxx.xx

This study is supervised by: Dr Theresa Shanahan

xxxxx@xxxxxx.xx

This study has been reviewed by the York University Research Ethics Board.

<div align="center">**Appendix C. Informed Consent Form**</div>

Date: June 2019

Study Name: Pursuing a PhD later in life: The challenges and rewards for women over fifty-five

Researcher name: Lois Kamenitz Principal Investigator, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education, York University
xxxxx@xxxxxx.xx

Purpose of the Research:
The purpose of my research is to learn how older women learners who have recently obtained a PhD, experienced their doctoral journey. Information will be obtained through interviews of 1.5 – 2.0 hours and reported in my doctoral dissertation as well as any anticipated conference presentations or journal articles.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:
You will be asked to talk about why you chose to return to graduate school late in life and how you experienced your participation in PhD study. Based on the transcript of your interview, which you will receive, you will be invited to contribute an artifact which represents your doctoral experience. It can be in the form of a short literary piece, a poem, a visual representation, an audio, or video file. If you are interested, it will need to be done within two weeks of receiving your transcript.

Risks and Discomforts:
Any risk will be minimal. Should you feel uncomfortable, anxious, or upset at any point in the interview you are free to not answer any question and to terminate the interview for any reason at any point in time. With regard to the risk from data exposure confidentiality will be maintained through all stages of the research process. Information will be kept in my personal work area in a locked filing cabinet. Research material on my personal computer will be backed up on an external storage drive and kept in a secure area. References to participants in text will be by pseudonym, universities will not be identified by name or location. Identifying information will be kept in a secure area separate from files containing research data. Data will be kept for three years after my dissertation is published and destroyed when no longer needed.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:
Given that there is a dearth of scholarly literature on older adult learners in higher education generally and in Canadian doctoral programs specifically my dissertation will fill gaps in knowledge about older adult learners. It will give university decision-makers, government decision makers and faculty a glimpse of this new group entering the academy. This could impact institutional policy, graduate program supports for older women doctoral students and also teaching and learning as well as graduate supervision. It also has the potential to advance a view of aging and of adult learners that enriches society. My research has, as well, implications for younger doctoral students and it has the potential to lead to further studies.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

<div align="center">256</div>

Confidentiality:
Unless you choose otherwise all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Documentation will be through audiotaped interviews and handwritten notes. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to this information. The data will be stored for three years after the research is completed after which it will be destroyed.

Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at xxxxx@xxxxxxx.xx or my supervisor, Dr Theresa Shanahan at xxxxx@xxxxxxx.xx You may also contact the Graduate Program in Education at xxxxx@xxxxxxx.xx

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone xxx-xxx-xxxx or e-mail xxxxx@xxxxxx.xx).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____consent to participate in Pursuing a PhD later in life: The challenges and rewards for women over fifty-five conducted by Lois Kamenitz. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature_____   **Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____   **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

Additional consent (where applicable)

1. **Audio recording**

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

Signature: Date:

_____   _____

Participant: (name)_____

Appendix D. Interview Schedule

Opening

Welcome, social chat to put researcher and participant at ease, establish rapport

Objectives of the interview shared

Consent form reviewed and signed (in person interviews)

Consent form reviewed, signed in advance, scanned, and emailed (remote interviews)

Participant reminded that they are free to not answer any question and to terminate the interview
at any point

Any questions and concerns are addressed

Interview prompts

- Why a PhD? Why now?

- What were your expectations going in? What educational goals did you set?

- To what extent do you believe you succeeded in meeting those goals?

- What contributed to and what impeded your progress to graduation and how did structural forces intersect with the personal to impact your doctoral experience?

- How did you meet/negotiate /manage the challenges you faced as a doctoral student?

- What about your career trajectory and what if any plans post PhD

- And if you wish to share some information on your growing up in your family, on your parents' educational level, their thoughts, and feelings on post secondary education generally and on you pursuing post secondary education. Also your early schooling, how would you describe your elementary and secondary school experiences?

Closing

Participant thanked and invited to add any last minute thoughts, raise any questions or concerns.

Participant reminded that they would receive a copy of the transcript with any questions, points of clarification I may have. They are encouraged to respond and to raise any questions, concerns, points of clarification of their own as well as any additional information they would like included.

Appendix E. Consent to be Photographed

Re - authorizing consent

Neomi Kronish   xxxx@xxxxxxxx.xx

Mon 23/11/2020 3:57 PM

To: Lois Kamenitz   xxxx@xxxxxxxx.xx

I hereby grant permission to Lois Kamenitz, York University and its representatives to take photographs of me and to reproduce, use, exhibit, display, and distribute these images in any media now known or later developed for promoting, publicizing, or explaining York University and its activities and for administrative, educational, or research purposes.

I understand that the photographs are the property of York University.

Sincerely,

Dr. Neomi Kronish

Dr. Neomi Kronish, PHD
xxxx@xxxxxxx.xx
xxx-xxx-xxxx

Appendix F. Data Analysis Process

Figure A.1

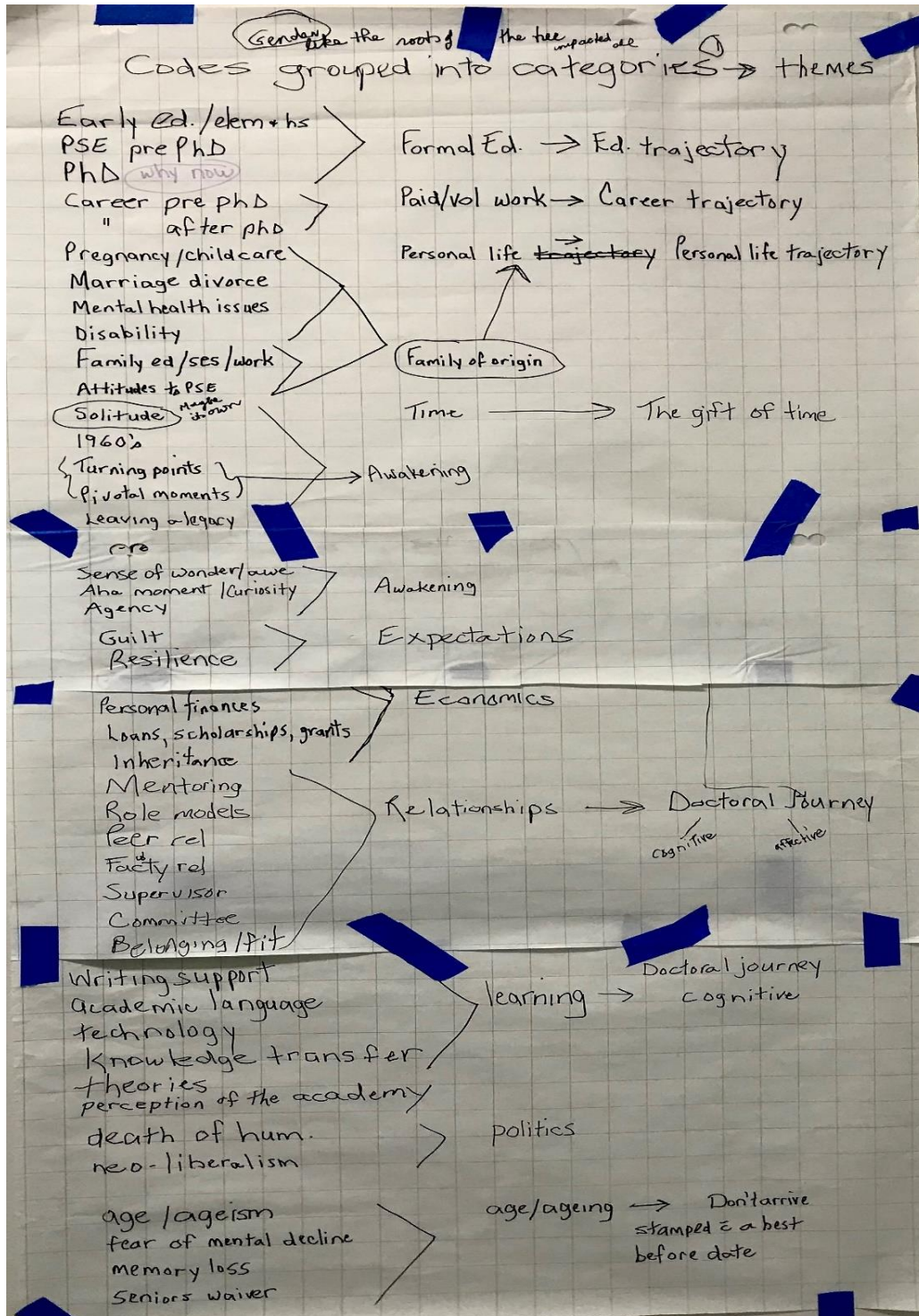*First-Level Data Analysis: 43 Codes*

Condensed Codes

Figure A.3

Codes Grouped into Categories

Figure A.4

Four Possible Themes