

AFTER THE ADULT LEARNING CENTRE:
Rural women: decisions and transitions to Post-Secondary Education

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Dedication

I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't.

Audre Lorde

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Abstract

Adult Learning Centres (ALC) provide opportunities for rural women to complete a high school education and pursue career opportunities that may not have been available to them otherwise. The ALC is the first step towards pursuing post-secondary education (PSE) for many women. The goal of this study was to investigate the process by which rural women decide to pursue PSE, once they have completed their studies at an ALC. A series of semi-structured interviews and journal entries, situated within a case study model, were used to capture the decision-making experience of six rural women (3 who pursued PSE and 3 who did not). Narrative analysis with a feminist lens was used to analyze the data, capture participant voices, and enable the women to “speak for themselves”. Many stories indicated that the patriarchal society that permeates many rural communities played a significant role in whether or not women decided pursue a PSE. Issues related to family and community life, rural gender roles, values attributed to rural gender roles, and supports offered by ALCs were also important. Taken together the results highlight these rural women’s complex decision-making processes when considering educational decisions. This study lends evidence for the unique attributes of women as learners, when considering adult learning theory, and has the capacity to inform those working with rural women at the ALC.

Keywords: adult learning, rural women, transformative learning, patriarchy

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

After the Adult Learning Centre: Rural Women: Decisions and Transitions to Post-Secondary Education

Rural women are a significant group in the Adult Learning Centre (ALC) landscape. The Adult Literacy and Learning Strategic Report (2014-2015) of the province of Manitoba reports that 8,153 adult learners were registered at ALCs in Manitoba in 2014-2015. Of that number, 56% were women. Forty-two publicly and privately funded ALCs exist in Manitoba, of which 27 are situated rurally, outside Winnipeg. Thus, a sizeable percentage of ALC students are rural women in Manitoba.

In the grade 12 Family Studies course I taught at an ALC in rural Manitoba, one of the assignments students were asked to complete was called “Who Decides”. This assignment appeared, at first, to be a simple checklist of daily decisions with three choices “me, we, other”. Initially, when asked to complete the checklist, students would observe that they thought this activity was better suited to high school students, as they, surely, made all their own decisions? After some discussion about decision-making and the impact of family and community on their daily decisions, students started to realize that very few of their decisions were taken independently. This simple classroom activity was a transformative moment in many students’, especially more mature female students’, lives and was instrumental in sparking my curiosity and leading me along this path of research.

My curiosity regarding rural women’s decision-making led to a pilot study that I conducted in 2014, which provided the context, shaped the interview questions, and assisted in formulating the purpose of this research study (Webb, 2014). Building on a snapshot of current demographics of ALCs in Manitoba, this study, therefore, focuses on the decision-making

process of rural women attending an (ALC) in Manitoba, who are considering transitioning to Post-Secondary Education (PSE). To ground myself within the research, I situate myself as a feminist educator with lived rural experience. This chapter concludes with the research questions and objectives.

Pilot Study and Entry Questions for the Research

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that qualitative researchers in education continually ask questions of the people they study to find out what they are experiencing and how they interpret and structure their lives. In the pilot study, I explored what rural women were experiencing in their transition from ALC to PSE (Webb, 2014). To achieve this goal, I asked questions focused on what their educational experiences had been like at the ALC, how well the ALC prepared them for PSE, what barriers they faced in accessing PSE, and their thoughts on why they had successfully managed the transition to PSE. The information gathered from the pilot study enabled me to identify common themes in the women's ALC experiences: the importance of a sense of community and supports at the ALC to promote further learning, spousal resistance and lack of spousal and community support, families as both support structures and barriers to PSE, and personal agency in negotiating the transition (Webb, 2014). One intriguing result that emerged from the study was the influence of patriarchy in rural areas, both overtly via spousal and family/community resistance to further education and covertly through gender role socialization, limiting gender role expectations, as well as limited gendered career choices available to women. This intriguing result sparked my interest to investigate whether patriarchy was a significant factor in rural women's decision-making.

The pilot study did have some limitations; namely, it did not include women who had not continued with their education path from ALC to PSE. The three participants were

representative of a small proportion of rural women at the ALC who had overcome personal and societal barriers, were actively pursuing PSE, and were, thus, only one part of the narrative. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled me to probe and gain some insight, but these insights were limited, as they were not contextualized within the women's lives (Webb, 2014). While I understood how the ALC, their families, and communities had provided support at one stage of their lives, I was unable to see the full picture. Questions such as how the attitudes, values, and role models they had encountered in their families, and in society had shaped their attitudes towards education and their role as women in a rural society remained. To find answers to these questions, I needed to go beyond the semi-structured interview methodology used in the pilot study. I also needed to consider the lens I would adopt in the interview and analysis process. As gender role socialization, limiting gender role expectations, as well as limited gendered career choices had emerged as dominant themes from the pilot study, I decided to adopt a feminist lens anchored in Standpoint theory (Harding, 1991, 1998, 2004; Hartsock, 1998, 2002).

Further potential limitations were that two of the three women self-identified as of Mennonite cultural heritage, and thus introduced a potential cultural bias in the findings that I had not considered. The pilot study also did not consider stage of life and gender role influences (Santrock, 1997; Thacker & Novak, 1991). Finally, although the pilot study gave me an important insight into some of the factors influencing rural women's decision-making at a particular moment in time, it did not address the deeper-rooted questions surrounding how rural women's values, interests, definitions of success, and perceived gender role expectations had impacted their decision-making. The findings and limitations of the study reinforced the need for further research in this field.

Background. Rural women make up a large percentage of ALC students and yet they have been under-represented in the research data on entry into PSE (Stalker, 2001; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). A sizeable amount of research on mature students' transitions into PSE exists, but research glosses over questions of gender, geographic situation, social class, and life-stage (Reay, Ball & David, 2002; Richardson & King, 1998; Stalker, 2001; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). Some research into the lives of rural women in Manitoba exists (Graveline, 1990), and although the information is seminal, it is dated and needs reexamination to determine whether the lives of rural women are still influenced by the same factors identified in earlier research. Recent studies into the lives of rural women in Manitoba (Neustaeter, 2015; Ramsey, Annis & Everitt, 2003; Weir, 2007) have explored the issues of patriarchy, rural identity, and education but have focused on perceptions of rurality, educational contributions, and community involvement rather than the decision-making of rural women regarding PSE. The progress from homemaker to full-time student at a post-secondary institution has also been documented, but very little research on the progress of rural women from rural ALC to PSE exists in Canadian or Manitoban contexts (Bourgeois, 2009; Bundy, 2004; Lien, 2001). Neustaeter (2015) supports this view and, in a review of literature on gender and rural research, contends that while a body of literature exists in Australia, New Zealand, and Europe, very little exists in Canada.

The Vanier Institute in Canada has, historically, collected data and published research on rural families in Canada, but a great deal of the research is dated (The Family in the Evolution of Agriculture, 1968) and none of it is related specifically to rural adult education. More recently, the Vanier Institute (2012) published research related to rural PSE attendance, but it is not reflective of the group of rural women captured in my study, as it is focused on high school leavers and their PSE attendance rates. While there has been a body of research, within

the realm of adult education, concerned with women and learning (Hayes & Flannery, 2000), very little research has been focused on women in the adult learning area of Transformative Learning Theory (English & Peters, 2012). For example, English and Peters (2012) point out that the *Journal for Transformative Education*, the primary place for publication of articles on transformative learning, has only published seven articles directly concerned with women in the past decade. According to their survey of the extant literature on transformative learning, the focus has been on women's learning as relational and supportive and has rarely focused on an application of transformative learning theory (English & Peters, 2012). More recently, Neustaeter (2015) incorporated women's learning in her study of rurality and gender in Manitoba, but the focus of her research was on community involvement and not educational decision-making.

Because a significant percentage of students at rural ALCs, as shown in the section above, are women and many of them transition to PSE, it is important for ALC policy-makers and PSE administrators to understand the decisions of rural women regarding PSE and how and why they are making those decisions. I also wish to give rural women a voice. More on-line outreach from PSE institutions to rural Manitobans is anticipated at the PSE level; therefore, more rural women will in all likelihood choose to continue their PSE journey (Government of Manitoba, 2012). The voices of rural women are acknowledged as being significantly valuable to the study, practices, and decision-making of adult education and PSE. To that end, the findings of this study will add to the literature in the adult and post-secondary education field, and contribute to planning for the needs of students who transition from rural ALC's and enter PSE. To adopt a feminist perspective, I need to situate myself in the research (DeVault &

Gross, 2007). Therefore, in the next section I situate myself in the research and explain why I have used a feminist lens to frame the research study.

Situating Myself

DeVault and Gross (2007) suggest that feminist scholars operate “reflexively and relationally” and thus must consider their own biographies and contexts before they consider their research (p. 173). Furthermore, as this research is formulated within the narrative inquiry framework, Clandinin and Connelly (2000), state “it is crucial to be able to articulate a personal relationship between one’s personal interests and a sense of significance and larger concerns expressed in the works and lives of others” (p. 122).

I situate myself as a feminist and as a white, socio-economically advantaged woman with “lived rural experience”. While recognizing that there many feminisms, and as a white, socio-economically advantaged woman, I can only reflect from this perspective, feminism, to me, means a way of thinking that seeks to challenge assumptions about what people can and cannot do and promotes equality for all people (Holl, 2004).

My feminist roots and principles evolved from my mother who promoted equal education for her daughters and affirmed the feminist principle of equality for women in all spheres. My lived experience, as a woman in the deeply patriarchal society of 1970s and 1980s South Africa, shaped my thinking on issues of gender equality. My years of post-secondary education gave me knowledge and understanding of feminist thinking. Two prominent feminist scholars, Dorothy Smith (1987, 2005) and Sandra Harding (1993,1998, 2004), have shaped my thinking and have provided the focus of the feminist lens used in this study. Standpoint Theory (Smith, 1987, 2005), asserts that in societies that have been stratified by race, gender or class (to name but a few), the “activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on what

persons who perform such activities can understand about themselves and the world around them” (Harding, 1993, p. 54). Therefore, the voices of those inside the society need to be given a voice. By giving voice to the people, in this case rural women, who experience the situation as opposed to those who report it, I can provide a starting point for the discussion. In taking up the standpoint of rural women, I wish to give attention and expression to their issues.

My interest in rural women and their pursuit of post-secondary education began when I started teaching at an ALC in a town in rural Manitoba, a rural hub in the southeast part of the province. Our family immigrated to Canada in 2002 from a farm in South Africa. I had lived and taught in a rural area for the 20 years prior to our move and been deeply involved in the farming and teaching community. My childhood and young adult years had been in an urban environment, so when I moved to a small town, in 1982, in rural South Africa to assume my first teaching position, I was immediately struck by the differences between rural and urban populations. Besides the limited cultural and arts opportunities afforded by small town living, attitudes to women were different. Women assumed more traditional roles, such as homemaker, after marriage and gender roles were more clearly defined. At first, I struggled to reconcile my feminist beliefs with the patriarchal structure of the rural community. However, as time passed many post-secondary educated women, including myself, married into the rural community, and we brought with us the social capital acquired in the city. This social capital translated into changed values and beliefs associated with gender and education when rearing our children and contributing to the community.

Upon arrival in Canada, I took part-time work in both the public school system and in the adult education system, as well as studying part-time through the University of Manitoba.

Increasingly, I felt drawn to the adult education sphere because of my experience as an adult learner at the university and the unique and interesting challenges my adult students faced.

In 2006, I started teaching courses in family studies, psychology, and career development, which involved working closely with students in both a career counselling and mentoring capacity. The majority of students at the ALC were women and many of them were juggling child-care commitments with part-time jobs and study. A common theme in their lives was the desire to complete their high school and be role models for their children. Many of them expressed the desire to continue studying after the completion of their grade 12 diplomas and to achieve their lifetime dreams of becoming professionals. However, I noticed that although they had the academic ability, the desire, and in many the cases the financial resources, many women did not pursue further education. I became curious about the barriers they faced and, based on numerous career-counselling sessions, wondered about the impact of social support networks and gender expectations within the community. Were the women in the 21st century, in Southeast Manitoba, subject to the same rural-community gender expectations that I had witnessed as a newly married woman in a farming community in the 1980s, in South Africa?

I recall a conversation among rural women that I overheard in the 1980s concerning a newly married woman living on a farm in the community. She had recently taken up correspondence studies in a degree program. Rather than express admiration for her determination, they were concerned that she was neglecting her husband by refusing to interrupt her study time to serve him his coffee! While this incident happened in the 1980s, Teather (2014) reports that this collusion with the patriarchal structure of farm life by women has not changed. Neustaeter (2015) suggests that being identified as a feminist in a rural area can

sometimes create social isolation and a rift with the community whose social inclusion is essential. I wondered, for the rural women at the ALC, were gender role expectations sufficient to restrain women from pursuing their dreams, or were there other barriers? Was I merely generalizing my experiences as a newly married woman in a farming community to all rural communities? Perhaps this was not a problem of patriarchal structures but one of prevailing rural attitudes to education? Or perhaps rural attitudes to education were also framed by patriarchal structures?

As stated previously, as a feminist scholar, I acknowledge that because of historical and positional differences there is no commonality of gender experience (DeVault & Gross, 2007), and that my experience as a rural woman and teacher gives me access to one aspect of rural women's lives and a situated knowledge and perspective. I also acknowledge, that as a former educator I once held a position of power over the participants. Viewed through a feminist lens (Harding, 1993; Smith, 1987, 2005) and guided by the literature on rural women in education (Ambrose & Kechnie, 1999; Carbert, 1996; Cox, 1997; Harrison, 2012; Little, 2012), principles of adult learning theory as expounded by Knowles (1980) and Mezirow (1991), and *Women as Learners* (Hayes & Flannery, 2000), I formulated a conceptual framework for my study.

Research Questions and Purpose

While the most intriguing result of the pilot study – the influence of patriarchy in rural women's decision-making – became the finding I most wished to explore, I did not wish to bias the study towards this one finding (Webb, 2014). The over-arching goal of this study was to explain how women's values, experiences, and attitudes had shaped their decision-making related to PSE. I deliberately kept the scope of the research questions broad to allow other potential themes to emerge and to prevent potential bias. Thus, the following question provided

the direction for this research study: How and why do rural women decide to continue with their education to a PSE level after leaving an ALC and, if they do transition to PSE, how do they experience that transition? To understand rural women's decision-making, I looked to the literature on rural women and education (Dolan & Thien 2008; Kubik & Moore, 2013; Leach, 2013; Neustaeter, 2015; Pini, 2003) as well as the results of the pilot study (Webb, 2014). The two broad concepts that emerged and were used to develop both the guiding questions, the interview, and journal questions were: (a) the experiences, barriers, and supports along the journey from ALC to PSE, and (b) the attitudes, values, and beliefs surrounding gender and education that played a significant role in the decision-making process of rural women.

The guiding questions were:

1. What influences the decision-making of rural women to return to formalized education at an ALC and, later, to PSE?
2. What is the process like for rural women in the transition from ALC to PSE?
3. How have attitudes, values, and role models they have encountered in their lives shaped their attitudes towards their education?
4. Do rural women encounter barriers in their desire to fulfill their educational goals?
5. What specific barriers do rural women encounter in envisioning educational goals when they are focused on existing resources and potential opportunities (resource-based planning vs goal-centered planning; Deacon and Firebaugh, 1988)

Specifically, the objectives of this research were to: a) record and transcribe the stories of rural women who had graduated from an ALC and were choosing, or not choosing, to transition to PSE; b) collect and analyze stories of women's pathways, using narrative case studies and themes extrapolated from the findings; and c) report on and discuss the research

findings within the context of rurality, adult learning theory, and women as learners. The research findings and narratives were collected and used to determine whether the same barriers identified in the pilot study, the patriarchal system in rural areas, was indeed the biggest deterrent to PSE or whether other factors could be identified (Webb, 2014). In this research, I attempted to go beyond the traditional access-based studies on women and barriers to PSE that focus on socio-economic and single-parent obstacles and examine the barriers rural women encounter to illuminate our understanding of rural women, their learning, and societal impacts on their decision-making (Lien, 2001; Phillips, 2008; Reay, Ball & David, 2002).

Chapter Summary

Chapter I examined the current profile of Adult Learning in Manitoba. The chapter also highlighted the research problem and research questions. A summary of the pilot study, as well as the limitations of the pilot study, was included to provide context and focus to further research questions (Webb, 2014). I situated myself as a rural woman, an educator, and shared my journey of feminist curiosity (Enloe, 2004). An introduction to the theoretical concepts was included, as well as a chapter summary.

Overview of following chapters. Chapter II is comprised of a review of the literature dealing with rural women their roles, values and educational aspirations. A historical background of the development of rural women's learning opportunities in Canada is included to provide context for rural women's education in the 21st century. Issues and implications of what it means to be rural are explored, focusing on what it means to be a rural woman. A theory of adult learning, andragogy, (Knowles, 1980), is presented as the starting point for a theoretical framework of this study. Mezirow's Transformative Learning (1991) is introduced to add further dimension to adult learning theory. To supplement the theory of adult learning, the

significance of gender in adult learning (Hayes & Flannery, 2000) is added. A feminist lens, based on Standpoint Theory, is maintained throughout because of the themes of gender-role expectations and patriarchal hegemony that emerged from the pilot study (Webb, 2014). The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature reviewed.

Chapter III presents the research methods and methodology employed. A rationale for the use of qualitative research is offered, and an explanation is given of why narrative research design was selected and what it entails. In Chapter III, I also explain how the research was conducted and how data were collected and stored. The chapter concludes with a discussion of potential research limitations, ethical considerations, and a summary.

Chapter IV introduces the women who participated in the study, and I give voice to the six participants by including their narratives in a restoried account of their learning journey. Their narratives are restoried following the outline of the questions presented in their interviews and journals. The chapter concludes with a self-reflective narrative and summary.

Chapter V presents the research findings and the extracted themes from the findings. The themes are represented in a figure, Figure 1, and I identify and explain the similarities and differences between the participants in each of the themes identified. The voices of the participants are integrated throughout the discussion of the themes. The chapter concludes with a summary.

In the concluding chapter, Chapter VI, I discuss the issues arising from the thematic analysis in Chapter V and the recommendations flowing from the findings. The themes identified in Chapter V are analyzed according to Knowles' (1980) theory of adult learning, Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning, and Hayes and Flannery's (2000) women as learners. As a feminist lens is employed throughout, the discussion will conclude with a self-

reflective section. The limitations of the research and recommendations for future study are also included.

CHAPTER II Literature Review

People do not hold values, make decisions, or live in a vacuum: contextualization matters (Bourgeois, 2009). In this chapter, I provide a brief history of the initiatives aimed at educating rural women in Canada to contextualize the development of learning opportunities for rural women in the last century. My goal in including an account of learning opportunities for rural women in Canada is not to provide a detailed history but, simply, to provide a contextual frame to the discussion. Three distinct women's initiatives: the Women's Institutes, the Homemaker's Clubs, and public and private library movements emerged as powerful, early, educational influences and are examined, along with short discussion of the role of the National Farm Radio Forum (NFRF), to gain an understanding of the emergence of informal educational opportunities in rural communities in Canada (Ambrose & Kechnie, 1999; Beattie, 1999; Carbert, 1996; Maclean & Rollwagen, 2008; MacLeod, 1997; Magee, 2009; Ohliger, 1968).

To articulate what it means to be a rural woman, I attempt a broad definition of rurality and what the implications of being a rural woman are. An examination of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980; Mezirow, 1991), coupled with research on Women as Learners, (Hayes & Flannery, 2000) is included to understand the women in this study, as learners, and to establish the theoretical framework for my study. Finally, the feminist lens through which this study is viewed, is explained. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Historical Overview of the Education of Rural Women in Canada

The education of rural women was, historically, most frequently supported by grassroots social movements and, at times, run by government agencies that provided the basis of adult learning initiatives for rural women in Canada (Welton, 2013). Many of the early rural

education initiatives focused on health care and even today, there is ample evidence that rural women are inundated with education that is mainly health focused (Chapman, Kreitzer, Ray, & Westman Integrated Strategy for Health Inc. Health Promotion & Education Committee, 1993; Johns, 2013; Petrucka & Smith, 2008), perhaps to maintain the viability of the rural family and farm (Vanier Institute, 1968). Early initiatives to promote rural education – the Ontario Women’s Institute, the Saskatchewan Homemakers’ Clubs, the Alberta Native Homemakers’ Clubs, the Prairie and Maritime libraries, and the Farm Radio Forum – provided the first experience of community-based adult education for many rural women (Ambrose & Kechnie, 1999; Carbert, 1996; Cox, 1997; Harrison, 2012; Little, 2012; Maclean & Rollwagen, 2008; MacLeod, 1997; Magee, 2009). While many of the early organizations and initiatives included in this chapter may not have identified themselves as feminist, the underlying goals and values that they were founded on reflect the central premise of feminism: equality (Neustaeter, 2015).

Women’s institutes. In the early part of the 20th century, membership in the Women’s Institute (WI) marked a rite of passage for many women in rural Canada. New brides typically received a year’s free membership in the local branch of the WI (Carbert, 1996). Carbert (1996) suggests in “For Home and Country: Women’s Institutes in Ontario” that the Women’s Institutes, begun in 1897 under the supervision of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, did not immediately appeal to the working farmers’ wives. By the turn of the century, the three founding branches of the WI were struggling to survive (Ambrose & Kechnie, 1999). The WI did not appeal to hard-working, lower-income farmers’ wives, as many of them did not have the time or any interest in what the WI had to offer (Ambrose & Kechnie, 1999; Carbert, 1996). In 1899, George Creelman, Superintendent of the Farmer’s Institutes, tried to intervene and proposed a school of domestic science for farmers’ daughters and funds to begin women’s

groups in the rural areas of Ontario (Ambrose & Kechnie, 1999). Only this change in direction, brought about by a realization that as long as the Farmer's Institutes and Women's Institutes were government organized they would never flourish, resulted in the revival and growth of the WI movement (Carbert, 1996). When the women became co-creators of their learning, they whole-heartedly embraced the concept of the WI.

Although it may be argued that the WI initially only served the interests of middle-class town dwellers and affluent farmer's wives, it eventually found resonance with many rural women. Despite the fact that the WI has often been deemed "little more than an outlet for 'tea and trivia'" (Ambrose & Kechnie, 1999, p. 231) it was one of the first and most durable learning opportunities for rural women in Canada. In fact, one of the main reasons the WI branches in the rural areas eventually flourished was because, according to Ambrose and Kechnie (1999), "these groups provided rural women with access to education, a luxury which most women in early twentieth-century Ontario would otherwise never have enjoyed" (p. 236). Not only did the WI provide educational opportunities to rural women, but more importantly the WI has been recently viewed by scholars as an early feminist attempt to validate the role of women on farms (Ambrose & Kechnie, 1999; Neustaeter, 2015; Walby, 2011; Welton, 1995).

In 1910, a group of women from Morris, in rural south Manitoba, asked Premier Roblin for support to set up an organization similar to the WI in Ontario (Cox, 1997; Manitoba Women's Institute, 1980). As Premier Roblin had been considering a similar structure for some time, he suggested that the Department of Agriculture set up comparable organizations province wide called Household Science Associations (Cox, 1997). Two professors from the Manitoba Agricultural College, Miss A. Juniper and Miss M. Kennedy toured the province and, by 1911, had visited 23 communities and set up 17 Household Science Associations (Cox, 1997;

Manitoba Women's Institute, 1980). Initially, the lectures hosted by the Household Science Organizations focused on health and household management related topics, but during the First World War they became involved in assisting the soldiers abroad and the Children's Aid Society (Cox, 1997 Manitoba Women's Institute, 1980). After the war, the Household Science Associations were renamed Women's Institutes, so as to be associated with the Federated Women's Institute of Canada. This change would give them more bargaining power in the turbulent politically charged era of women's emancipation (Cox, 1997; Manitoba Women's Institute, 1980). Throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s the WI of Manitoba continued to advocate on behalf of women in the areas of libraries, restrooms, and hospitals. Many of their programs focused on health care, personal growth, and informal opportunities for education (Cox, 1997; Manitoba Women's Institute, 1980). A combination of the educational opportunities provided by the WI, as well as the greater political involvement by women in the 20th century, empowered rural women to engage in their communities and realize the opportunities available to them.

While the WI was emerging as an opportunity for education in rural Manitoba, the Homemakers' Clubs in Saskatchewan and Alberta played a pivotal role in providing education and support to rural women in these provinces. By 1913, the University of Saskatchewan had established a Department of Women's Work and the Director's role was to "support and guide the Homemakers' Clubs" (MacLean & Rollwagen, 2008, p. 227). The Homemakers Clubs spread and very quickly became one of the main areas of informal learning for rural girls and women. Yet again, it was in the sphere of public health that the Homemakers' Clubs had the greatest educational impact. While many of the early initiatives in the rural areas no longer exist, the WI continues to exist in some rural communities allowing women to continue to "use

the gendered nature of their roles as mothers and caregivers to fight for social change” (Neustaeter, 2015, p. 105).

Native homemakers’ clubs. Adult education, traditionally, within Aboriginal communities has been part of lifelong learning and centered on reinforcing the values of love, kindness, humility, honesty, and respect (Hawkins, 1997). Adulthood was not marked by a particular age but by a life transition, which indicated that the person had acquired the skills and maturity to be considered adult (Hawkins, 1997). Learning was mostly informal and experiential and considered necessary to survival (Hawkins, 1997). When individuals chose to develop their abilities, they did so for the benefit of their community and not for their own benefit (Hawkins, 1997). These principles of adult learning were the ones that the Aboriginal women incorporated in the Native Homemaker’s clubs of Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

The Native Homemakers’ Clubs of Saskatchewan were founded at the instigation of Dr. Thomas Robertson, Indian Agency Inspector for Saskatchewan, with the first club operating in Saskatchewan in 1937 (Magee, 2009). Soon these clubs would spread throughout the country. Dr. Robertson believed that there was a “direct correlation between the lack of Native women’s organizations on reserves and their low standards of living” (Magee, 2009, p.28). The clubs proved to be extremely popular and in 1955 there were 185 clubs across the country (Magee, 2009). The Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) was very encouraged by the success of these clubs and allocated funds to support the clubs. Magee (2009) notes that while the Homemakers’ Clubs are one of the few early Aboriginal women’s movements of the twentieth century, relatively little attention has been paid “to the role the clubs played in the lives of Aboriginal women” (p.29). Because little attention has been paid to their role in the lives of Aboriginal

women, they are important to include in this study as they provide important context to the discussion around educational opportunities and personal agency for Aboriginal women.

The initial set-up of the clubs depended on the acquisition of three things: a sewing machine, funds for supplies, and a meeting place (Magee, 2009). Magee (2009) notes that, although sewing was the main focus of many of the clubs, lectures about childcare, health issues and sanitation were organized by the members without “any supervision or direction from the DIA” (p.35). The broadening of educational initiatives led to involvement in community life in many different realms, and Magee (2009) states that it is only when one examines the projects undertaken by the clubs that one “comes to understand the significant participation of Native women in all aspects of community life” (p. 37). Not only did the clubs help in the education of women on the reserves, they also contributed to the whole community; government reports between 1940 and 1954 link the overall improvement in “quality and standards of education on the reserves” directly to the Homemakers’ Clubs (Magee, 2009, p. 42). Beyond the daily improvement in women’s lives the Clubs also were an “expression of women’s agency within their own communities” (Magee, 2009, p. 43). This “expression of agency” was important in empowering Aboriginal women within their community and in their dealing with the DIA. Perceptions of Aboriginal women held by administrators of the DIA became positive. However, they did not foresee one of the consequences of the creation of a National Native Women’s network, namely, the building of political awareness amongst Aboriginal women (Magee, 2009). These formal structures provided limited educational opportunities to native rural women, but they were important first steps.

The Native Homemakers Clubs of Alberta, like the Saskatchewan clubs, not only fostered sewing skills but also promoted education and facilitated a sense of personal agency.

Magee, (2009) explores the nature and role of the Alberta Native Homemakers' Clubs in promoting adult education, activism, and agency among Aboriginal women in Alberta and concludes that these clubs contributed significantly to the development of future organized movements and government initiatives involved in Native education, social assistance, and child welfare.

Libraries as centres of rural learning. The founding and expansion of libraries across the rural areas of Canada were crucial to the informal education of rural women. Free public libraries were key to the education of rural women because regardless of income level or geographic location information could be accessed and shared. Not only were many of the early libraries founded and supported by women, but also were it not for pioneers like Mary Kinley Ingraham and Lady Tweedsmuir, libraries would not have reached the remote and rural areas of Canada (Harrison, 2012).

Mary Kinley Ingraham devoted her life to “connecting people to the written word” (Harrison, 2012, p. 75). Based in the Maritimes, her legacy is not only her work as Chief Librarian at Acadia University, but also her initiative to start the first bookmobile service (Harrison, 2012). She had already offered a mail order library to rural communities for many years; however, the bookmobile would be the first library of this kind in Canada (Harrison, 2012). The population in the Maritime Provinces was historically less affluent and less educated and, as Ingraham noted, the service brought “a new inheritance to the people in the villages, hamlets, and farming districts, people who had never seen books in ordered and useful mass” (Harrison, 2012, p. 85).

Public libraries had, in the last half of the nineteenth century, been part of government institutions and were frequently too expensive for the average working class person to access.

With the involvement of people like Ingraham and funding from large donors like the Carnegie Corporation, the emergence of free public libraries slowly made reading and education accessible to all people (Harrison, 2012). The Carnegie library demonstration, in June 1933 on Prince Edward Island, is an example of how the founding of a free public library had a dramatic impact on all aspects of rural community life (Harrison, 2012). Norma Bateson had been chosen to lead the project to initiate the founding of a modern library service on PEI, and in the pursuit of this ideal, meetings were held, committees were formed and study groups, “for the purposes of adult education” were formulated (Harrison, 2012, p. 93). When the “book car” could not travel in the winter months, the WI local branches distributed books (Harrison, 2012). This collaboration between library services and the WI illustrates not only how important access to knowledge and education was to rural women, but also how rural women’s organizations took the initiative to foster access to education.

Access to reading and libraries in rural areas was well developed in Ontario and the Maritimes by the early half of the twentieth century, but this was not the case in the Prairie Provinces. Susan Buchan, Lady Tweedsmuir, wife of the Governor General to Canada (1935-1940), describes her first visit to western Canada:

We first saw the southern Prairies in the tragic days when long drought had made the land into a desert (...) The only feature of the place that was not depressing was the fortitude and optimism of the people. I enquired of some of the women what I could do for them, and they asked me to send them books. (Little, 2012, p. 103)

Public libraries did exist in these provinces, but they were situated mainly in the cities and many were not free. In Manitoba, volunteers belonging to the WI ran almost 75 percent of

the public libraries in Winnipeg (Little, 2012). Lady Tweedsmuir, as a consequence, met with the WIs in Manitoba and Alberta during her tour to find out how she could send books to the remote areas (Little, 2012). With funding, Lady Tweedsmuir believed she would be able to “stiffen up the scheme tremendously with really good books, and make it a real venture in adult education” (Little, 2012, p.107). In 1937, the Carnegie Corporation granted her funds of \$1500 and the Lady Tweedsmuir Prairie Libraries were founded (Little, 2012). Lady Tweedsmuir involved the women in the WI in her library scheme, and the WI branches on the prairies ran many of the libraries (Little, 2012). In Saskatchewan, the Homemakers Clubs handled the sorting and distribution of the books (Little, 2012). All three of these organizations: the WI, the Homemakers’ Clubs, and the Libraries laid the foundations for and contributed immensely to the formal and informal education of rural women across Canada. Consequently, the history of these organizations is vital to understand because it forms an integral part of our understanding of how women became involved in fostering, developing, and co-creating their educational opportunities.

National farm radio forum. A final adult education initiative that impacted rural women directly, and is worthy of mention, was the combined initiative of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE), the Canadian Broadcasting Association (CBC), and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFE) (Beattie, 1999; MacLeod, 1997; Ohliger, 1968). This education initiative covered topics important to the lives of rural women and provided access to information critical to their decision-making in many areas of their lives. Launched in 1941, the National Farm Radio Forum (NFRF), and later the Citizens Forum (CF) in 1943, provided educational opportunities to rural communities in Canada from coast-to-coast (MacLeod, 1997; Ohliger, 1968; Welton, 2013). At its peak in the period 1949-1950, 1,600

discussion groups with approximately 30,000 members existed across rural Canada (Ohliger, 1968). Every Monday evening farm men and women would gather at an appointed home to listen to topics of importance to the farming community (MacLeod, 1997). Topics ranged from the cost of food for local consumers during the war to the future of rural schools (CBC Archives, 1943). The broad range of opinions, the creation of discussion communities, and the relevance of the topics to the farming communities made the NFRF a unique rural adult education tool, and one which, when it ended in 1965, left a void in the adult education landscape (Beattie, 1999; Welton, 2013).

To provide context to the lives and decision-making of the rural women in this study, I presented a brief history of the major influences in adult education in rural communities. Many of the historic influences in the field of adult education have been in the informal education sector via community organizations and public services. Rural women in this short history have been seen to be initiators and co-creators of their learning, and not only used the learning opportunities to benefit themselves but also used “the gendered nature of their roles as mothers and caregivers to fight for social change” (Neustaeter, 2015, p. 105). Furthermore, when examining the values, attitudes, and beliefs influencing rural women’s decision-making, regarding education, it is important to remember the rich history of rural women’s involvement in initiating their educational opportunities.

Rurality and What It Means to be a Rural Woman

In order to explore the factors that shape the decision-making experiences of rural woman in Canada, it is important to understand what it means to be rural. In terms of demographics and economic resources, rural communities differ greatly from each other (Wallin, 2003). Neustaeter (2015) states that rurality “encompasses the imagined and

experienced conditions of being rural” (p.100). Several definitions of rurality exist; some define it by geographic area such as population size, density, and location (Parkins & Reed, 2013; Ramsey, Annis & Everitt, 2003), while comprehensive and detailed descriptions of typically rural may include economic, social, and ecological attributes (Ramsey et al., 2003).

In this section on rurality, I have included the socio-cultural descriptions of rurality to facilitate a better understanding of the values and attitudes of the participants and the Statistics Canada population density measure to explain why the participants are viewed as rural. Both the socio-cultural and demographic explanations are important to understanding this study, as many people, as demonstrated in the pilot study, do not view themselves as rural if they live in urban centres in rural areas (Webb, 2014). Situated within the socio-cultural concepts of rurality, rural women have not only been influenced by their situation but have also formulated their beliefs, values and attitudes about their place in rural society. The section on rurality concludes with what the literature says about rural women’s perceptions of themselves and how it affects their views of education and PSE.

Demographic definition of rurality. In demographic terms, Statistics Canada (2012) defines the rural census population as those who live outside settlements with 1, 000 or more people and a population density of 400 people per square kilometer or fewer. Rural definitions are frequently formulated by using a comparison to urban, and what being urban means. Expanding on the Statistics Canada (2012) definition and related to the dilemma of categorization posed by the rural-urban fringe areas, Ramsey et al. (2003) cite a framework, created by Flora et al. (1992) that includes three categories: rural, less-urbanized, and urbanized. This framework is similar to the framework adopted by the Organization for

Economic Cooperation and Development, which looks at rural as it relates to, or borders on, urban, metropolitan areas (Ramsey et al., 2003).

Historically, the definition of what constitutes a rural population in Canada is problematic because up until 1941 the federal government's distinction between urban and rural was based on the kind of local government people lived under; it had very little to do with population density or economic activity (Sandwell, 2013). The Dominion Bureau of Statistics, a predecessor to Statistics Canada that has data going back to 1871, shows that it was only by 1941 that the majority of Canadians (51 percent) lived in communities larger than 1,000 people (Sandwell, 2013). In the pilot study participants revealed that they were confused by the term "rural" and saw it as strictly applicable to people who lived on farms or who made a living by farming (Webb, 2014). To prevent confusion for the participants of this current research study, the term rural, and a "rural woman" in Manitoba will be defined as any woman who originates from and resides in an area defined by Statistics Canada (2011) as rural (population less than 1,000) or a small urban area (1,000 to 29,999).

Socio-cultural definition of rurality. What is the socio-cultural definition of rurality? Paradoxically, a socio-cultural definition of rurality is both simple and complex because while most people have an understanding of what rural means geographically, stereotypes, assumptions and misconceptions of rural life have made the conversation about rurality complex and have resulted in varying definitions of rurality (Deavers, 1992). One perception of rural life and rural communities is that they are more conservative than urban communities, but because of economic and demographic influences this may no longer be the case (Wallin, 2003). Wallin (2003) further contends that because rural communities deal with many issues in vastly different ways, it is difficult to make a generalized statement about what is typically

rural. Neustaeter (2015) concludes her description of what is rural by saying: “Rural and rurality are defined by functional, imagined, and experienced factors laden with values, beliefs, and cultural images associated with human community, development and modernization” (p. 103). Woods (2005) describes rurality in terms of a socio-cultural phenomenon. Based on the distinction made by Ferdinand Tonnies in the late 1800s, Woods (2005) differentiates between the dehumanizing experience of urban life and the ideal experience of rural life. This approach is very much in line with the social representation approach identified by present day scholars, which has less to do with population density and more to do with the rural way of life (Hughes, 1997; Parkins & Reed, 2013; Ramsey et al., 2003). A socio-cultural definition recognizes both the quantitative (population density, geographic area) and qualitative (values, attitudes) aspects of rurality (Hughes, 1997; Ramsey et al., 2003). According to Hughes (1997) rurality is culturally defined and must be seen in both the historic and social contexts.

Linked to the culturally defined notion of rurality is the home, which is frequently represented as the heart of the community (Hughes, 1997). Some have argued that the woman’s natural place is at the centre of the home and the community, nurturing and caring for her family (Nead, 1988; Little, 1987; Hughes, 1997). The Vanier (2012) report on the state of the family farm in Canada supports this perspective and still discusses the role of the rural woman as a supporting one to her husband, although 27% of farmers in Canada are now female. Women may, themselves, hold onto this idyllic notion of what their natural role is without considering how it perpetuates stereotyped gender roles and their own subordination (Neustaeter, 2015). The above-mentioned notions of rurality are important to reflect on when considering the values and attitudes the participants in this study.

Roles and realities of rural women. If the “natural” role of women is central to perpetuating the notions of idyllic domestic life in rural communities (Hughes, 1997), then what does it mean to be a rural woman? Research from the U.S. suggests that gender roles tend to be more traditional and defined in rural areas (Bundy, 2004; Dolan & Thien 2008; Kubik & Moore, 2013; Leach, 2013; Pini, 2003). Within farming families, traditional gender roles frequently allow a man to be dominant in both the family and the production sphere, according his contribution greater prestige and status (Gerrard, Thurstone, Scott & Meadows, 2005; Kubik & Moore, 2013; Pini, 2003). Traditional gender role beliefs that farming is a man’s occupation and that a woman is the “farmwife” and “helper” continue to foster the dependent nature of the rural woman (Kubik & Moore, 2013).

This situation is slowly changing in Canada as uncertain economic conditions have propelled many more women into the workforce and thus the “traditional role” stereotypes have had to change (Pini, 2003; Wallin, 2003). Although many women are beginning to be more involved in the farming enterprise, many still do not recognize their own contributions. In fact, because much of the work done by women on farms is invisible, and all of it is unpaid, the mythical belief that they do not contribute to the farming enterprise or cannot farm in their own right is perpetuated (Kubik & Moore, 2013; Teather, 1996). Research into the physical health and psychological well-being of farm women conducted by Kubik and Moore (2013) found that while 67% of women indicated that the farming enterprise could not continue without their off-farm income, most still did not see their contribution as significant to the farm. Women in the 2013 Saskatchewan study (Kubik & Moore,2013), as in other studies among rural women, perceived their contributions to the household as less worthy of status than their husband’s because their contributions are unpaid and part of a woman’s role (Bundy, 2004; Dolan &

Thien, 2008; Gerrard et al. 2005; Teather, 1996). Because rural women are seen as caregivers and rural men are seen as providers and decision makers, these gender-role beliefs contribute to limited options outside of the home for women (Leach, 2013).

The traditional conception of gender roles leads to isolation from political and economic power in rural communities, and a scan of women in leadership roles in their communities in Manitoba found that while women were in the majority on school boards – making up 60% of the trustees – when it came to town and municipal councils there were hardly any women in leadership roles (Leach, 2013; Neustaeter, 2015). Community involvement for rural women is also frequently limited to activities consistent with the rural domestic life ideology (Hughes, 1997; Leach, 2013; Reed, 2003). Nearly half the women who took part in Neustaeter’s (2015) research study stated that they did not see gender playing a role in the positions they had assumed. However, Neustaeter (2015) states that the majority of community roles the women assumed were tied to “traditionally female concerns” (p. 109), indicating that gender stills plays a large role in rural community involvement.

When the few empowering, but unpaid, socio-political structures for rural women (Farm Women’s Bureau, Farm Women’s Initiative, Canadian Farm Women’s Education Council, Farm Women’s Advancement Program and the Rural Childcare Initiative) were discontinued in 1998, Gerrard et al. (2005) reported that women in their study on the effects of the erosion of support programs for farm women experienced a sense of disempowerment coupled with a return to invisibility. The invisibility of the farmwoman’s work, coupled with gendered rural values, makes rural women a vulnerable and frequently voiceless group in the rural community (Bundy, 2004, Leach, 2013; Teather, 1996). While Pini (2003) asserts that much has changed in Australia, New Zealand and Canada for rural women, she acknowledges that what has not

changed is the “intransigence of gender relations . . . and the patriarchal structure of the family farm” (p.215).

Economic limitations, uncertainty, and change, cannot be ignored in considering what it means to be a rural woman. The reasons for poverty have, historically, often been closely associated with the foregoing of education and career advancement, as women’s roles were limited to running the home and raising the children (Graveline, 1990). Further, because rural women were, and sometimes still are, often involved in a personal relationship, for example marriage, with the “oppressor”, they were strongly affected by the “male-dominated milieu” in which they live and, thus experienced guilt when they did not accept the status quo (Graveline, 1990, p.175). While Graveline’s (1990) work is seminal in understanding rural women in Manitoba, it is now dated. New research in this field reveals that rural communities in Saskatchewan have risen to the challenges presented by economic uncertainty and have diversified, allowing women to assume greater roles outside of the home and in their communities (Wallin, 2003). Neustaeter’s (2015) study involving rural women in Manitoba supports Graveline’s (1990) findings that the socio-cultural value system in rural areas still place the burden of career sacrifice and stay-at-home parenting on women, but does not specifically address career opportunities and advancement for women in rural areas. Further research is warranted to determine whether some of these issues are still facing rural women in Manitoba today.

Rural women and education. In studies of rural communities in the U.S., Bundy (2004) reports that family as well as community and church are extremely important to rural women. Rural women and their families hold traditional gender role values and as a result these women are discouraged from attending post-secondary education (PSE). Some families see education,

especially college attendance, as a way of getting out of work (Bundy, 2004). Bundy (2004) cites a dissertation study by Day-Perroots (1991) that found that in rural West Virginia, while rural girls did well at a high school level and frequently outperformed boys, they had lower college attendance rates. The reasons given for girls failing to proceed with their education were geographic isolation, lack of community support, and rigidly defined gender roles and expectations (Bundy, 2004). A well developed sense of loyalty to the family and the high value placed on motherhood and marriage are values cited as being of greater importance than pursuing an education (Alloway & Gilbert, 2003; Bundy, 2004; Corbett, 2007; Pinhorn, 2002)

Bourgeois (2009) cites Davis (1998) in her study of enrolment of rural women in PSE in Newfoundland; Davis (1998) found that the definition of acceptable femininity in fishing villages was the long-suffering wife who sat waiting for her husband to come home from fishing trips, while looking after the family. Davis (1998) reported that values such as indirectness, unassertiveness, and self-sacrifice were highly valued in wives and mothers. Bourgeois (2009) states that many of the traditional values associated with gender roles are slowly changing in Newfoundland and that young women are seeing education as their ticket out of the rural way of life, but other studies show that rural women's work, especially for those women with families, is still undervalued and leaves some with a sense that they are trapped and unable to access PSE (Bates, 2006, Harrison & Power, 2005).

Does rurality have an impact on women's attitudes to PSE? Bundy (2004) cites Jossé y Thomas (2002), who suggests that rural women's willingness to engage in PSE is frequently limited by their own life experiences and a fear of being unable to fulfill the roles of mother and student simultaneously. While Corbett (2007) indicates that women are more likely to leave rural communities for PSE, Jossé y Thomas (2002) focused on women who chose to stay in

their rural communities. Neustaeter (2015) reports that women in rural areas face challenges in accessing education, not only because of geographic isolation but also because of local gender attitudes, lack of support services like child care, and limited mentoring opportunities. How then does the rural context impact a woman's ability to make decisions regarding her own education and, specifically, PSE? Decision-making, achievement-related beliefs, gender role beliefs, self-esteem, identity, and perception of the task are all factors to consider in evaluating the rural woman's path from the Adult Learning Centre (ALC) to PSE.

Diversity of rural women. A final factor to consider when defining a rural woman in the Canadian context would be the multi-cultural diversity of the Canadian landscape. Canada is a society of Indigenous people and settlers (Friesen, 1987; Weir, 2007; Welton; 2013). The descendants of the predominantly Scottish, French and Metis fur traders and settlers settled the Red River Settlement, prior to 1870 (Friesen, 1987). However, in the period after 1870 the population increased slowly as settlers from Ontario, French Canada, Britain, and Germany moved into the rural areas to take up farming on former Metis lands (Friesen, 1987). Although the majority of people lived in Winnipeg, Irish and Mennonite farming communities were emerging in the west and southwest of the province (Friesen, 1987).

Besides the British settlers, successive waves of immigrant groups also contributed to the diversity of rural Manitoba: Hungarians, Scandinavians, Icelanders, Danes, Belgians, Ukrainians, Mennonites and Jewish migrants to name but a few (Friesen, 1987). Some of the women in the immigrant groups were well educated, for example the Icelandic settlers, and they brought with them a rich history of life-long learning and cultural capital (Weir, 2007). Both the immigrant settlers and the Aboriginal and Metis people of the prairies brought with them their culture and educational capital, which influenced and contributed to rural communities. A

cultural factor that should be taken into consideration when conducting research with women from an Aboriginal culture is that, unlike in a Eurocentric hierarchical culture, women are and always have been central to Aboriginal culture and, frequently, occupy important positions within rural communities (Matheos, 2000). Regardless of the historic heritage, all cultural groups bring with them perceptions on education and the role formal education plays in their communities. While this study does not attempt to uncover or explore these cultural influences, they cannot be ignored when considering the research findings in this study.

As demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, a definition of rurality and what it means to be a rural woman is complex and multi-faceted. By including both the socio-cultural and a demographic definition of rurality and the values and attitudes associated with being a rural woman, I have provided vital context to the understanding rural women in this study.

Feminism

As noted in Chapter 1, the most interesting finding from the pilot study (Webb, 2014) was the impact of patriarchy on rural women and their educational path. This finding of the pilot study is well supported by the literature, just discussed, relating to gender roles in rural areas (Bundy, 2004; Dolan & Thien 2008; Kubik & Moore, 2013; Leach, 2013; Pini, 2003). Taken together, I realized that a feminist lens would be needed to give voice to the participants.

Standpoint Theory. Standpoint theory, in general, deals with power relationships, individual authority and how the individual's point of view is shaped through political and social experiences (Hartsock, 1993). Feminist standpoint theory makes three assertions, although it has undergone many revisions since the introduction of the idea to feminist research in 1987 (Bourgeois, 2009). These three assertions are: 1) Research should find its origins in the lives of groups and people who are marginalized by society; 2) All knowledge is socially

situated; 3) Groups and people who are marginalized, because of how they are situated in society, are better able to ask the right questions and make observations about their situation than non-marginalized people (Bowell, 2011; Hartsock, 1993). Many subsequent feminist scholars have revised and employed this theory in different ways (for example Harding, 1991, 1998, 2004; Hartsock, 1998, 2002). A concise and more concrete example of feminist standpoint theory is provided in the following excerpt:

This theoretical orientation emphasizes that women's shared common set of social experiences - such as subordination to men, or responsibility for housework and child care, or fewer opportunities in the labour market ~ provides them with ways of seeing and understanding that differ from those of men (Sachs, 1996, p. 13).

Based on Smith's (2005) ideology, taking up the standpoint of rural women gives rural women's experiences the expression and attention they have not been given before (Bourgeois, 2009). Nancy Hartsock (1998) in "The feminist standpoint revisited" reminds us that the concept of a "feminist standpoint" was meant to contrast the epistemologically naïve notion of a "woman's viewpoint" (p.238). Drawing from my shared experience as a rural woman, articulated in Chapter 1, I will be able, as the researcher, to take up the standpoint of rural women. As a feminist researcher, I must also become an active listener so that I can create knowledge that is "for rather than about the people" I study (DeVault & Gross, 2007, p. 184).

In taking up the standpoint of rural women, it is important to ask, ". . . do all women . . . occupy the same standpoint?" (Jaggar, 2004, p.63), and does my experience of rural life enable me to speak on behalf of all rural women? Smith (2005) suggests that a "standpoint" is a position anyone can assume in opposition to hegemonic structures and that it should never be assumed that a woman's standpoint implies a universal standpoint for all women. Pini (2003)

states that within feminist sociology, universalizing the experiences of one group of women and ignoring other groups has been widely criticized. Pini (2003), however, attempts to solve the debate by proposing that paying attention to differences does not mean that similarities do not exist. Furthermore, Pini (2003) references Little (1997) in stating that, while no common gender identity exists among rural women, there are, in certain contexts, similarities of gender found.

From my standpoint, thus, as a woman and educator with lived rural experience, I will use the feminist lens while being cautious not to generalize my own experiences, “interrogate...(my) own deep seated assumptions about various worlds...and (my) arrogant perceptions of others in those worlds” (DeVault & Gross, 2007, p. 184). A criticism of feminism, important to note, is the criticism made from within the scientific disciplines regarding objectivity in feminist research (Harding, 1993). Scientific disciplines contend that objectivity within qualitative research is frequently problematic. Standpoint theorists have, however, answered concerns about objectivity, as it relates to socially situated knowledge (Harding, 1993).

Two prominent feminist scholars, Dorothy Smith (1987, 2005) and Sandra Harding (1991, 1993, 1998, 2004) have guided my thinking on feminist research. I also draw from scholars who have been informed by the work of Smith (1987,2005) in gender and rurality (Dolan & Thien, 2008; Hughes, 1997; Little, 1997; Pini, 2003; Teather, 1996; Wagner 2014; Whatmore, 1991).

“The Patriarchy”, a term frequently associated with feminism from the 1970s, has largely fallen out of use in today’s post-feminist era but is critical to articulate in order to apply a feminist lens (Bennet; 2008; Ortner, 2014; Rupp, 2008;). Both Bennet (2008) and Ortner (2014) make a call for a renewed use of the term instead of the preferred “gender hierarchy” or

“gender imbalance” (Rupp, 2008, p.136) as is used in the post-feminist, or third wave feminist literature (English & Peters, 2012). Ortner (2014) argues that although post-feminists may believe that the term patriarchy is associated with outdated feminism and that the term reflects a Western, neoliberal bias, it is as relevant today as it has always been. It is thanks to a century of feminism that patriarchy is less widespread and immovable in North America, but still plays an “invisible and highly damaging role” in women’s lives (Ortner, 2014, p.531). Situating myself as a second wave feminist - a feminist from the 60s and 70s where female empowerment was key (English & Peters, 2012), I agree with Bennet (2008) and Ortner (2014) and reject the bland descriptors of the post-feminists. I prefer to use the term patriarchy as it clearly speaks to systems of power within homes and societies. I acknowledge that other important discussions within the feminist discourse, such as class, race, and queer theory are equally as important as discussions around patriarchy, but I contend that it is too early to put discussions of patriarchy to bed.

The traditional definition of the term patriarchy was tied to the role of the father and meant the rule of the father; however, in feminist terms it became an umbrella term for male dominance, social and political dominance, and sexism (Ortner, 2014). For the purposes of this study, I use the term patriarchy in its broadest sense to describe a system of social power that exists in society, where the control of the power and hence the structures of the society are still systematically disadvantaging women (Ortner, 2014; Bennet, 2008). Therefore, to interrogate instances of patriarchal control in this study, it is essential for me to adopt a feminist lens.

Feminism and rural women. Both feminist and rural theorists emphasize the idea that gendered identities and behaviours are socially constructed, and according to Bourgeois (2009), these socially constructed identities can: “vary between and within localities, as well as the way

in which localities – as constructed categories and material realities – shape women's perspectives and decision-making processes” (p. 60). In the Prairie Provinces, within both the Aboriginal and settler communities, rural women’s involvement in community building activities, like the WI and the Homemaker’s clubs, helped shape their communities and their individual perspectives and decisions (Ambrose & Kechnie, 1999; Cox, 1997; Neustaeter, 2015; Teather, 1996, Welton, 1995). While these organizations may not have identified themselves as feminist, the underlying values in their work are aligned with feminist principles of gender equality (Neustaeter, 2015).

As a feminist researcher, I must be aware of issues that surround the field of feminist research. Feminism is still, in 21st century Canada, a contentious issue in rural areas as many rural women view feminism as an urban movement and thus irrelevant to their lives (Neustaeter, 2015; Teather, 2014; Walby, 2011). Furthermore, they realize that acknowledging a feminist viewpoint would damage their positions in rural communities and possibly lead to social rejection (Neustaeter, 2015; Teather, 2014; Walby, 2011). A further consideration in rural areas is that populations are not homogenous and thus feminism may be viewed both through a rural and cultural lens. For Aboriginal women, feminism may be viewed as having emerged from a Eurocentric culture. However, in today’s understanding of feminism, Aboriginal voices and perspectives have been recognized and articulated (Matheos, 2000).

Issues of rurality and rural women’s realities have been discussed to contextualize the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the participants. The feminist lens will also be applied to the structuring of the questions and responses regarding participants’ attitudes, values, and beliefs to illustrate how gendered identities and behaviours are socially constructed. As this study’s

focus is on women's educational decision-making, a discussion of adult learning theory, in particular women's learning is necessary and forms the next section.

Adult Learning Theory

Principles of andragogy, including transformative learning theory as it relates to women, and supported by research on Women as Learners, will form the theoretical framework of this study (English & Peters, 2012; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Knowles, 1980; Mezirow, 1978).

Andragogy. In formulating a theoretical framework to guide my research and analysis, I was guided by my research participants who are, or have been, adult learners. I looked initially to adult learning theory (andragogy) as articulated by Knowles (1980). While Knowles' (1980) work is seminal in the field of adult learning, it does not specifically address the needs of women as learners. Mezirow's theory of transformative learning (1978) originally influenced by feminist concerns is another adult learning theory that will be considered in this study (English & Peters, 2012). English and Peters (2012) contend that transformative learning has not kept pace with feminist research and there seems to be silence on the issue of gender (English & Peters, 2012). In the past five years, some research has emerged linking feminism and transformative learning, and it is from those studies that I will draw the threads of the relevant portions of transformative learning (English & Irving, 2015; English & Peters, 2012). Based on the aforementioned feminist lens, my conceptual framework will thus be formulated from a combination of adult learning assumptions (English & Peters, 2012; Knowles, 1980; Mezirow, 1978) with a focus on women as learners (Hayes & Flannery, 2000).

The first assumption of andragogy posits that adults are self-directed learners (Candy, 1991; Garrison, 1997; Knowles, 1980). Knowles (1980) states that as people mature they

become independent and self-directing and, thus, when they enter an educational setting will resist pedagogical strategies that limit their independence.

The second assumption of andragogy is that adults arrive at their learning with extensive life experiences that can be utilized in their learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). These experiences are not only useful to enhance learning, but also stimulate the need for learning (Knowles, 1980). Grounded in cognitive psychology, developmental psychologists Erikson and Havighurst (1972) identified developmental tasks that have to be achieved at every stage of life. These accomplishments at each stage of life, according to Havighurst, (1972), create “teachable moments” where learning naturally occurs. Life experiences are collected simply by fulfilling the roles required in each of these developmental stages and this collection of experiences is what, according to Knowles (1980), shapes the adult learner’s self concept and identity.

Closely linked to the second assumption of andragogy, that an adult’s learning is grounded in his/her experiences and the roles he or she fulfills, the third assumption is that the social roles that adults play create a desire for learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Because adults engage in many different social roles in their lives, the needs of these roles frequently create teachable moments (Havighurst, 1972). Adult learning is also social in nature and thus is created within a community where validation and support from the group are critical (Hawkins, 1997, p. 37). As a great deal of adult learning is informal, the social setting of the learner and community support is a vital component of informal adult learning (Candy, 1991).

The fourth assumption proposed by Knowles (1980) is that adults change their time perspective as they mature. The knowledge that they wish to acquire becomes problem-centered, in other words, they want to learn about a problem they currently wish to solve, not information for a future application (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). They are thus “problem-

centered” not “subject-centered” (Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 53). This assumption is inextricably linked to the first three assumptions, as most adults are motivated to learn in order to deal with a particular problem that is pressing in their lives (Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

In 1984, Knowles and Associates added a further two assumptions about adult learners. The fifth assumption states that adult learners are largely intrinsically motivated (Knowles, 1984). Adult learners often cite job satisfaction or personal fulfillment as more important reasons to pursue education than external job requirements (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). The final assumption, as posited by Knowles (1984) is that adults need to understand why they are learning something and its relevance their current situation. This need is linked to their life experiences, the roles they assume, and their stage of development (Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

Transformative learning. Situated within the field of adult learning theory, Mezirow’s (1978, 1991, 2000) theory of transformative learning was introduced to the field of adult learning as a change process that transforms frames of reference (English & Peters, 2012). While Knowles’ (1984) Theory of Adult Learning focuses on the characteristics of adult learners, Mezirow’s (1991) Theory of Transformative Learning focuses on the process of learning and the resultant effects of learning on the adult learners (Haggis, 2002). Mezirow (1991) did not seek to refute Knowles’ (1984) theory of andragogy but simply to build on the field of adult learning theory (Baumgartner, 2012).

Mezirow’s (1991) frames of reference can be defined as the structures of assumptions by which we make sense of our experiences. These structures of assumptions shape and define our expectations, feelings, thinking and understanding (Mezirow, 2000). Based on this premise, once the perspective of the adult learner is changed behavior will be changed (Cranton, 1994). A key difference between transformative learning and other adult learning theories is that the

learning must result in a basic change in our “habits of mind” that form our “psychological self-image, cultural expectations and epistemic frameworks about what counts as important knowledge” (English & Peters, 2012, p.105). The transformation need not be large and striking; however, it could be cumulative and be task oriented or self-reflective (English & Peters, 2012; Mezirow, 2000). Due to the transformation of perspective, we will become aware of our actions and, thus, be able to choose whether or not to change our ideological schema (Cranton, 2006). Another essential principal of transformative learning is that, initially, the transformation will be precipitated by a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000) or an event that acts as a catalyst that “ typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard or read" (Cranton, 2002, p. 66). Again the nature of the disorienting dilemma need not be one dramatic event but an accumulation of events over a period of time that may result in a readiness for change (Mezirow, 2000).

The key elements of transformative learning are listed below to provide the information necessary to not only gain an understanding of the process of transformation, but also to allow for a discussion in Chapter V of the participant’s process:

1. A disorienting dilemma,
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt and shame,
3. A critical assessment of assumptions,
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change,
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions,
6. Planning a course of action,
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans,

8. Provisionally trying out new roles,
9. Renegotiating relationships,
10. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and
11. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (Mezirow, 1991, p. 224).

Mezirow's (1978) Theory of Transformative Learning has undergone several changes and additions; one such addition is women's transformation. English and Peters (2012) contend that there has been little emphasis on women's transformation in the literature on adult learning and that this "silence on gender is troubling since the original concept of transformation emerged from Mezirow's 1978 study of women" (p.105). Furthermore, the extant studies on transformative learning tend to focus on women's learning as either "relational and supportive" (English & Peters (2012), p.105) or the issues of gender and women's learning have been subsumed under other categories (English & Irving, 2015). However, despite changes and criticisms, the key aspects of transformative learning remain: "Individual experiences, critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, context, and authentic relationships" (English & Irving, 2012, p. 250).

Within the context of effecting change in rural societies, Social Transformative Learning Theory, may be a helpful lens by which to view the transformation of women in this study (Johnson-Bailey, 2006). While the focus of transformation by Mezirow (1978) and Belenky and Stanton (2000) has been on individual transformation, social transformative learning emphasizes the importance of relationships, the body, emotions, and race, class and oppression on the transformation (English & Irving, 2012). The scope of this study, however, is not broad enough to explore whether social transformation occurred or may occur in the future;

therefore, I will focus on women as learners (Hayes & Flannery, 2000), incorporating relevant aspects of transformative learning as it applies to women and interrogating whether transformation has occurred.

Despite accepting the key elements of transformative learning, a fundamental change in “habits of mind” precipitated by a “disorienting dilemma”, English and Irving (2012) contend that there are other elements more important for women’s learning. Three of the most important and relevant elements: the importance of relationships, the body, and emotion are included in this study.

Relationships are crucial in women’s transformative experiences (English & Irving, 2012; Ferris & Walters, 2012). Brooks (2000) argues that the ability to share their life stories is at the heart of the transformative experience and thus the relationships created during the adult learning experience are key to the transformation. Cranton and Wright (2008) go so far as to say that the relationship is the catalyst for the transformation more so than the “disorienting dilemma”. The importance of building authentic relationships to support transformative learning cannot be underestimated (Taylor, 2009). Part of the relationship building is the role of the educator as a “model for alternative beliefs and behaviours” (English & Peters, 2012, p. 106). The educator’s role can sometimes be that of a coach where journal writing can form a part of the transformation (Meyer, 2009), but within that role educators should always maintain appropriate boundaries (English & Irving, 2012).

The importance of the body is part of the distinctly female form of transformative learning. English and Irving (2012) citing Armacost (2005) and Mayzumi (2006) state that the body is the catalyst and locus of the learning, creating new opportunities for change. The role of the body in women’s learning has been recognized and featured in adult education studies,

especially as it challenges the increased acceptance of rational ways of knowing and a frequent dismissal of the relationship between body and mind (English & Irving, 2012).

A final element to add to transformative learning, as it applies to women, is that of the importance of emotion. English and Irving (2012) assert that this aspect of women's learning, while playing a particular role in transformative learning, is frequently not discussed openly. As much of women's learning happens in oppressive contexts, emotions like anger and resentment are common and have the ability to transform (English & Irving, 2012). Both bell hooks (2001) and Freire (1970) support the notion that emotion plays a role in transforming a person's life experiences and thus bears exploration in women's learning.

By including transformative learning as an element of the conceptual framework, I will not only be widening the scope of adult learning but also adding to the literature on women's learning and transformative learning. As the purpose of this research study is to determine the decision-making of rural women regarding PSE, adult-learning theories, as they apply to women as learners, will be used to analyze and interrogate their experiences, barriers, and supports. Transformative learning theory will be utilized in this context, to see whether transformation occurred and whether the transformation had any impact on the decision-making of the participants in this study.

Women as Learners

An important consideration for this present study is to address the question of women as learners. According to Hayes and Flannery (2000), the importance of gender has not been given enough attention in adult learning theory. Women's learning is, frequently, reduced to terms such as "collaborative" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p.3), which simply perpetuates stereotypes about women instead of giving credit to the diversity of women found in adult

learning. Besides being reduced to terms such as “collaborative”, women’s learning has been largely ignored in adult learning theories, which assume that the dominant learning theories in the adult learning field are universally relevant and applicable to all learners (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). While gendered knowledge and learning may differ depending on culture, ethnicity, age, class, or geographic location, an attempt should be made to “understand and value women’s learning in its own right”(Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p.9), while establishing where there are similarities across these differences. Adult learning theory as constructed by Knowles (1980) defines the characteristics of adult learners, and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) describes a journey the learner goes through during the learning process. Hayes and Flannery (2000) attempt to not only fill in the gaps in the literature regarding women as adult learners, but also explore both the characteristics of women as learners and processes they go through in their learning. Key assumptions about women as learners, drawn from feminist study, underpin Hayes and Flannery’s (2000) research:

1. Women’s learning should be respected and understood in its own right.
2. Women’s learning must be viewed within the wider social context that should include the social determinants of gender roles and norms.
3. The diversity of women’s lives and learning should be recognized as much as the similarities.
4. Efforts are needed to overcome the limitations that continue to be placed on women’s learning opportunities and outcomes. (p. xii)

Adult learning theories, based on Knowles’ (1980) adult learning assumptions, state that adults are self-directed learners. Candy (1991) states that the long-term goal of adult education is “people who exhibit the qualities of moral, emotional and intellectual autonomy”(p.19).

However, the ideas of individuality and autonomy are very culturally specific and Hayes and Flannery (2000), cite Keddie's (1980) view that individuality tends to be valued "in those cultures where high status is obtained by competitive individual achievement" (p. 54). In Aboriginal cultures, learning is a lifelong process and learning is not simply to attain individual needs but also to meet the needs of the community (Hawkins, 1997). In considering women's learning, it is vital to add layers to adult learning theory to accurately capture the diversity and complexity of women as learners.

Social Context. In order to address women's learning, the first layer to add to adult learning theory is that of social context. Hayes and Flannery (2000) suggest that that women's learning cannot be understood without understanding the social contexts in which the learning takes place. While Knowles (1980) and Candy (1991) acknowledge that social roles and settings are important factors, the social contexts defined by Hayes and Flannery (2000) go beyond the adult learning theory definition. In all learning contexts, whether formal or informal, women are learning far more than simply the skills and knowledge presented; they are learning about themselves (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). For women, experiences in the home can be a powerful influence on their learning. The home, as a social context, can be both the home in which the woman grew up and the home she now occupies as an adult (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). When women return to formal education and experience a role conflict in being both a mother and a student, they frequently become overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and feel inadequate in their new roles (Rice & Meyers, 1989). Hayes and Flannery (2000) state that these conflicting feelings of guilt and inadequacy are some of the major obstacles to women pursuing further education.

Self-esteem. A second layer to add to adult learning theory, to better reflect women's learning, would be that of identity and self esteem. Identity can be defined as who women say they are and how they identify themselves; self-esteem would be the positive or negative views of those identities (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Knowles (1980) does speak to the topic of identity creation and self esteem in his discussion pertaining to life experiences and teachable moments (Havighurst, 1972). He presents the development of identity as something that originates as a consequence of life experiences and role fulfillment (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Hayes and Flannery (2000), among others, present a nonessentialist view of women's identity development where there are many possible expressions of identity and self-esteem, and the influence of race and class are considered. The views on women's identity development that are more nonessentialist in focus give weight to how social forces and individual interpretations of those forces help shape women's identities (Hayes & Flannery, 2000).

Identity formation. Because identity formation is gendered, it is important to examine the research on how gender plays a role in identity formation in adult women. Research, according to Hayes and Flannery (2000), shows that within white, middle class society, caregivers, parents, and teachers encourage different activities in boys and girls. Boys get more positive feedback on their accomplishments than girls do, and this pattern continues throughout adolescence (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Societal gendered expectations portraying women as nurturers, carers, model mothers, wives and sexual distractors are continuously reinforced in adult women's lives. New roles, such as motherhood and paid employment, perpetuate gendered expectations that may reinforce or alter the way women view themselves (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). However, in their identity formation, women should not be seen as "passive recipients of . . . societal prescriptions" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 68) as, frequently, they are

the ones effecting the change. They are the ones who are actively seeking to develop their own identities and promote their self-esteem when taking the first step to adult education. Culture significantly contributes to the development of identity and self-esteem; however, one study (Reybold, 1997) shows that women respond in very different ways to cultural norms and expectations and this may or may not play a role in identity and self-esteem development.

Learning experience. Another aspect of identity formation in adult women is how they view themselves as learners. Many women have a positive view of themselves as learners in the “school of life”, but not necessarily in formal education. Frequently, school had been a place where they had developed low self-esteem because they felt that they did not fit in based on their social class or learning problems (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Within formal education settings, curriculum, interpersonal interactions and institutional culture all play a role in shaping women’s learning (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). When women and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in classroom materials, gender stereotypes are reinforced (Hayes & Flannery, 2000).

Returning to school as adults, while fraught with anxiety, many women report enhanced self-esteem because of the “socially acceptable status” of being a student (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). The link between feelings of being in control and women’s self-esteem has also been researched and documented, and Hayes and Flannery (2000) cite studies that reveal that adult women receiving education felt better about themselves as learners and felt more in control of their lives. A further study cited by Hayes and Flannery (2000) shows that women not only felt more in control of their lives than before the education, but also developed more positive perspectives on their own intelligence and abilities as learners than they had held as students in the K-12 school system.

Voice. The final layer that is needed to ground adult learning theory in women's experiences is the concepts of voice emerging from the process of learning. Voice, while it can have many meanings, will for the purpose of this study be focused on the metaphorical use, which centres around identity and how women's identities are reflected in "what they say . . . the ideas they express and the confidence they express in their own thoughts and opinions" (Hayes, 2000, p.80). Voice, associated with identity, can find expression in different ways. It can be associated with "giving voice" to women, an empowering process whereby women who have not previously been able to express themselves are able to do so (Hayes, 2000). Giving voice to an experience or situation can be a transformative experience, but can also, according to Hayes (2000) be a challenging process.

Voice can also be seen as "developing a voice" as women change and develop throughout the learning process. This process can lead to a women's voice taking on different forms as it develops, and thus, this definition attempts to recognize how women "learn to express their identities" (Hayes, 2000, p. 93) as they develop. Some women, will find their voice and learn to express themselves for the first time. This expression can occur not only within the learning environment, but also at home when women give voice to their opinions (Hayes, 2000).

A final association of voice with identity is one of "reclaiming a voice" (Hayes, 2000, p. 95). Hayes (2000) cites the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girl's development to support the contention that women frequently deny their true voices as they grow up and older in response to the "oppressive nature of social and cultural expectations" (p. 95). The aforementioned study found that adolescent girls start to lose "trust" in the "authority of their own experiences" (Hayes, 2000, p. 95) as they start to try to conform to societal expectations

and norms. One way to cope with societal pressure is silence. Silence can be used as self-protection, as a way to preserve relationships, and to maintain the ideals of “feminine behavior” such as being “nice” (Hayes, 2000, p. 96). Reconnecting with their childhood voice is both an emotional and intellectual process, according to Hayes (2000).

A not yet discussed, but crucial, aspect in a discussion of reclaiming voice should include how women of Colour experience this process. Because many women of Colour may have been raised in a racist and/or sexist culture, reclaiming voice will involve not only reclaiming their voice as a women but also their cultural identity voice (Hayes, 2000). Thus, women’s voices can be seen to reflect many identities, not just that of being a woman. For rural women, community and societal norms and expectations will further complicate giving voice to their identities.

At the beginning of this section, Knowles’ (1980) adult learning theory was introduced to create the over arching framing structure of the theoretical framework. Within the over-arching framing structure, the characteristics of adult learners as identified by Knowles (1980) and the characteristics of women as learners, as articulated by Hayes and Flannery (2000) were explored. The processes that adult learners go through in their learning journey were also articulated via transformative learning theory and its applicability to women’s learning (English & Irving, 2012; Mezirow, 1991). The research on women as learners, conducted by Hayes and Flannery (2000), is dated, and as attested by English and Peters (20212), there is very little research, specifically on women’s learning as it relates to transformative learning, that has been done in the past decade. By bringing these theories to the fore, my goal is not only to answer the questions of this current research study, but also to add to the literature on women’s learning and women in transformative learning. The adult learning theories I selected as the

framework enable me to understand the characteristics of the participants, their journey through the ALC, and their decision-making regarding PSE.

Chapter Summary

At the beginning of this chapter, I felt it was important to provide a background to the development of educational/learning opportunities for rural women in Canada in the past century. This historical background allowed me to contextualize the current landscape of education and adult learning in rural Manitoba and to demonstrate how women, despite the patriarchal nature of their societies, have frequently taken the initiative and been co-creators in their learning opportunities. The literature I reviewed focused on the roles played by the Women's Institute, Homemakers' Clubs, libraries and the media in providing early educational opportunities to rural women across Canada. The issue of rurality and what it means to be rural was explored to give definition to the exploration of rural women and their lives. Rural women and the extant literature were further discussed and considered. The conceptual framework was developed from Knowles' (1980, 1984) assumptions of adult learners, Mezirow's (1991, 2000) theory of transformative learning and Hayes and Flannery's (2000) findings on the role of gender in adult learning. The lens through which I will view both the interview process and the analysis of my findings is based on my feminist beliefs. A background to my feminist perspective as well as a definition of patriarchy was included.

How will these aforementioned elements enable me to address the research questions? To understand the decision-making process of rural women in Manitoba and to assess the validity of the pilot study (Webb, 2014), I needed to contextualize the lives and learning of the rural women in this study. The historical details and rural definitions will enable me to understand what has shaped the communities they live in and who these rural women are. The

theory of adult learning, with the focus on women's learning, attempts to illustrate the characteristics of women as learners, explain the process of their learning, and understand what formal education means to the participants. The feminist lens, in particular Standpoint Theory, simultaneously gives the participants their own voice, acknowledges that not all women occupy the same standpoint, and facilitates a further discussion regarding patriarchy and the hegemonic structures present in rural societies.

CHAPTER III Methodology

In this chapter, I explain why I selected a qualitative research approach, articulate the feminist lens within the research methodology, explain a narrative analysis within a case study model research design, discuss how the data were collected and analyzed, explain the rationale for site and participant selection and state the delimitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research is concerned with process rather than outcomes and thus is well suited to the present study, which attempts to unravel the reasons and processes behind how and why rural women make their educational decisions rather than looking at the end product of the educational decision itself (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Furthermore, qualitative research is used to describe a variety of attitudes towards and strategies for conducting inquiry that is used to discover how human beings understand, experience, interpret, and produce their societies (Sandelowski, 2004). As this study seeks to uncover rural women's experiences and interpretations of their societies, it is a well suited methodology. Because qualitative research is focused on making meaning out of people's perspectives and lives, and employs methods such as open-ended interviews to give voice to the participants' perspectives, it fulfills the needs of this study by allowing the voices of the participants to emerge and giving insights into their thoughts and motivations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The Feminist Lens

Broadly framed within the phenomenological paradigm (as it relates to understanding research participants from their point of view and developing an understanding of the lived experience), the feminist lens provides the research approach for this study (Denzin & Lincoln,

2011). The feminist lens is suited to this research study for a number of reasons. The feminist lens considers that all social relationships are influenced by power and this power must be taken into account when a researcher wishes to understand participants' perceptions of their own situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Secondly, the feminist lens recognizes that the researcher will come into the research study with pre-conceived ideas and beliefs about the subject, but that these ideas are not binding as the researcher's perspectives will be transformed by what he/she learns from the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Furthermore, the fundamental tenants of feminist theory would underscore a feminist lens; namely, people have been socialized into gender roles and ways of thinking that have created inequalities and have, usually, given males more power institutionally, economically, and socially (Tisdell, 2012). Most feminist theorists agree "feminism assumes that the problem in gender relations is not men but sexism and the forces of patriarchy that lead to sexism" (Tisdell, 2012, p. 2). Thus, feminism challenges sexism both in thinking and in every day life to enable both men and women benefit from a more equitable society (Tisdell, 2012).

As the researcher, I will need to be conscious of the fact that I may be perceived as a person who holds more power than the participants in the interview process. My position as a former teacher in the lives of some of the participants also has a power dynamic attached to it. The role I played previously, as their teacher, had a profound impact on my ability to build on the relationships I had previously had with the participants. This in turn resulted in the sharing of information that resulted in rich data. English & Peters (2012), view the role of the educator in the building of authentic relationships that will lead to a transformative experience, as a "model for alternative beliefs and behaviours" (p.106). In my interactions with four of the participants: Alison, Brenda, Carol and Fern, I strove to play this role. As part of encouraging

critical thinking and questioning, I encouraged students to journal. It was through the journals in the Family Studies course that I got to know the struggles and successes of my students and it enabled me to build deep and meaningful relationships with the students. Meyer, (2009) states that the educator's role can sometimes be that of a coach, but within that role educators should always maintain appropriate boundaries (English & Irving, 2012). As an educator of four of the participants, I always strove to maintain a balance between my perceived role as a coach and my professional role as an educator.

To counter this perceived imbalance of power it was important to give each individual participant an opportunity to express her thoughts and feelings during the data collection, fact checking and restorying stages. "Giving voice", which could also be perceived as an imbalance of power whereby I, as the researcher, am in control, is in the context of this study empowering women to discuss and reflect on their decision-making process and involving them in each step of the process. I deliberately conducted the interviews in their home communities and asked the participants to select the meeting place. I started each interview with an informal introduction, and for those participants who did not know anything of my rural connection, I told them something about my story and the reason for my interest in the lives of rural women.

Finally, a feminist research methodology will enable me to "affirm differences amongst women and women's interests, health and safety", promoting "justice and well-being of women" (DeVault & Gross, 2007, p. 174). Applying the feminist lens in the analysis of this research study allows me to account for the socialized gender roles of rural women in this study. Although there is no single "correct" feminist methodology, general guiding principles from feminist research can be used (DeVault & Gross, 2007; Pini, 2003). To raise consciousness, I deliberately asked questions related to gender roles and female role models.

While it became obvious that some of the participants had not considered these aspects and did not share my feminist views, the questions may have prompted some of the participants to reevaluate their thinking regarding their decision-making process and influences. However, as I cannot speak on behalf of the participants, I was not able to evaluate the impact of these thoughts. Their views also made me consider my understanding of gender roles in rural communities, and made me realize that I needed to be conscious of my own biases.

Research Design

In considering a methodological approach to choose within the qualitative framework, I asked one question: Which research design would best allow the voices and stories of the women to emerge without “exploiting or distorting them” (Olesen, 2005, p. 27)? Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) Narrative Inquiry Approach would, I expected, have enabled me to most adequately meet such expectations for the research. Narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative inquiry, which has its origins in biography and storytelling (Chase, 2011; Creswell, 2007). According to Clandinin and Connelly (1990):

The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are story-telling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives.

The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world. (p. 2)

However, as all the questions were semi-structured and based on filling in the gaps identified in the pilot study (Webb, 2014), a traditional narrative inquiry model (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) was not ideally suited to the purpose. Rather, a combination of qualitative approaches was used to address the research questions. The following example can be used to

illustrate that the dichotomy between approaches in qualitative research is not strict and the use of one does not exclude the other. Two of the four following questions:

1. How, over the years, have rural women taken decisions regarding their PSE education (Narrative Approach)
2. How rural women develop into PSE students? (Phenomenological Approach)
3. How rural women develop into PSE students in a particular ALC?
(Case Study Approach)
4. How rural women develop into PSE students in a particular culture?
(Ethnographic Approach)

could be combined and rewritten to answer the guiding question in this study: How have rural women attending an ALC taken decisions regarding their PSE? To address this question I combined two approaches: a narrative analysis within a case study model. The case study model is usually arranged around a small number of issue-based questions or themes and allows the researcher to explore these themes with a small number of participants (Stake, 2000). Using narrative analysis allowed the voices of the participants to emerge, in keeping with feminist beliefs, and the case study model allowed me to arrange the questions around a limited number of issues and experiences.

Despite the fact that there are many different forms of narrative analysis, they all share some common characteristics (Creswell, 2007, 2012). The most important characteristics of narrative analysis are:

1. Experiences of an individual - social and personal interactions,
2. Chronology of experiences - past, present and future experiences,
3. Life Stories - first-person, oral accounts of actions obtained through field texts (data),

4. Re-storying - (or retelling or developing a meta-story) from the field texts,
5. Coding the field texts for themes or categories,
6. Incorporating the context or place into the story or theme, and
7. Collaboration between the researcher and the participants in the study, such as negotiating field texts (Creswell, 2012, p. 507).

The combination of using both the case study method and allowing the narratives of the participants to emerge freely not only enabled the participants to speak for themselves but also focused and guided the thematic analysis.

Site Selection and Description

This study was conducted in rural South West (SW) and South East (SE) Manitoba. I chose this geographical area of Manitoba because of my experience living and teaching in the area. In the nine years that I taught at a rural ALC, I experienced working with both long-time residents of the area as well as recently arrived immigrants from many different regions of the world. I had a good working relationship with the ALC in the area, and thus, it was relatively easy for me to work with them in the recruitment of research participants. The ALC site I approached to assist me in the recruitment of female students was the ALC in a medium-sized town (hereafter referred to as Town A) in rural SE Manitoba. The study participants were rural women, aged 19-65, who had all attended an ALC and completed a grade 12 diploma. The age qualification was kept deliberately broad, so that any rural women who attended the ALC would qualify. The ALC in Town A draws from a diverse group of rural communities. Besides many different Mennonite communities, SE Manitoba also is home to 9,155 French-speaking people, Hutterite colonies, Roseau River First Nation Reserve and a large German immigrant population group (Statistics Canada: Community Profiles, 2011). The ethnic diversity of SE

Manitoba enabled me to select participants from widely disparate socio-cultural backgrounds, but still maintain a rural focus.

Participants and Recruitment

The participants of this study were selected from recent ALC alumni using a purposeful sampling method. All participants met the following inclusion criteria: rural, female, aged 19-65, and had graduated from the ALC.

Ethics comes first and foremost in this process with no recruitment of any sort before this is authorized. I applied for ethics approval to the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) at the University of Manitoba and, as many of the participants were recruited from an ALC run by Red River College (RRC), ethics approval was also sought from RRC. The recruitment of participants was conducted via two methods:

Recruitment method 1. I developed a letter of intent and emailed it to the campus manager at the ALC in Town A (Appendix C), to ask for the administration of the ALC's support in reaching out to prospective study participants through their organization. Once the campus manager at the ALC agreed to distribute the letter of invitation, a representative of the ALC administrative staff emailed a targeted sample of potential participants the letter of invitation to participate in the research study (Appendix D). After the potential participants had responded via email with their willingness to participate in the research study, a letter of consent was sent via email outlining the details of the research study, the implications for them, and their rights as determined by ENREB at the University of Manitoba. I then contacted each participant via email and set up interviews at locations decided by the participants. At each interview, I ensured that I obtained the signed letter of consent from the participants and the details of the research were explained to them.

This method resulted in an initial response of four potential participants. Of the initial four respondents, three had transitioned to PSE and one had not. However, after the initial interview, one of participants who had transitioned to PSE withdrew from the study for personal reasons. I then waited for further responses to the initial email (Appendix D) and two more potential participants responded. One had transitioned to PSE and one had not.

Recruitment method 2. Via word of mouth, through a neutral third party, two participants from a small rural town in SW Manitoba were contacted. I sent out the invitation email directly (Appendix D) to these two people and both of them accepted the invitation to participate in the study. I did not need to seek permission from the ALC in SW Manitoba, as I was not recruiting participants requiring their assistance. The ethics approval protocol secured from ENREB was sufficiently broad in scope to enable me to recruit rural women who were not solely ALC alumni in Town A.

After the potential participants had responded via email their willingness to participate in the research study, a letter of consent was sent via email to them outlining the details of the research study, the implications for them, and their rights as determined by ENREB at the University of Manitoba. I then contacted each participant via email and set up interviews at locations decided by the participants. At each interview, I ensured that I obtained the signed letter of consent from the participants and the details of the research were explained to them.

Both respondents identified themselves as not having transitioned to PSE, but after the interview one of the respondents revealed in her journal that she had taken PSE training. Her data were removed from the study, as it did not fit the inclusion criteria.

I stopped teaching at the ALC in Town A in 2013 and, thus, did not hold any position of power over these students. I had no influence over them at the time of the interviews, or over

their decisions, as I no longer have contact with administration or teachers at the ALC in Town A. Although I had taught four of the six participants at some stage in the past nine years, I was very careful to reiterate at the interview stage that they could withdraw from the study or refuse to answer questions at any stage of the process. I also emphasized that they would be fact checking and verifying their stories at each stage of the process.

Tools

Case studies are generally arranged around a set of questions that focus on a particular set of issues or are arranged around themes (Stake, 2000). In the case of this research, the six interviews all focus on the same set of issues, and the questions are based on themes of gender, ALC attendance and PSE decision-making. Interview guides can be found in Appendix A. The interview questions were based on the results of the pilot study (Webb, 2014) and used to uncover the conscious decision-making process of the women transitioning from ALC to PSE or not. The journal questions attempted to uncover the context for the decisions. Journal questions can be found in Appendix B.

Data Collection

Interviews. Consideration was given to the length and type of interview best suited to the research design. Creswell (2012) states that stories are a natural part of life and that people all have stories to tell about their lives. I therefore selected a semi-structured interview method as one way to collect my data. This method not only gives the interviewer opportunities to seek clarification from the participant, but also coupled with interviewer observations, interviews can increase our understanding of the complexities of people's lives. To collect and record the stories, I emailed the participants instructions, including the guiding questions (Appendix A), at least a week in advance of the interview.

The interviews took the form of semi-structured interviews. When the participant responses were brief, or seemed to indicate that there were other factors in play, I probed and asked for clarification. Because of the time consuming nature of narrative style research, participants were forewarned and given approximate ideas of their time commitment: one week with the interview questions, one month to respond to journal questions, two weeks to check the interview transcriptions, two weeks to check the first version of the restored biographical narratives, and a further two weeks to check the second restored narratives. In the invitation letter and the letter of consent, participants were informed that there would be a one to one-and-a-half-hour interview and that journal writing would be required. They were also informed that they would be required to read and give approval to the interview transcripts and restored data. Another aspect of narrative style research that may present ethical difficulties is that of anonymity. Narrative style research requires participants to reveal personal information and thus in both the restoring and analysis of data, I was careful to protect their identities by eliminating personal and contextual identifiers through which anonymity might be compromised.

The interviews were recorded on two separate, password-protected devices: an iPhone and an iPad. The interviews were recorded in an audio file format (MP3) and saved on a password-protected laptop. Both the recorded interviews and the journal entries, which were submitted via email, were stored on a password-protected computer at the University of Manitoba in my office. The participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and identifiers such as settings and people's names were removed from the data. A master copy of the participants' names and corresponding pseudonyms were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my

office at the University of Manitoba. At the conclusion of each interview, the next stage of the research process, the journal, was explained.

Journals. The journal questions were handed to the participants at the end of the semi-structured interview. The questions were carefully explained and any concerns the participants had about the length of their responses or the depth required were addressed at this stage. These questions attempted to find out the “why”, to probe deeper than the interview responses. The participants were provided with a notebook to facilitate note taking for the journal entries. Participants were given a one-month period to submit the journal entries either in the notebook or via email in an attached document. I arranged to collect the notebooks at a prearranged time and venue from the participants

Restorying. After collecting the stories, Creswell (2007) suggests a restorying, where participants’ stories are organized into a framework that is chronological and provides “a causal link among ideas” (p. 56). Collaboration with the participants is a critical component of critical inquiry in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012).

Once I had transcribed the interviews, I sent them to the participants for fact checking, collected their journal entries and then began the restorying. Initially, I merely summarized the lives of the participants into narrative vignettes and sent it to them for verification. However, as the purpose of the study was to allow women to speak for themselves, I rewrote the narrative vignettes including as many of their own words as possible and sent them back to the participants for re-verification. Triangulation was completed in three phases:

1. Participants were given two weeks to check the interview transcripts,
2. Participants were sent the restoried data, based on their interviews and reflective journals, and asked to verify their introductory stories, and

3. Participants were sent the full restored narratives for final feedback and verification.

Once the restorying was completed, the data were arranged and organized into themes and categories. Although the themes can be interwoven into the participants' stories, Creswell (2012) states that the themes are frequently included after the narrative. I have included the thematic analysis after the narrative vignettes.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was a descriptive and interpretive process and loosely followed the steps outlined by Creswell (2007, 2012) in the interpretation and analysis of narratives.

Experiences, life stories, context, and collaboration. The experiences of the individuals, both their social and personal interactions, were recorded not only in the interviews but also articulated, in Chapter IV, in my accounts of the interview process. Where the analysis deviated somewhat from the steps outlined by Creswell (2007, 2012), was in the chronology of experiences. Although the first question asked of the participants was to tell the story of how they came to be at the ALC, subsequent questions did not focus on the chronology of experiences but on the details of the actual experiences. The life story details were obtained via the interviews and the journals and, in some cases, in collaboration during the restorying process. Context or place was added into the narratives by both the participants in their interview and journal accounts of their lived rural experiences and my recollections of the context of the interviews.

Restorying. In Chapter IV, the restored narratives vignettes were organized in two ways: Firstly, the three participants who had transitioned to PSE told their stories and then the three participants who had not yet transitioned to PSE told theirs. This organization was not done to categorize participants, but simply to allow similarities of experiences to rise to the

surface. Secondly their narratives were structured and arranged according to the interview questions, as some of the participants had not disclosed enough details of their lives to enable a chronological restorying.

After the restorying and the creation of the narrative vignettes, the results were coded and organized. The themes that emerged from the coding were linked, in Chapter V, to the two broad conceptual areas, identified in Chapter 1 that guide rural women's decision-making regarding PSE, namely, (a) the experiences, barriers, and supports along the journey from ALC to PSE, and (b) the attitudes, values, and beliefs surrounding gender and education and the findings were explained.

The results of the findings from Chapter V were carried through to Chapter VI where the literature included in Chapter II on rural women, adult learning theory, transformative learning, and women as learners was used to analyze and discuss the findings. Similarities and differences between the extant literature and the research findings were also identified and explored in Chapter VI. Finally, a feminist lens was applied to the findings to interrogate the instances of social relationships that are influenced by power. Standpoint Theory was included to assume a position in opposition to hegemonic structures and to acknowledge that adopting a woman's standpoint does not imply adopting a universal standpoint for all women. The feminist lens was also used to uncover socialized gender roles, which have created ways of thinking that perpetuate inequalities and patriarchal structures.

Introduction to Participants

In Table 1 below, the participants of this study are introduced and a brief summary of their ages, cultural backgrounds, and current education paths are included to provide the background needed to contextualize their narratives in Chapter IV.

Table 1.
Summary of Participant Characteristics

Participant Group

Alison	Alison is 28 and from a traditional Mennonite community. She grew up on a farm in SE Manitoba and currently lives in the city. Alison is currently pursuing PSE.
Brenda	Brenda is 27 and identifies as an Aboriginal and Filipino woman. She grew up in rural Manitoba. Brenda has completed her PSE and is living and working in SE Manitoba.
Carol	Carol is 21 identifies as an Aboriginal woman who grew up in SE Manitoba. She lives and works in the city. Carol has completed her PSE.
Diane	Diane is 20 and lives in SE Manitoba. She grew up in rural Alberta and has been living in SE Manitoba for approximately 5 years. Diane has completed her grade 12 at the ALC and intends to pursue PSE.
Esther	Esther is in her early 60s and lives in SW Manitoba. She grew up in SW Manitoba and has lived rurally her entire life. Esther has completed her grade 12 at the ALC and does not intend to pursue PSE.
Fern	Fern is 40 and identifies as an Aboriginal woman who has lived in small towns and cities her whole life. Fern lives in SE Manitoba. She has completed her grade 12 at the ALC and intends to pursue PSE.

Note. All participants' names and identifiers were changed to protect their identity. I assigned the pseudonyms to the participants randomly.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the inherent bias of my personal life experience as a rural woman and the fact that I knew some of these women when I taught at the ALC. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) ask qualitative researchers to consider the effect of their own opinions, prejudices and biases on the data. While the researcher's role is not to pass judgment but to add to the body of knowledge on that subject, some would argue that it is impossible to eliminate bias altogether (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As feminist research aims to give voice to not only the participants in a study but also to the researcher conducting the study, a researcher in this field needs a certain amount of reflexivity (Pini, 2003). Reflexivity implies that both the researcher and the participant contribute to the data (Olesen, 2011). Throughout this study, I contributed my personal perceptions and reflections towards the data. I acknowledged the limitations of my position as a white, able-bodied, socio-economically advantaged, woman.

Olesen (2011) cautions that reflexivity may require constant and uncomfortable assessment of the relationship between the participant and researcher and “an acute awareness as to what unrecognized elements in the researcher's background contributes” to the research (p. 135). Throughout the process of the data collection and fact checking, I was aware of my own perceptions and feelings regarding the information shared, as well as my own experiences of some of the events that the participants recalled. I also recognized that my personal recollections of life in SE Manitoba could cloud my perception. From a feminist standpoint, I would maintain that my personal experience living rurally and professional experience working with some of the participants, in an educational setting, allowed me to reflexively contribute to the data. I remained vigilant in the expression of my own bias and how it informed my analysis and conclusions, while acknowledging that without the previous relationship I had with some of

the participants, I would not have been able to acquire the level of trust needed to obtain the necessary information.

Some other limitations in this study were the fact that some of the interviews, in particular those of Brenda, Carol, and Diane, were time-constrained. Brenda was on a lunch break from classes and Carol was on her way home from work. Diane had just moved and was busy unpacking her home while coping with the demands of a job. The time constraint did not allow me to ask many probing questions, thus limiting the opportunity to explore some of their responses. Thus, more data was generated by the participants who did not have a time constraint; namely, Esther, Alison and Fern, potentially resulting in a greater representation of their voices in the findings.

Finally, the journal response questions could also be viewed as a limitation as not all participants were familiar with this type of questioning. The participants, whom I had taught in the Family Studies class, were very familiar with journaling and understood the level of detail required. The two participants, Esther and Diane, who I had not taught, did not reflect as deeply as is normally done in a journal activity and this limited my knowledge of their thoughts.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study is that I chose to limit the participants to rural women between the ages of 19 and 65 who have completed their grade 12 at an ALC and who have either transitioned to PSE or who have chosen not to continue with their studies. The findings of this study may not be applicable to women in rural areas who are younger or older than this demographic group, as their stage of life and family influences may be different.

The number of participants is also a delimitation of this study. As I only interviewed six women, three who had transitioned to PSE and three who had not yet transitioned to PSE, it is

impossible to generalize the findings of this study. This study can offer a snapshot of six rural women's lives, experiences and decision-making but cannot speak on behalf of all rural women.

Finally, the trustworthiness and credibility of the data was ensured by triangulation and constant fact checking by the participants. After I had transcribed the interviews, I sent the transcripts to the participants for verification. The first restoried narrative was created from a combination of the verified transcripts and the journal entries. After the participants had fact-checked the restoried narratives, I once again added details from the transcripts to the restorying and sent it to the participants for a third time to fact-check. In this way, I ensured that the data were credible and dependable.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the qualitative research methods: Case studies combined with elements of narrative inquiry formed the basis of the methods. The case studies, combined with the participant narratives, were presented and justified as the method most suited to the needs of this study. By including participants' narratives, the research gave a voice to an under-represented sector of the population: rural women. Rural SE and SW Manitoba were identified as the sites selected for the research, and the details of participant selection and recruitment procedures were included. The methods of data collection and tools used in the data collection were explained to facilitate an understanding of the process of the research study. Data analysis methods that incorporated elements of narrative inquiry, such as restorying, the coding of emergent themes and a discussion linked to the literature, were included and explained. The chapter concluded with a consideration of the delimitations of and potential limitations in the study.

CHAPTER IV Restoried Accounts

This chapter presents the restoried account of the six participants. In an attempt to allow the voices of the participants to guide the narrative, I have used the following outline from the interview questions to construct the restoried narrative vignettes:

1. The participant journey to the ALC.
2. The participant learning experience at the ALC.
3. How the participant came to consider PSE.
4. What challenges and supports the participant encountered in pursuing PSE.
5. Why the participant has not pursued PSE.
6. The participant's beliefs, attitudes and values around gender roles, success for women, the role of education in her family and community, and the barriers and supports available to her.

While a chronological restorying is one of the more common ways to restory, the interview questions and journals did not, in some cases, yield enough information to enable a chronological approach. The participants, with whom I had a previous working relationship and had thus established a trust relationship, freely shared all aspects of their early lives in the interviews and journals. However, with two of the participants I had no previous working relationship and did not establish enough trust to establish a detailed chronology of their lives; therefore, I used the interview outline to construct their stories.

At the conclusion of each restorying, I have reflected on my role as interviewer and my relationship with the participant prior to the interview. This chapter concludes with a reflection of the impact the stories and restorying process had on me.

Alison

Alison selected a coffee shop in the city close to where she lives with her aunt for the interview. We met one afternoon and over a long and leisurely cup of coffee we conducted the interview.

Alison is from a Holdeman Mennonite community. As part of her church's mission work, travel was a big part of her life. She attended the church school, which was a K-9 school, after which girls in her community were expected to help out at home, teach in the school, and get married. Alison worked a number of part-time jobs that ranged from cleaning houses to teaching at the church school. The turning point in Alison's life came when she did volunteer work in a hospital in the U.S. When she returned she was faced with the dilemma of returning to her previous teaching position or embarking upon a new career:

a big thing I always tell people is that I volunteered at the X hospital for 12 months and so then after that the health care field really spoke to me. But I don't know if it was just that, it was also like the job where I was at had a ceiling, you know, pay scale wise, it was a church school so it wasn't like they could . . . it wasn't like there were advancement opportunities well exactly . . . when I started my Adult Ed, I was principal at our little school kind of thing, you know, and there wasn't anywhere to go from there like no management nothing.

Her family was very supportive when she turned to them for advice they asked her: "What do you really want to do?", she recounts she said: "I want to be in health care". She was still struggling trying to meet the expectations of her job at the church school when a co-worker at her part-time job put things into perspective:

there was a lady there who said you need to get your Health Care Aide and come and be a health care aide in WM. I had never thought of that before and now I work with her right? I tell her you're the reason that I'm here and if anyone needs to blame anyone we're blaming you. So, she said that and it got me to thinking a little bit too you know, so community that way was good. Church-wise like I said, they said no we want you teaching still, we'll give you more money and there was also stuff like that . . . Our church is moving, it used to be like they just hated higher education, that's what they called anything after Grade 9 . . . you know.

Because Alison had only completed her Grade 9 and a Grade 10 was required to register into the Health Care Aide Certificate, she enrolled at the ALC to gain her Grade 10. Alison describes her learning journey at the ALC:

Yeah, so what you needed for Health care Aide was just your grade 10, so I took my grade 10 and 11 Bio and I got into Health Care Aide training, and in Health Care Aide training they said . . . And I kind of took Health Care Aide training to see if I could handle being a nurse because I didn't want to spend all that time and money and then say wait a minute, I don't like so this so while I was in HCA training I was encouraged and I also thought about applying for nursing so then I had to finish my grade 12. So I kind of did it in steps, like chunk, chunk, chunk kind of thing . . . But the Adult Learning Centre was very supportive, like with setting up tests, like come here, do this, we can help you with this, challenge that. Teachers were supportive, very supportive and they acknowledged my ability, so I found that big too, so they said hey you can do this, so I think that really encouraged me to keep going. And in the HCA class they said, "Hey, why not be a nurse?" kind of thing, so it was just little boosts all the time. So then for

my own life, you know you get addicted to learning . . . (Laughs) There's stuff out there I don't know and I want to know about it kind of thing . . . you know so I kind of got addicted to hey you know what there's this and this and this and then I got more of a satisfaction.

After completing her Health Care Aide Certificate, Alison, with the support of family, friends and the ALC enrolled in some distance courses while waiting to get into the nursing program. She describes her feelings and thoughts regarding her reasons for pursuing PSE and her path to PSE:

Um probably the pay ceiling a little bit, where I was at, I didn't really have any family responsibilities, so I could. Like now I see my friends with kids, husbands and stuff and I'm so lucky, lucky I don't have any of that right? Maybe I have less support than you do, but its ok, it pays off um and like that volunteer work I did, I was like maybe I'll go back there too because I had a really great experience so kind of ya.

Later in the interview she came back to her reasons for PSE and added this statement to her initial reason:

Pay and ya I want to do that kind of like I don't want to be a health care aide all my life and health care aides have their place and are very important but kind of like I want to do a little more . . . Maybe I get bored easier, I don't know, I want to do more and the pay scale too right?

She also included that living rurally, coupled with the community values, limited her options: because what else is there other than health care kind of thing, like for that kind of expertise . . . and the wages, there's not much . . . farming no, you're not getting

anywhere, getting an education to be a farmer kind of thing, there's trades and for ladies there's health care . . . pretty much that's it you know . . . so that's why I think nursing was a big window.

On the subject of her path to PSE she discussed both the supports and challenges she received and credited her parents' support as very crucial in her path to PSE:

Family are super supportive, mum especially, she's always trying to get my dad to be a nurse now . . . ok Alison will be a nurse now at least someone will be . . . um and I mentioned the church is supportive financially, and um ya, friends and family they were pretty much ya supportive.

Her community had mixed reactions to her desire to pursue PSE, but she perceived their support as mostly positive:

Ya, ya they are, they were more supportive I think? That's the way I would feel it . . . like I said they wanted me to teach more, so the church, some of the church were like "why do you need to kind of thing" . . . I don't know we're quite quiet people you know, us Mennonite's you know how they might not always say what they're thinking like I've seen very supportive church people so and the community where I'm a health care aide super supportive, like they're like " You're coming back here to work right?"

Alison reflected a positive attitude to all her challenges in the interview and, although she could note potential challenges, she did not perceive any of them as insurmountable. For Alison living rurally meant that when she decided to pursue PSE full-time she had to relocate to the city. She overcame both the obstacles of cost of PSE and rural living by working part-time as a Health Care Aide and living with a relative in the city. She also credited the staff at both

the ALC and the PSE institution in the city with facilitating a smooth transition from one institution to the next:

At the ALC:

Yup, because I started my journey in Town A at the ALC, they were like “Here and this is how you apply for nursing kind of thing”, you know and like people were like “ Well there’s University of . . . you know Alison”, so I kinda lucked into it a little bit because it was so easy, like at the front desk they just helped shovel you right in, and they were like here’s all the papers and stuff and my information was all there and that’s a big reason why I chose this PSE institution. I might have anyway if I had weighed everything out, so ya, that was a big thing I think.

At PSE:

And from the PSE institution it’s been good, you know, as I said you’re not just a number there. The teachers are pretty good with trying to make personal connection, I don’t know, like I said before, maybe it’s because I kinda stand out so they’re always like “Hey” kind of thing you know? But ya, definitely like in the first year, there was this whole thing where you pass or you fail and they were really supportive with helping me through that. I don’t know, it was really personal?

While at her PSE institution, Alison encountered values and attitudes contrary to her own and part of her growth as a student, and as a woman, was challenging assumptions that violated her own beliefs and values. One such instance occurred when she felt that an instructor was biased against rural people:

I felt this one teacher was biased against rural students and, possibly, Mennonites and I did this case study where I did this rural person but I had that he was a successful farmer and that his academic level would have been high because he was a successful farmer and she marked it wrong because she was like no he is just a farmer, he did not complete high school, he's not going to have a high level . . . And I actually went to her office and I was like look do you know how hard it is to be a successful farmer and I actually said to her "Have you ever read the Western Producer"? And I truly, I got three more marks out of her for just like talking about it, I mean I had never done that before, I was really nervous and all my friends were like no, you need to stand up for yourself, this is what you meant, she didn't catch on. So I did go and talk.

In Alison's journal Alison reflected on the attitudes and values of her community that shaped her own attitudes and values to life. Alison was very candid about gender roles and the gendered expectations of her community:

Gender roles in our house were maybe not as defined as other homes in our church/ community? As the two oldest in the family were girls, we were needed to help out on the farm-choring, driving tractor, etc. Also, I had a lot of male cousins my age and sports became very important to me . . . I was definitely a tomboy. My parents did not object too much. When I got part-time jobs they ranged from cleaning houses to assembly line style work at a tree nursery. I sometimes wished I could farm more or be a carpenter but it was tacitly discouraged (don't know if that works to put those two words together) So, in order to make a wage comparable to my male peers, I looked to health care – prompting my foray into Adult Ed and Post-Secondary Education.

Although she had an upbringing with less defined gender roles, she freely acknowledged that she does not conform to the gendered expectations in her community, but did not feel judged for her decision:

Well I wasn't really fitting into the getting married and having kids . . . and I don't know, I always like new things and let me learn more and stuff like that so I . . . it's been a real fulfillment to get my grade 12 and to move on . . . I don't know . . . very important to me. I like to do a lot of things and learn a lot of things and stuff like that . . . so its helped me deal with the fact that no, maybe I wont have a family you know, maybe I won't have a spouse and kids and that, but I do have something else and my cousins see that too like just at this last Christmas they said you know, I went and sat with my married cousins that's my age right, and they were like "You know we could have a husband here for you, Alison".

Her female role model, a woman she deemed to be successful, was her mother.

Although she did not see her mother pursuing a career, she still admired the values that her mother demonstrated. Her mother's encouragement that Alison expand her horizons and move beyond the confines of her community had initiated her foray into health care. The values of hard work and determination were values she cited throughout the interview as formative in her life:

I admire my mom for her hard work, her open mind and her many interests. She always encouraged me to try things and broaden my horizons. I also admire the hard-working women at my job . . . the staff at the personal care home where I work is predominantly female, and some are breadwinners for their families. I think they have played a big part in motivating me and instilled a drive for success in me.

Alison reflected on her community's attitude to education:

Many of the boys, however, did not see the need of pursuing education past grade 9, as you could be a successful farmer without it. That's changing now, as small farms become unable to sustain families economically, and trades are being turned to in order to make it financially. Girls considered higher education in order to make a living, as it was needed if they did not get married or weren't satisfied with the opportunity to teach in the K-9 church school. Higher education was seen as something you take up if you have to!

Alison's family inspired her desire for education by their love of books and learning:

Education was encouraged in my home growing up. We had maps on the wall and books galore! Travel was a big part, too, as my parents took our family overseas for several years (mission work for our church). I still live with my parents and they support my education.

Alison concluded her journal entry with an interesting thought on her values and her community. This entry also hinted at where her values and education might steer her in the future:

Values in my community that I disagree with would maybe be the parochialism of some of the members. I see myself as someone who is not confined by the community, although I never forget where I came from. Maybe, through my education, I can be an even greater asset someday.

I had got to know Alison over a period of years and her open-minded approach to her community and education made me re-examine my bias towards traditional faith-based communities and the influence they exert over women's decision making.

Brenda

Brenda and I met for the interview at the university where she was studying, as she was in her final semester and it was easier for her to see me between classes than for her to rearrange her home life on a weekend. Brenda booked the small boardroom in her department and ate her lunch while we conducted the interview. Brenda is a woman in her late twenties and although she is half-Aboriginal, she does not have any experience of Aboriginal culture. Brenda was a foster child in the Child and Family Services (CFS) system, in Manitoba, until grade 3 and was then adopted by French-Canadian parents.

Brenda's journey to the ALC began when she left the public school system in grade 9. Despite doing well in school, by grade 6 Brenda was struggling with depression and feelings of alienation. Of that experience she says:

I felt school growing up was just another foster family. You can live your whole life and you never belonged, and no one cared where you went, or that you were even there. My OCD, anorexia, and self-harm just got worse and worse over the years – in which led me to the dark, depressing, adolescence later on. I later became the “foster child” that my parents tried so hard to keep from.

By grade 9, her parents withdrew her from public school and homeschooled her. However, her desire to conform to her family and community's expectations led her to marrying young and becoming a parent.

I was also really young, so I had never really gotten into a serious relationship and growing up in a small town community it was almost expected of you to graduate, get married, have kids, settle down and then that was the end of your life. And so, it didn't work out and I didn't want to be part of the relationship that consisted of abuse and

drugs and alcohol and it wasn't safe anymore more my son and so I decided to leave and so... yeah.

At 18, Brenda left an abusive marriage, divorced, and found herself the single parent of a one-year-old son. She could not survive on social assistance and decided to complete her grade 12 to find employment. As her homeschooling was never registered with the correct authority, she found that she did not have any high school credits and started the journey at the ALC. Of her time at the ALC, Brenda says:

When I first started I was kind of, I was just going to get out of my house (laughs) I didn't have any other activities or anywhere to go, so it was just me and my son in my house all the time. And so it helped me, it helped me wake up in the morning, it also helped me at night when my son went to bed and I had nothing or no one to talk to, so I kind of just dove in there and um . . . It also gave me new perspectives . . . I also, um . . . I wasn't able to question my life, or my beliefs or what I stood up for or valued and then being in a past relationship it also prohibited me from thinking about myself and who I was and so, um, the school itself allowed me to ask questions and enquire and take another look on life that wasn't surrounded by the belief system that the rural division had so...

As a result of her ALC education Brenda not only gained her grade 12 diploma but also gained a new perspective on her life:

Well it gave me hope. It . . . well for so long I had been telling myself that I couldn't do anything, I was still stuck in the foster child mind where you couldn't amount up to anything and um the abusive relationships and also the stigma that us women have to be at home, be a wife and have kids and then that's as far, like that's your life and that's

where you wanna be in life. So, um, knowing that I could branch out of that and still have a happy home but still further my future and understand who I am as a person in this world definitely helped me to where I am today.

The new perspective on her life options, and an ability to question and embrace new values and attitudes enabled Brenda to consider PSE. Initially, Brenda had not considered university as an option, but, as Brenda's teacher, I felt that if she had someone who believed in and assisted her, Brenda could achieve her goals. Brenda recalls the conversations we had and her decision to embark on the PSE route:

(Laughs) You, you helped me um I think it was in our . . . No I don't really remember how it went, it wasn't that long ago but still, you told me that nobody could take my education away from me and you were reviewing my writing and told me that I could make it in university and that it was possible and that I could be a teacher . . . which was a huge shock to me because I never . . . I potentially thought that I could go as like an EA teacher and then we discussed the numbers and like the EI and how that would happen in the summertime and it just wasn't what I was looking for, for my son and I deserved more and I could get more if I worked hard, so that's how (laughs) I started that journey.

Brenda had not ever considered university because, as she recalled, it was not part of how she had been raised:

I didn't think that I could be smart enough to go to class and then um also like my parents were telling me that there was a lot of stuff, like evolution theories, that did not go with the church so it wouldn't work, so I never really thought of my options for

university and going and because I lived in such like far away . . . I didn't even really think it was possible to . . . and I wasn't comfortable in moving to the city either so...

Brenda moved to the city for the first year that she attended university but found that she did not adjust well to city living. Despite the fact that she did not get any support from her rural community or her family, she preferred living rurally. Of the supports available to her while pursuing PSE Brenda said of her rural community:

It's the place that I call home but I'm honestly like... I spend more time driving to school and doing homework at school than I am at home and so weekends is spent with the kids and I'm out of the house and so I don't really have community, its just the place that I have my home.

Brenda did not find that she had any support that she could count on from family during her time in PSE. Her greatest support network was her university community:

I have had great experiences with the profs though that kind of . . . my life really hasn't changed in support wise . . . Like I have always focused on school and that has been my only thing so maybe that has been a barrier for my social life and me living so far away has been a huge barrier . . . but I also did move to the city for a year and that didn't work out as well for the, the students here . . . so um ya, I've had really great profs who have supported me along the way and I have some profs that I'm still connected to that um keep encouraging me that I can keep going doing another step further to where I want to be and inspiring me . . . so I would say that would be my community . . . that's pretty sad (laughs).

The challenges she faced while pursuing PSE were not limited to geographic and financial obstacles. Brenda experienced both the physical and mental barriers presented by rural

living and rurality. Of these barriers she said: “so um living in a small community is just it makes it hard to . . . to become a successful person in society to be helping . . . ya . . . it wraps you up in a bubble and you can’t escape sometimes”. Commuting in Manitoba in winter presented its own challenges:

Some days, ya, when our weather is really bad... some days I haven’t been able to make it to school because of the roads and... or... I had a crappy car so that really didn’t help either so other than that no my drive to finishing something that I started has been my only reason why I’m here, like I can’t quit something and so me living out there, I don’t think would have changed anything...yeah.

Despite the fact that Brenda found that she did not have much in common with her friends from her community after her years of PSE, Brenda returned to her community to teach and work. Of this decision she said:

I dream of a bigger future away from here, but I think when I first began my journey through university, I was trying to run from here – get away from the judgments, religion, exes, and my past. As the years went on the outlook of my community changed. When I came back I realized that I just needed to find my place. I needed to see where the road led beyond my community. The funny thing about roads is that in some way, shape or form, it leads you to the place where you need it the most, and my road keeps leading me back here. I am a stronger person now, able to question the rules, religion.

A further challenge that Brenda experienced while pursuing PSE was that of her Aboriginal identity. In her rural home community, she had not been exposed to the Aboriginal

culture and found herself over the years denying any Aboriginal heritage for fear of racist comments:

I am still afraid in my community to say that I have Aboriginal in me, I will relate to that I am Filipino. If somebody asks me, I say I am Filipino, just because there is the stereotypes, I mean my last relationship he would call me squaw and just like very racial and as soon as people start drinking they bring out the racial jokes and like, because of my skin colour, so I don't like to associate with that . . . It's probably because I don't yet know my own heritage and I don't know if I ever will that I can't connect to those Aboriginal perspectives and that identity because I just don't know where my identity is . . . so.

Conversely, in her PSE program she found that her lack of knowledge about her Aboriginal identity was very problematic and presented obstacles of a different nature:

Huge, ya it's been really . . . Ya and like a lot of people seem to embrace the name that they are Aboriginal too even though they look white . . . so it's been ya, like people also expect me to know these, these things about their culture and over the five years of constantly learning about it, but it's not something I grew up into it was a way that I was treated . . . so I never understood why I was treated differently or why people didn't like me skin colour um and it wasn't my way of life and here it's a way of life . . . you have to be your skin colour, you have to be your name , what treaty are you, what culture are you yeah.

In Brenda's journal, she reflected on her childhood and what role her gender had played in her upbringing. Being raised on a farm, she did not consider gender roles until she got older:

I never really thought of gender roles in my house growing up. I was a farm girl, who moved bales to help my dad. I played outdoors and was in the mud just like any boy out there. I feel like as I grew older the only gender role that played a huge factor was that the community and my family believed that I should marry, have children, and then settle down. I wanted to make my parents proud, living a good life, but when I got married to an abusive husband that led me to being a single mom, which was hugely frowned upon.

Once she internalized the gender role expectations and tried to adhere to them, she found herself in a marriage that was unsustainable and unsafe. However, because of the values absorbed from her family and community, she experienced guilt and depression when she tried to remove herself from her marriage. She reflected on gender roles and marriage:

I have always said, “life would be so much easier being a male”, because you go to work, come home, eat, rest, whereas my life consisted of work/education and home! It’s basically working 24/7, and we do not get as much appreciation or acknowledgment for the amount that is asked of us. Sometimes it still feels that if a woman chooses to work then they have to learn to deal with work and balance home life. And if work starts replacing home life, then we must sacrifice work to make sure we take care of the duties at home.

Brenda’s female role models are women who are not only strong-willed and open-minded but have also learned to deal successfully with the work/ home life balance:

The two women that I admire are successful in everything they do, which inspires me to never give up on my dreams because I can make them happen. They are incredible mothers to their strong, and super successful children. Above all they played the

“mothering” role to me that I never had growing up. They were there to support me when things were tough, they helped me grow as a mother – teaching me how to parent, cook, question life.

For Brenda, part of being a successful woman is being able to think for yourself and being open-minded. This also reflects Brenda’s attitude to education. Initially for Brenda, education was a way to escape the pain of her life as a foster child:

Prior to grade 4, the role of education in my life was basically a life support. It was my ticket to freedom, love, and a place where I could be free from abuse, neglect, maybe even sleep awhile. From Kindergarten to grade 3, I grew up in foster homes, but the one thing that I excelled in for some reason was reading. I do not remember learning to read, but I think I loved it so much was because when I picked up a book, it was my only chance to play (in my mind). The homes that I was in and out of were really abusive, so factors such as insecurity, abuse, socio/emotional issues, all pushed schooling behind. Once I got adopted, I remember meeting my new teacher, at my new school, and I remember being super excited.

However, education did not provide a solution to Brenda’s personal struggles and it was only as an adult, after learning to think for herself at the ALC, that Brenda realized the power that education could give her and she changed her attitude towards education:

Today the role of education in my life and my family’s life has taken a dramatic turn. I am completing my teacher’s degree and am fighting to push education in my children’s lives. Not only do I want to ensure a safe environment for my children but I also want to make sure they get the best education that ensures their best futures.

Brenda, in reflecting on her community and her attitudes and values now, shared that she had now made peace with the values and attitudes of her community and realized that she was not defined by their values and attitudes:

To me now back in this community, I still hold some sort of comfort I have not yet determined. I dream of a bigger future away from here, but I think when I first began my journey through university, I was trying to run from here- get away from the judgments, religion, exes, and my past. As the years went on the outlook of my community changed. When I came back I realized that I just needed to find my place. I needed to see where the road leads beyond my community. The funny thing about roads is that in some way, shape or form, it leads you to the place where you need it the most, and my road keeps leading me back here. I am a stronger person now, able to question the rules, religion. I am able to be proud of myself and my accomplishments without having to please anyone else other than my children. My community solidifies the meaning of home somehow, but it is my children and I that forms my foundations. As I return with my degree, I have been offered placements for teaching, and I may take them, or I may not. If I stay, I believe that I can instill a new sense of community within the hearts of the children I teach. I believe that I can provide a safe, respectful environment for them to come in and be free to be themselves, no matter their family life, skin color, religion, and relationships.

As a former student and later as a friend, I have known Brenda for approximately eight years. Brenda took many of the classes I taught at the ALC, and I worked with her through every stage of her ALC education and transition to PSE. Brenda frequently stayed after class to chat about the issues we had raised in class, and through these conversations I got to know

Brenda's thoughts and feelings on a number of issues ranging from parenting to religion and everything in between! Brenda had more questions than answers and quite frequently I could not provide her with the answers she needed. Throughout the eight years, our relationship went through many phases, initially as student/teacher, later a closer 'mentoring' relationship developed and then, latterly, a friend and colleague in education. As the researcher, and having had knowledge of many of the facts of Brenda's past life, it was very meaningful for me to read the conclusion of Brenda's story. I frequently wrestled at the ALC with my desire to inform, enlighten, and challenge my students knowing that for some of them it might give a glimpse of a future that could not be attained and for others it might disrupt their worldview. I felt a burden of responsibility when students shared their career goals with me because, sometimes, I was responsible for awakening their interests, but I knew that for many their goals were unattainable in their current situation.

Carol

Carol is a woman in her early twenties. She is an Aboriginal woman, but she has not lived an on-reserve Aboriginal lifestyle. She was born and lived most of her life in Town A, a town in rural SE Manitoba. As Carole had relocated to the city for PSE and now lived and worked in the city, she selected a coffee shop near her work place to meet for the interview.

In relating her journey to the ALC, Carol stated that her mother had always emphasized the importance of education, but at age 15, Carol left high school:

I dropped out of high school when I was 15 just for a lack of interest I guess . . . I spent a couple of year just doing nothing, working as a nanny for a year, and then I decided I would go back to school mostly because I didn't want to be just like another statistic, an

Aboriginal woman who dropped out of school kind of thing and did nothing, so that's the main reason I wanted to go back.

At 18 she turned to the ALC to get her grade 12 diploma. She found that she really enjoyed learning at the ALC, as she was treated like an adult:

I felt like I was taken more seriously like I wasn't treated like a child I was . . . there was more of a respect you were given and like you and the other teachers they didn't try and dumb things down for us, you gave it straight up and if we didn't understand that's ok, you're ok with answered questions . . . but just like the whole atmosphere is totally different and you are able to . . . at the ALC they can tailor the learning experience to you a bit, whereas in the high school if you don't fit the box, you're out of here.

Initially her plan was to attend university after completing her grade 12 diploma:

I always wanted to go to university and if I could I would just study for the rest of my life but, I always wanted to do anthropology or something like that but when I think a lot . . . when . . . I not really certain what it really . . . I remember taking your class and I remember you talking about people from all over the world and different things and like Japan and I wanted to . . . I don't know how it related but it some how made me want to do like Aboriginal governance and I had originally wanted to do that but, I think there's a little bit of everything.

But, despite being accepted at two universities, she did not receive the band funding for which she was hoping. Because of lack of funding, a desire not to incur huge student loan debts, and a desire to expedite her learning, Carol chose a career college:

and at that point I was like oh maybe I'll get my anthropology or something and then go onto university and then that's where I was stuck, set on for a while and then I applied

to university. I got into the U of M and U of W and Simon Fraser in BC but I was kinda dead set on getting funding from my Aboriginal band and they didn't so that kinda put a stall to the university because I didn't know if I wanted all those student loans. So I thought the next best thing is getting the Legal Assisting and I got myself a student loan because it was shorter and faster . . . (laughs) that's my deal.

As this was not her original career plan and her mother had been closely involved in assisting her with university decision-making, not everyone in her family was supportive of her decisions:

My mom wasn't really happy about my decision to go to a career college, she really wanted me to pursue like university, one of them that I got accepted to which kind of was a little rough for me because I just wanted to do what I thought was best and easiest um my husband was supportive of going to ABC, he didn't want me to go to university so . . . it was kind of different but, my family for the most part was supportive but my mom had her own take on it.

When asked why her husband did not support her interest in attending university she replied:

Well he didn't want me to go to university, we weren't married at the time when I, we were engaged and he didn't want me . . . he didn't want to live in the city and he didn't want me to go to university because, it's not going to sound good, but in his words " I might meet someone better there" or he felt threatened about me pursuing more things like that so for him it was kind of a territorial thing I guess, it wasn't necessarily about what I'd learn or do with it .

Despite the lack of band funding, Carol had a supportive community of friends and extended family in the city. She also carpooled with a friend from her hometown and this assisted her in getting to her college daily. Of this experience and her supports in her hometown she says:

I had a friend who was also thinking of going back to school and she had just had a kid and she didn't want to be stuck just doing that forever, or just being a mom so, she ended up going to ABC with me so we did it together, we car pooled and it was nice but for the most part my friends, a lot of them weren't like, didn't care, didn't have an opinion, they were just kinds like apathetic to everything.

Later, in her journal, Carol reflected that her home community's values did not really promote education and that was why she found herself gradually alienated from her friends in her hometown:

I was raised in Town A. There was never really a push from the community either way to attend college or university. Most people would just graduate from school; get married and just start a family. To my knowledge, less than half of the people I grew up with went on to pursue a further education. In Town A it's perfectly acceptable to just work at the grocery store for the rest of your life. I've had people tell me that schooling is a waste of time because it just sends you into debt with student loans. I don't think that's a valid reason to not want to pursue it.

Living rurally did impact on Carol's decision-making process regarding PSE because the local college did not have many options and the thought of going out of province to live and study was:

kind of scary when you are from a town of 10 000 people, you're not really ready to go to Victoria or wherever it was . . . but um ya . . . it was a little too scary to think about

going somewhere too far or somewhere too big, just because you're from somewhere small, you're used to driving to the city every weekend right, cause that's the only place to do something, so that didn't seem like too big of a option for going to school?

Carol's learning experience at her PSE institution was not academically stimulating or challenging and in contrast with the ALC, she felt let down:

It was like going backwards, I felt like going from the adult learning centre to ABC, it was like a step down . . . work was like, it wasn't challenging, it was stuff like . . . I could have done the whole program in 2 months probably, it just was spread out, it was kind of . . . the teachers were really nice and were really great, but you can tell that they don't , they weren't given enough support on certain things either so . . . just in terms of like everything it felt like it was step down from the adult learning centre.

In her journal, Carol reflected on gendered roles in her home and community. She did not grow up in a home with traditional gender roles and contrasted her experience of being raised by an independent, single mother, who valued education, with her community's values that did not seem to value education:

When I was growing up my mother instilled the importance of education into my siblings and I. There was never a question of if we would go to college or university, but what we would take and where we would go. My mom herself has two university degrees and was able to get them while raising three children on her own. So it was always expected of us to go to post secondary school.

While she had recognized that the gender expectations of her community led many of her friends to marry early and not pursue PSE, she had not considered how these community structures had influenced her career choice:

Having grown up in a community that has these usual strict gender role careers definitely has an impact, whether I knew it or not, on my career choice. I am a paralegal, which is an administrative office job. A job you would typically see a woman work in my community. To me, this seemed like a good fit to me. I didn't realize until this moment that it might have been influenced by the gender roles in my community.

In 2014, Carol graduated as a paralegal and is now working as a paralegal and living in the city. For Carol, a successful woman is:

The women that I admire are kind, compassionate, have raised successful and wonderful children, and have seen success in their own careers. To me, being able to balance your career with your family is a sign of success. To me, family is very important, being able to maintain your relationship and closeness with your family is more important than the success of your career. I know many women who are able to have great family dynamics while continuing to have success in their career.

Despite her experience at the career college, Carol has not given up on her aspirations to pursue a career she finds interesting. Her desire is, at some time in the future, to return to PSE. She reflected on where she is working now and her future ambitions:

like I really love the people I work for and with and the company I work for but its not what I want to do, you know, I want to go back to school and pursue more things that I am passionate about rather than go through the motions every day . . . Its difficult work I taught Carol for one semester before I left the ALC in 2013. While in the career development class that I taught, Carol investigated her options regarding PSE. I was excited to hear what type of PSE Carol had pursued, as I remembered her as being a vibrant person full of big dreams for the future. As the interview progressed, I could not help feeling disappointed

that Carol had not achieved her dream of going to university. I deliberately did not probe about the details of her decision to abandon a university career, as I got the sense that Carol was disappointed in her decision and had regrets about her career choice. The interview was shorter than most of the other interviews and I was left with the impression that much had been left unsaid.

Diane

Diane is a woman in her early twenties. I met Diane for the first time when I interviewed her, as she was not a student at the ALC while I was teaching there. The fact that I had no previous relationship with her and the fact that she had just moved and was very busy unpacking, resulted in an interview that was much shorter than my previous interviews. I met her at her home in Town A, and we sat at her kitchen table to conduct the interview. Although she was relaxed in her own home, she had recently moved houses, was still busy unpacking, and seemed eager to conclude the interview. Her responses to the interview questions, despite prompting, were often lacking in depth and information. I felt that this was largely due to the fact that I did not know her, and because of the rushed nature of the interview, we did not establish a rapport.

Diane had been living in S.E. Manitoba for the past four years but previously lived in rural Alberta. She had also lived in urban centres in Manitoba and Alberta. Diane attended a small elementary school in a quiet community but was living in a city when she left high school at 17. In exploring her journey to the ALC she said:

I was a bar-tender and you know, as much as I loved it, it wasn't something I wanted to do for the rest of my life, so you take the first steps and go back to school and we got the cards in the mail about College X here, because I had checked before to go back to

school when I lived in Town A, I had lived in Alberta for a little bit and I had tried there too, but none of it really worked and, ya I tried here and I went there so that I could finally have my grade 12 and then go to university.

She related that she tried to return to school both in Alberta and in rural Manitoba, but the style of independent learning at both places did not meet her needs.

And then I ended up moving back to Manitoba and then I moved out to G, which is when I tried doing the one in Town A, and then I just gave up on that because I'm not the best for . . . basically it was like here's your stuff for your courses, you can go home and do it, you can show up . . . it didn't really matter?

When she found that the ALC in Town A offered formal classes, she signed up for her grade 12 diploma. Initially, she had to travel some distance to classes because she was not living in Town A. She was hesitant about returning to school, as she had not had good experiences with education. Of this successful attempt she said:

When I had gone back before I hadn't really had the confidence that I was like going to finish it? I had a lot of anxiety about being back in school and I loved being back... like I felt stimulated and challenged and there was no more anxiety to go with it, like I loved it so much... I had phenomenal teachers who just made it so much easier ... it was just wonderful

Not only did Diane overcome her anxiety about school, but also through exposure to the different courses at the ALC, she recognized where her strengths lay and what career direction she should take:

I loved the ALC here, it was actually my teacher for my first two semesters, my courses because it was law, psychology – he was my teacher for both of those and I was

still kinda fifty-fifty on what I wanted to do for work whether it was just like youth care or social work or psychology itself and being back at school and doing the psychology courses I realized being a psychologist wasn't for me. As much as I loved it, it was . . . I would just be way too personally involved.

Diane received support not only from her immediate family while at the ALC but also from the rural community where she lived and worked:

I was actually still living in out G when I went back out here . . . and it was actually the community from the bar that I worked in that in a town called R that was super supportive about me going back to school. Like I would be sitting at the bar some nights doing my homework and they would patiently wait until I was done whatever I was doing...(laughs) to get what they needed . . . they were super supportive and were like all for me for going back to school.

Diane intends pursuing PSE and is currently working towards gaining enough volunteer hours to be accepted into the program. The fact that the program is only offered in the city means that Diane will have to commute daily. Diane describes the potential challenges facing her:

as long as I can get my volunteer hours in on time and stay in touch with people from Service Canada, they are actually going to, I guess it's almost like a scholarship, they are going to fund me, for two years of school, which is exactly how long my certificate is and then they'll help with the financial costs of like a house? But I am still looking to being back at work . . . I just had surgery in December . . . so I'm trying to go back to work so that I can go to work and school! And get it done. I think the biggest financial barrier will be that I don't have my own vehicle and not having a vehicle and going to

City A . . . The College X campus out here doesn't offer the Youth Care worker certificate so.

Currently, Diane is still bar tending, but she is also working with Service Canada to get enough volunteer hours to get funded to study the Youth Care program at a local college:

I would like to work with or through CFS in like group homes and independent living homes because I find that's a really critical time is in higher-level homes? Normally when you are in a group home or in independent living homes you're 14-18 and like, I know people who were in CFS when they were at that age and I'd like to be there to shape those times and make a difference and be involved with them . . . so.

In reflecting on gender and gender roles in her home, Diane said:

I personally do not find that gender roles have been a dominant part of my life although I was raised in a primarily female household. My mother was a single mother who raised my sisters as well as myself on her own, and maybe when looking at gender roles I believe the dominant role is that of strength and independence, that while you may not have to do it on your own, you are always able to; but that it does not rely specifically on gender.

While Diane did not agree with some of the values in the rural community in which she lives, she liked the values of respect and caring she has witnessed in her time living there:

As for my community we have simple values; this is a religious town, with definite gender roles, and whilst I may not agree with all things, I find the basic values of respect, care, and general positive treatment of your fellow towns people and community to be the right ideals for communities. I disagree with some of the gender roles of certain community aspects, within certain religious systems it is still very basic

in the sense that the men work and provide for the family, while women tend home and family, as a independent woman I find being able to step outside of that domestic role, working and chasing your dreams to be exceedingly empowering, but, those women could find those roles in their communities to be empowering to them, so I try not to judge.

Diane stated, repeatedly, that she highly valued education and was determined to achieve her educational goals:

Education has always played a huge role in my life, as it still does today. I am currently looking into education programs for my chosen field of work, I support my younger sister in her education, as well as I push my older sister to continue pushing through on her medical studies.

When it came to role models and success, Diane reflected that she probably would choose herself as a role model and a definition of success, as she felt she was on the road to achieving her goals despite many obstacles in her life:

but the person I admire most is myself. I tried to think hard of someone I admired, looked up too, and I found that I don't use anyone else other than myself as my admiration and strength to push further. While I definitely have strong people in my life I find I admire myself in how far I have come in life, even in the last few months, from where I have been, the struggles I have gone through, the strength to persevere, and still have a heart full of compassion after it all. I find most women who I could look up to in success and strength lacking in compassion, they have a coldness towards them; I believe it is a feature of true inner strength to be able to do all the things required for success and still have a compassionate heart.

I left the interview wondering what had impacted on Diane's ability to respond to the questions in a deep and meaningful way? Was it because I did not know her and had not been able to establish a rapport with her? I had hoped that her journal responses would give me a greater insight into her thinking, but her journal responses did not really clarify or add any great depth to her interview responses.

Esther

Esther is a woman in her early sixties. I had not met Esther before I interviewed her. We met at her home and sat at the kitchen table to conduct the interview. Even though I had no previous relationship with Esther, I could easily establish a rapport with her during the interview. Esther was easy to talk to and was willing to share her thoughts and feelings about her decisions. She has lived rurally in S.W. Manitoba since she was three-years-old. Esther's family immigrated to rural Manitoba and is of German heritage. The journey that would lead her adult learning and the ALC began many years ago when she left school to work.

She says of that time:

It was a small town and we lived on the outskirts so my interaction with the town was small. My interaction was at school or in the church. My father passed away when I was only 12 and I started working shortly after that and working became more of a priority than school. We needed all the income we could to live on. Economics played a much larger role in life than education at this time.

Although she did not have the opportunity to finish school, she valued education and raised her children to value education too. In 1998, Esther decided to return to school to get her grade 12 diploma:

That was 1998 to 99 and I've spent all my working life working in a high school and someone who worked in the high school with me told me about the Adult Education Centre and it was brand new, it was just opening and she told me how it worked and I have always felt that I would like to go back to get my high school diploma so it just seemed to suit what I needed to do and wanted to fit into my lifestyle at that time.

For Esther her return to formal education was not motivated by career or economic concerns, but to fulfill a lifetime goal. She did not ask for validation or support from family or friends in this decision:

I just told them this is what I was doing and they were all good and some of them were again staff in the building, so ya the support was there on one hand but again it was totally, it was totally my thing.

The ALC allowed Esther to work independently. She was not tied down to daily classes and could draw on her community and work-based resources to assist her in her learning:

Yes it was brand new and it was right downtown and I knew the lady who chose to run the centre very well because she left our school and she was a teacher in the high school and she left to do that, so she was very supportive and she kind of talked me through the what I needed to do and how we could do this and what my options were, um so I did a few things at the Adult Ed centre, but as I said most of the stuff I ended up doing within the high school.

The courses had a volunteer component, and Esther volunteered in the kindergarten for the year that she was at school. She had always wanted to work with children, and this volunteer placement opened up the possibility of training to work with children. However, when Esther

considered the length of time it would take to qualify as an Early Childhood Educator and the distance she would have to travel to the city for classes, she decided not to pursue PSE:

the length of the program and my age and then of course the geography piece. You know, having . . . now I'm going to say to myself, now I'm going to drive to the city every day because my home and my life is here, you know, so picking up and moving . . . an hour and a half down the road is just not feasible . . . and then also, do I want to give up my whole life to do this . . . and it was a no.

Besides the length of the program, her age, and the distance she would have to travel, Esther's priorities were focused on her community volunteer work and her grandchildren, and she added in her reflection of the commitment to PSE:

Well, as I said I'm a very active grandparent and I would never, ever give that up um I have a home, I have a husband that . . . and I have a job . . . I have my volunteer commitments that I am very committed to and my grandkids they are first and foremost, yup, that's the bottom line.

Esther did not regret her decision, as she has always been happy and fulfilled in her job and in her community involvement.

Reflecting on gender roles in her childhood and community, Esther did not believe that she was restricted because of her gender. She reflected that it was related more to the time period in which she lived than her gender:

Gender roles were very much as they were in most homes in the sixties. Although my mother did teach her sons how to cook and clean the majority of the housework was done by the girls. But out of necessity I also helped with the outside work. The work needed to be done so everyone helped. Job opportunities were as they were in small

towns back then. Babysitting, retail or restaurant work. I don't think it was a gender role as much as a teenage role. Gender was not an influence as much as were life choices at the time. I got married just before my 18th birthday and started a family immediately and looking back my family became my priority, not education or a career. That came after my family was grown and that was for my own personal growth.

Community involvement is a cornerstone of Esther's volunteer life and allows her to be a productive and valued member of her community. Her reflection on what it means to be successful as a woman demonstrates her deep commitment to her community:

I admire my mother and my mother-in-law. They were and are strong, hard-working women who raised large families who have all done well in life. They built strong loving homes where everyone was always welcome. They worked hard in their churches and communities and have made and continue to make a difference in many lives. They were and are strong successful women and yes I have attained the same level of success within my home and community.

Esther's commitment to her community is also reflective of her belief in the values of her community. Of the community values she said:

This community has strong Christian values that are very much geared towards helping others and working for the greater community and in the last number of years also helping the world community and the refugees that have joined our community.

The interview with Esther went well and although, initially, there had been some hesitation to disclose her thoughts, by the end of the interview I felt there was a good rapport and sense of trust. Esther expressed some confusion at the journal questions on gender roles, when I went through them with her, and in her journal response she indicated that they were

very difficult questions to answer. I sensed that her confusion came from being asked to consider potential influences on her life she had not considered before, as she had reflected earlier that she had not viewed any role expectations in her life as being gender based.

Fern

Fern is a 40-year-old woman. Fern has Aboriginal status and is typical of many Aboriginal women in that she has been alienated from her culture through colonial structures. I first met Fern when I taught her at the ALC. I only taught Fern for a term, but as the subject I taught required a great deal of personal sharing, I got to know Fern quite well. I met Fern at a coffee shop in Town A and could re-establish the rapport that we had had in class fairly quickly.

Fern's journey to the ALC, although precipitated by her son's lack of academic engagement, started long before that event. I asked Fern to tell me about her journey to the ALC:

there were a few, numerous things . . . One of them was, um, I had my oldest son when I was 14 and so I decided when I had him that I was going to keep him, um I knew that was going to impinge on my education because I couldn't raise him and work full time and go to school, so I promised myself then that I was going to go back to school because my ambitions and dreams were to become a police officer later on when I grew up, and I knew that um . . . then I proceeded to have 3 more kids and I was almost coming 40 and so I could see my kids growing up, graduating and leaving and so what was I? Cause I had been mom and wife up to this point and who was Fern? Where was I going to be in all of this when everybody was gone?

Fern described her journey through learning at the ALC as transformative:

It gives power . . . knowledge . . . and I'll never forget my dad's saying "Knowledge is power" and without knowledge you have nothing and whatever that knowledge is, whether it be in an industry or working in school, and school did it for me . . . it changed who I was, it really did, like it gave me such confidence and self worth and that in itself, like when I went back, my intent was to possibly go back into a career of law enforcement somewhere, um and I realized that was probably . . . because I wanted, I thought I wanted a power . . . I needed that to have power and now I don't feel that urge or that rush to have to go into that kind of field ,I have power just from that year I spent in school and it hasn't left . . . like it's funny . . . it just hasn't left, it hasn't left.

At the ALC, she derived support from the women in her class who were also parenting, working, and finishing their grade 12. These women became her community of support:

What I found was the group of people when I found when I went back to school, those people became my core . . .you know X and them, you know we worked hard together, we drove each other . . . we both have . . . she's got young kids and I had older kids so we would . . . my older kids would baby sit her younger kids and we would get together and cram for studying and we would, so we just made it work and that became my new circle.

While her children, church community and employer were supportive of her decision to study at the ALC, she did not get the support from her spouse that she had hoped:

Um, actually he was the opposite, um he didn't want me to go back . . . part of that was a fear, I think, um, of losing mom and wife . . . change . . . um, but how are you still gonna do everything you're gonna do Fern if you're in school? And, and I mean life

did change when I went back to school, you know there were a lot of frozen meals and late nights (laughs) and sleepless evenings and many nights he slept, you know when he was home, he would have to sleep alone because I was up all night doing a paper or. In considering PSE and the implications of that decision, Fern discussed her family commitments, her husband's job, and financial pressures as barriers:

Um, at this point, um the year I spent in school, and that was only for my grade 12, that's half the intensity it's going to take to go back to university . . . um I was a non-existent mom and so . . . and my husband's a truck driver, so my decision not to go back to school right now is based on my husband not being home, but four days a month, and I have a daughter who is 16 and still in grade 11.

Living rurally was also identified as a significant barrier to PSE:

You're looking at how many hours of school, that you're at school, plus you've got your drive every day. You add, well you worked here for 10 years, (sighs), well it's a huge barrier, it really is cause you're adding, you know minimum two hours, probably three every day to your hours that's what you're taking away from doing homework, that's taking away from your meal planning or, you know, whatever? Your health takes a hit! I gained; when I went back to school I gained 47 pounds! (laughs) . . . and then you've got weather . . . so then you add weather to that, so when you've got bad weather you're longer, or you're laid over or you're stuck here and then ya, huge, huge barrier

Since graduating from the ALC, Fern became more involved in the day-to-day running of the family finances, more confident in her volunteer roles in the community and empowered in ways she had not considered before.

On gender roles in her home and in her community, Fern reflected:

Because of my gender I do believe in order to make an income equivalent to a man I need to be educated or additionally educated and men often don't need education to make a good income level. Although we have come a long way from the 70's or 80's we as women still make way less then men do for often the same job, if we are fortunate enough to get a chance at a job opportunity . . . I think that having my parents model a non-specific gender role household for us really confused me in my own marriage and family, because I expected to have that kind of relationship and family of my own. However my husband grew up in a very gender specific household. Men did outside work and women do all inside and delicate outside work. The women took care of children until they were old enough to start helping with the work that their gender decided they are qualified to do.

In defining success, Fern explained what she admired in a friend who is a successful woman:

I admire her because to me the meaning of success is being able to balance her responsibilities as a mom, wife, friend and employee well as well as being financially effective.

Education enabled Fern to recognize what she loves about her rural community but also enabled her to recognize the limitations of the values held by the community:

In our community we have good schools because our community strives for good education for our kids. Our community values our faith-based beliefs and puts strong value in our youth. I like these values in our community. I do disagree that if a child doesn't fit in to the "box" and they don't already know of another "box" the child fits in, the community isn't very accommodating. If someone does not fall into the "church" going category, then they struggle to fit in at all. I don't like this.

Despite having community support and the support of her employer, Fern spoke frankly about her fears of embarking on a PSE route:

you're a mom, you're a wife, you know you're busy, you still have laundry and dishes, you still have responsibilities, those don't go away... so time is of the essence and then in my situation (my husband) isn't home, and so when he is home, I usually shut everything else off and we do what he needs to do or what he wants to do and we spend time together. And that's hard to do if you've got a paper due tomorrow morning and he's home for 24 hours . . . it don't matter, your teacher does not care that he was home for 24 hours . . . and that is, that time is hard, that makes it very difficult to um pursue . . . I know people do it, but it seems from the outside not being in it, very overwhelming and I don't know, plus adding the costs which is a financial burden, that's a lot of stress. I mean, in all fairness it's, it's scary.

Fern's intention is to study further, but now that she has completed her grade 12 she does not feel pressured to make hasty decisions regarding her future. Her grade 12 education gave her "contentment" and the ability to take charge of the aspects of her life where she did not feel in control. Fern concluded her consideration of PSE by saying: "I think I want to go into something, eventually, that has better zen, something that's less stressful . . . I think I've raised 4 teenagers and been married for 25 years and I need something less stressful".

Fern and I chatted for quite a while after we had ended the interview. This was the longest interview I had conducted, almost 2 hours. I found myself slipping back into the role of "career counselor" and giving her the options of part-time and online post-secondary study after the interview. The interview with Fern reaffirmed my commitment to my research, as I knew that voices like hers needed to be heard in a discussion of rural women.

On the way home I reflected, once again, on the interesting women I had met and taught in the years I was with the ALC. They left a profound impact on me and completely changed my perception of formal education. The linear trajectory recommended by society through the K-12 system, I realized, was only one way of approaching formal education. In fact, education was far more meaningful and transformative in people's lives when they received it at a stage of their lives that they were ready for it.

Chapter Summary

To understand rural women's decision-making, I looked to the literature on rural women and education (Dolan & Thien 2008; Kubik & Moore, 2013; Leach, 2013; Neustaeter, 2015; Pini, 2003) and the results of the pilot study (Webb, 2014). Two broad concepts that emerged and that were used to develop both the guiding questions and the interview and journal questions were the experiences, barriers, and supports along the journey from ALC to PSE, and the attitudes, values, and beliefs surrounding gender and education that played a significant role in the decision-making process of rural women. This chapter has given expression to the six participants' stories of their educational journey to the ALC and beyond to PSE, as well as articulating their attitudes, beliefs and values regarding gender roles and education. The next chapter uses these same two conceptual areas to uncover the themes that emerged from the interview questions and journals.

CHAPTER V Findings and Thematic Analysis

Data collection and analysis techniques are often similar across different forms of qualitative research, but the way the data are reported varies widely (Cresswell, 2012). The results of this study have been organized into two distinct chapters. Chapter IV presents the participants' restories. The restories allowed the participants' voices to emerge, addressed the key questions asked in the interviews and journals, and added depth to the holistic approach of the analysis. Chapter V describes the findings according the themes identified and developed from the participant's responses to the interview and journal questions.

Figure 1 illustrates the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. Figure 1 includes the two broad conceptual areas identified in Chapter 1, that guide rural women's decision-making regarding PSE, namely (a) the experiences, barriers, and supports along the journey from ALC and beyond, and (b) the attitudes, values, and beliefs surrounding gender and education. Figure 1 shows how the two conceptual areas of decision-making produced both distinct and linked themes. The arrow from the theme of "rural patriarchal society" to the themes of "family and community", "education not valued or tied to gender roles" and "rural gendered roles" indicates that this theme has an influence on all of these themes. The rest of this chapter is structured around the research questions and themes illustrated in Figure 1. The chapter concludes with a summary.

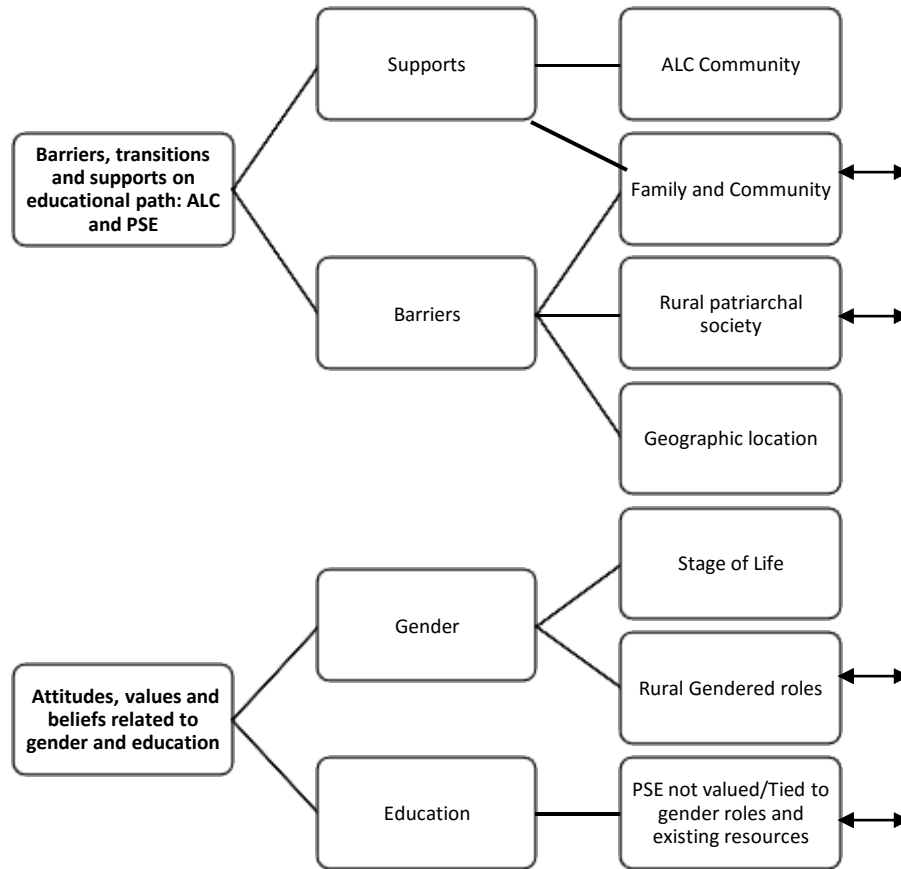


Figure 1 Findings related to barriers, supports and transitions.

Findings Related to Barriers, Transitions, and Supports

In Chapter 1, I identified the five questions that would guide my research:

1. What influences the decision-making of rural women to return to formalized education at an ALC and, later, to PSE?
2. What is the process like for rural women in the transition from ALC to PSE?
3. How have attitudes, values, and role models they have encountered in their lives shaped their attitudes towards their education?
4. Do rural women encounter barriers in their desire to fulfill their educational goals?

5. What specific barriers do rural women encounter in envisioning educational goals when they are focused on existing resources and potential opportunities (resource-based planning vs goal- centered planning – Deacon and Firebaugh, 1988)?

These questions were used to guide the findings in order to address the bigger question: What influences rural women’s decision-making with regards to PSE? Questions 3 and 4 are addressed first, by examining the themes related to supports: family and community; ALC community, and barriers: family and community; geographic location and rural patriarchal society.

Supports: ALC community. Supports identified by the participants fell into both tangible and intangible (psychological) categories. Tangible supports identified were financial assistance, transportation, and academic coaching and intangible supports were emotional encouragement, positive affirmation, and validation of their academic choices. The ALC community of support provided both tangible and intangible assistance to the participants.

For all of the participants, the ALC provided that valuable first step back into the realm of formal education. Many of the participants, Brenda, Carol, Esther and Fern had negative recollections of their K-12 school experience. All the participants had some anxiety and misgivings about registering for their grade 12. Alison recalled the positive encouragement by the ALC staff in challenging courses for credit: “I started by giving them my grades and seeing if I could get any credits. I challenged the Grade 10 English, I challenged the Grade 10 Math and they were like “yup, yup you can get this ”. Carol stated: “I felt like I was taken more seriously like I wasn’t treated like a child I was ... there was more of a respect you were given and like you and the other teachers they didn’t try and dumb things down for us”. Diane was extremely anxious about going back to school and related, “I had a lot of anxiety about being

back in school and I loved being back... like I felt stimulated and challenged and there was no more anxiety to go with it, like I loved it so much... I had phenomenal teachers who just made it so much easier ... it was just wonderful!”

Esther and Fern found formal schooling had been challenging and had not met their needs as learners. Both, however, found their ALC experience to be ideally suited to their needs as learners, as it not only allowed them to be independent, but also was contextually relevant to their lives. Esther preferred a ‘hands-off’ self-directed approach to learning and the fact that an apprenticeship placement with the kindergarten could be counted as high school credit suited her needs as a learner. She recalled that she had found school problematic as a child because she was a doer, not a listener, and traditional schooling did not cater to her learning style. She enjoyed not having to attend classes, rather taking work home to complete on her own. Similarly, Fern had experienced learning difficulties as a child but had found the ALC’s approach more relevant to her life and found herself excelling academically. Diane found the individual study approach from the first ALC she attended did not meet her needs, and when she found an ALC with classes where she had to attend, it worked for her. Brenda also needed the expectations set by the ALC to motivate her to “get up in the morning”. Fern stated that the group of friends she made at the ALC became her most important source of motivation during her time at the ALC. Importantly, the supportive environment created by the support staff, teachers, and fellow classmates at the ALC was cited as a significant contribution to the success of all six participants.

Those who transitioned to PSE spoke highly of not only the academic preparation that the ALC had provided them, but also the encouragement and advising provided by the support staff and teachers at the ALC. The three participants who pursued PSE engaged successfully

with the more self-directed approach of PSE but credited the small class size and directed approach of the ALC for getting them to that point. Alison credited the close connection she forged with teachers at the ALC for her more forgiving approach to teachers at her PSE institution. She felt that the small classes, academic expectations, and confidence gained at the ALC prepared her for the self-directed approach of PSE. Brenda found PSE like “a huge ant colony and they all seem to blend in a move together” and she felt alone and disconnected. Carol experienced her PSE institution as a “step down” from the ALC academically and missed the guidance and direction she had experienced at the ALC.

As an educator who had a prior teacher/ student relationship with four of the six participants, I must be aware of the fact that some of the positive feedback on the role of the ALC could be attributed to this prior relationship. However, both Esther and Diane, who I had not taught, did speak highly of the ALC and the role it played in their success. Furthermore, I only taught both Carol and Fern for a very short period of time and both spoke very highly of teachers unknown to me who had influenced them at the ALC. I did not gain the impression that any of the participants, with whom I had had a previous teacher/student relationship, felt constrained in their evaluation of the role of the ALC because I was the interviewer.

Supports and barriers: family and community. Families, both immediate and extended, played a pivotal role in the education experience of the participants. The theme of families existing as both a support and barrier directly influences and is influenced by the other themes of rural gendered roles and patriarchal structures in rural areas. For rural women, the barrier that their gender role in the family (that of primary child-care giver, housekeeper, and emotional counselor) creates is one of limiting their time and thus their ability to fully assume the role of student. As this gender role is entrenched in the patriarchal system and,

consequently, tied to their self-worth and status in their homes, any disruption of this role can lead to a negative consequence for the rural woman. For Brenda, the support she needed most from her family, but did not get, was in assistance with childcare. Their reluctance to support her in any way in her studies was tied to the belief that she was not properly fulfilling her role as a mother by staying at home with her children. Fern cited her responsibility to her daughter, who is still at school, as the main reason why she was delaying PSE and also assumed full responsibility for perceived problems within her family:

That was one of the disadvantages of me going back to school was my kids kinda lost me for a year. I wasn't good at juggling it I don't think? I don't know... either I wasn't good at it or maybe I, I... made it, I think it's worse than it really was. But um we started having some trouble with our kids that we didn't have previous... um I was very... I dove in, head first and really worked hard and so, kinda neglected in areas I probably shouldn't have.

The two participants who are unmarried, Alison and Diane, and the two other participants who did not have children living at home, Carol and Esther, did not experience the same level of family demands on their time. Alison and Diane cited immediate family as their constant support throughout their education. The reasons for this could be because they are not married, and thus do not have family expectations of spousal duties, and because they are single, they need careers to support themselves. Although Esther did not experience family as a barrier, she did cite her grandchildren as one of the major reasons why she would not spend time pursuing PSE. For Carol, although her studies at the career college were well supported by her spouse and extended family, her husband's opposition to university study limited her choice of career.

All participants reported varied levels of support from family and their rural communities. Overall, there did not seem to be a commonality of experience when it came to family or community support in the transition from ALC to PSE. When a participant had a pre-existing good relationship with family and friends before embarking on PSE, like Alison, she perceived the support throughout the transition as very good, although she was pursuing a path that conflicted with community values. However, when the participants felt alienated from their community, like Brenda and Carol, they did not see the need to rely on the support from their community. In fact, for Brenda, the transition from ALC to PSE was, in part, an escape from her community and family.

Rural communities can be perceived as restrictive when the values of the community clash with those of the individual and the individual feels judged. Conversely, rural communities can offer security and safety to those who feel like they belong. All three of the participants who transitioned to PSE initially experienced a sense of alienation. The sense of alienation, for Alison, was not only because she dressed differently, and thus was easy to identify as “different”, but also because she perceived that her PSE world did not respect the rural knowledge of her home community. She felt judged, not for her religion or dress, but because she represented rurality. Brenda’s alienation was twofold. She felt alienated from her rural community because she felt judged for her choice of PSE over marriage and children, and when she entered the PSE world, she felt judged for her lack of knowledge of her Aboriginal roots and identity. While Carol did not experience the same sense of alienation at her PSE institution, she gradually became alienated from her friends in her home community. All three of the participants who entered PSE recalled that, gradually, their ability to relate to friends and people in their rural community became more difficult as they found they had less and less in

common with them. Alison, although encouraged by people in her community to return to the rural community upon completion of her PSE, has doubts whether the pace would be challenging enough for her. Brenda has returned to her community, despite her misgivings, and has made peace with them. Carol, although she visits her family in the community, does not feel like she belongs anymore.

The three participants who have not yet transitioned to PSE had a somewhat different view of the supports and barriers presented by their communities. Diane described the rural community where she worked as being her support network during her time at the ALC and later, when asked about her community's values, reflected: "I find the basic values of respect, care, and general positive treatment of your fellow towns people and community to be the right ideals for communities". Esther felt respected in her community and also endorsed her community's values: "This community has strong Christian values that are very much geared towards helping others and working for the greater community". Likewise, Fern saw herself as an active, respected member of her community but did recognize that it could be limiting to people who did not adhere to their values:

I do disagree that if a child doesn't fit in to the "box" and they don't already know of another "box" the child fits in, the community isn't very accommodating. If someone does not fall into the "church" going category then they struggle to fit in at all. I don't like this.

Even though there was no commonality of experience regarding family and community acting as supports and barriers to PSE, there were some interesting findings. Taken together, the findings indicated that when women assume the roles of wives and mothers, the gendered roles expectations that are deeply entrenched in the community act as a barrier to further education.

These gendered role expectations, that are part of the patriarchal rural community and part of their faith based communities, are accepted without question as part of how the family and faith based communities' function. Women who adhere to these values find acceptance and respect in their communities.

Barriers: geographic limitations. Throughout the interviews and journals many participants related their decision-making to living rurally. Some of the participants overcame rural barriers by moving to the city to pursue post-secondary education,

but still maintained close links with their rural community. Others reported living rurally as a seemingly insurmountable barrier to PSE. The feelings of alienation when leaving rural communities to study were part of the barriers in the transition from ALC to PSE, which emerged through the participants' stories. Alison, Carol, and for the first year, Brenda, relocated to the city to pursue PSE. Esther and Fern stated that the commuting required to pursue PSE was an almost insurmountable barrier, as neither of them would have the desire, or be in a position, to relocate to the city.

Barriers: rural patriarchal society. As stated in the previous sections, the journey to PSE, by both participants who have transitioned and those who have not yet, is frequently shaped by gender role expectations in rural communities. The four participants who did not have children at home did not experience the same types of demands from home and thus did not experience family as a barrier to further education. However, Carol did acquiesce to pressure from her spouse not to attend university, and she did not fulfill her goal of a university education. In reflecting upon her life goals, Carol considered that if she wanted to have children with her spouse, she would probably have to forgo a career. Alison experienced, and still does experience, the pressure to conform to her community's expectations of marriage and children.

While they respected her pursuit of education, the good-natured teasing by her cousins at Christmas time contains a reminder of her community's expectations. Brenda suffered abuse at the hands of her partner but was still pressured by her family and community to choose motherhood and marriage over single parenting and an education. Fern put her PSE on hold, as the expectation in her home was that her attention would be focused on her husband while he was at home between trucking jobs. Esther did not recognize that roles were gendered but stated that girls did babysitting jobs in her youth, without reflecting that this was not a role expected of boys. Diane, although she recognized that women were not working in traditionally men's jobs, like construction, was unsure whether women would want to work in those areas. These barriers to further education for women within the patriarchal society are not only a product of rural societies and outdated family expectations, but they are also a result of the control and influence of religious institutions in the rural communities that are patriarchal in nature.

Attitudes, Values and Beliefs Related to Gender and Education

Intersection of gendered roles and rural patriarchal society. It would be incorrect to assume that the patriarchy in rural areas exists only in the homes and gendered roles within homes. The three participants who have pursued PSE all spoke about the impact of the rural community on their decision-making regarding PSE. Alison reflected that living rurally directly impacted her career options and limited her choices, as financially viable and socially acceptable careers were limited in her community. She said, "because what else is there other than health care kind of thing... there's trades and for ladies there's health care". In Alison's community, girls considered higher education only in order to make a living if "they did not get married or weren't satisfied with the opportunity to teach in the K-9 church school". Brenda stated throughout her interview and journal that growing up in a small community it was almost

expected of girls to “get married, have kids, settle down and then that was the end of your life”. Brenda felt that it was the only way in her community to gain acceptance. She expressed a feeling of being trapped in a small community and that “ living in a small community it just makes it hard to . . . to become a successful person in society”. Sometimes the isolation was akin to being wrapped in a “bubble where you can’t escape”. For Carol, the realization that gender roles in her community may have had an impact on her career choice, emerged through engaging with the journal questions. She reflected, in response to her choice of becoming a paralegal, “I didn’t realize until this moment that it might have been influenced by the gender roles in my community”.

The three participants who have not transitioned to PSE recognized that women frequently occupy traditional gendered roles in a rural society, but did not necessarily see rural society as influencing those choices. Diane initially asserted that she did not believe that gendered labor opportunities in her rural community had influenced her career choice, but confirmed that she was unsure as to why “construction sites are filled with male workers”. Esther supported the view that labour opportunities were not limited by gender and stated that she believed the limited job opportunities she experienced growing up, like “baby-sitting and retail work”, were limited because of her age not her gender. Esther further affirmed this belief in a follow-up statement: “Gender roles were determined more by the decade we were born and by family dynamics”. Fern was raised in a home where gender roles were not strictly adhered to, and she recognized that her home was not the norm. Fern further asserted that she believed that job opportunities are still limited for women and that to make the same wage as men, women still need to be better qualified than their male counterparts. Fern recognized that the expectation that her roles in the home as wife and mother should still be maintained were

significant barriers to pursuing PSE. Fern, although she recognized that society imposed unfair gender expectations regarding jobs and salaries, did not recognize that her traditional gendered role in the home was part of a patriarchal system that was inhibiting her ability to further her education.

Stage of life. In reflecting on the values, attitudes and beliefs related to gender and education, many participants related their decision to pursue education to their stage of life.

Alison reflected that she had reached the stage in her eyes, and in the eyes of her community, where she felt that she was expected to get married. She had also reached the pay ceiling in her job, and as she said “there was nowhere to go from there, like no management, nothing”. In Brenda’s case, the struggle of being a single mother trying to cope on Social Assistance and her battle with depression created her readiness to learn. She said: “ I struggled getting up in the morning... I needed a better job to support my son”. Carol had reached the stage of her life when partying and hanging out with friends was losing its appeal, and she felt she was “going nowhere”. Esther was very clear on her reason for returning to school – with her children grown and no longer needing her, it was her time to achieve a lifelong goal. She recalled that it suited her life at the time and was purely for personal fulfillment. Fern also had reached the stage in her life where she felt she needed to do something for herself; she was approaching 40 and her children were approaching a stage where they no longer needed her. She had been a mother since the age of 14 and now that that role was becoming less important, she no longer knew who she was. Although the precipitating situation was the need to motivate her son at school, Fern recognized that she had reached the stage in her life where she needed to explore who she was. Only Diane, the youngest of the participants, did not have a specific

answer to this question, but having explored ALC education before, she knew she needed directed, assisted learning in an ALC to succeed.

When considering PSE, stage of life became a significant factor for Esther. Esther stated: “had I done the whole process, probably ten years earlier I would have gone one... to um... to be a kindergarten teacher, but at the age that I was at when I did it, it was like Ooo five years of school and then I’m going to be almost at retirement age”. Although Esther conceded when she had been younger she had never seriously considered a career as a teacher, at this stage of her life it was out of the question. For Fern, unlike Esther, her stage of life was not defined by age but by duties expected of her as a wife and mother. With a teenage daughter in her home and a husband whose job meant that she was single-parenting, she said: “I just don’t see it being a good thing for me to go back to school... being 16 they make stupid choices and they start doing stupid things and I just can’t not be available for her... so that’s why I’ve made the decision not to go back right now”. The three participants, Alison, Brenda, and Diane, who were not married or in a committed relationship with a partner, did not refer to stage of life as a contributing factor to their decision to embark on PSE.

A factor that must be taken in consideration when discussing stage of life is age, and Alison, Brenda and Diane are all young women, under the age of 30. Therefore, a time of investment of three to five years in PSE would seem feasible when considering the return on the investment. Carol, even though she is only 21, did not consider a longer time investment in pursuit of PSE worthwhile and chose the career college because it expedited the PSE process. Her decision to expedite her PSE was not, however, solely determined by the length of study time but was in large part determined by the influence of her husband and a lack of financial support.

Education: gender roles and existing resources. How had the values, attitudes and beliefs of the participants impacted their decisions regarding the ALC and PSE? Community values, which resonated with the participants, were the values that they identified as belonging to their rural communities: honesty, hard work, respect, caring, religious values, and self-sacrifice. While some of these values emerged in discussions about attending the ALC, most of these values were attached to discussions of their home life, jobs, and volunteer activities. Nobody stated that education was a community value, although Fern did say that she saw her community as being very supportive of education.

Most of the participants in the study indicated that formal schooling in K-12 and education were valued in their homes. They were expected and encouraged to work hard at elementary school. However, beyond Grade 9, only one participant, Carol, was encouraged by a maternal role model to pursue higher education. Alison reflected that when girls did not get married, “girls considered higher education in order to make a living”. Carol, although encouraged by her mother to pursue higher education, reflected that in her community “most people would just graduate from school, get married and just start a family...I’ve had plenty of people tell me that schooling is just a waste of time because it just sends you into debt with student loans”. Diane did state that she was encouraging her sisters to pursue PSE, but did not elaborate on the value of PSE in her family.

When reflecting in their journals on female role models none of the participants included PSE as an essential element of success for a woman. Alison, Brenda, Fern and Carol identified a successful woman as a woman who could balance, effectively, both a career and home, and it may be assumed that some level of education would be associated with a successful career. However, Esther and Diane only identified success in terms of “hard

working... kindness and compassion” with no indication of education playing a role in success. Thus, successful women in rural areas, in the view of the participants, did not really need to engage in education beyond a grade 12 level to gain status in their communities. Furthermore, being a good mother, with successful children, was the one common characteristic of success listed by all six participants.

When taken together, the main findings related to gender, education, and the role of family and community within the patriarchal society intersect in providing a response to question 5: What specific barriers do rural women encounter in envisioning educational goals when they are focused on existing resources and potential opportunities (resource-based planning vs goal- centered planning – (Deacon and Firebaugh, 1988)

Existing Resources and Potential Opportunities: Specific Barriers

When one envisions educational goals the practicalities of the job market, one’s financial situation, geographic location and personal commitments obviously play a large role. However, part of the envisioning process is also based on attitudes, values and beliefs associated with education, status, role in society and rewards from education. Question 5, thus, straddles both conceptual areas, identified in Chapter I namely, (a) the experiences, barriers, and supports along the journey from ALC to PSE, and (b) the attitudes, values, and beliefs surrounding gender and education.

According to Deacon and Firebaugh (1988), there are two types of resources, human and material, available to family members when making decisions and planning for the future. Human resources are the personal characteristics, skills, health, energy, and time of the individuals within the family. Material resources are the non-human means for meeting their goals: goods, housing, and money (Deacon & Firebaugh, 1988). When the rural women in this

study envisaged educational goals, did they focus on the potential barriers presented by existing human and material resources in their families and communities rather than potential opportunities? What were these barriers and were they significant enough to negate their goals? Furthermore, were they able to envisage goals that did not align with existing resources and potential opportunities in their communities?

When participants discussed the barriers to PSE they identified both the material and human resources that presented obstacles. Alison identified the material resources of geographic location and financial support as two potential barriers, but overcame them by relocating to the city, living with a relative, and maintaining a part-time job. She was able to envision her future educational goals, not only because of these material supports but also because she had the emotional support of her family and the time to dedicate to her studies. Additionally, Alison had clearly identified the potential opportunities for careers within her community and had been able to envision a future where a well-paid career, within the accepted societal expectations of her community, would be the result. For Brenda, envisioning her educational future was more challenging. She did not have the human resources support of her family when it came to child-care and accommodation and had to relocate to the city and seek out financial assistance to pursue PSE. Despite these barriers, Brenda was able to envision her future career with support from the ALC and a will born of a fierce determination to succeed in spite of her community's perceived judgment. Carol's ability to envision PSE and subsequent career was not limited by her family or community, but was severely curtailed by a lack of funding. Without band funding, financial concerns became a key factor in deciding on a PSE path. Coupled with the pressure from her spouse not to attend university, Carol chose the quicker, less costly, PSE option.

For two of the three participants who have not yet pursued PSE, the geographic barriers presented by PSE present a major stumbling block in envisioning a career based on PSE. These two participants, Esther and Fern, cannot easily relocate to the city for PSE because of family and job commitments. Daily commuting to PSE in the city would require a considerable financial and time investment that neither participant thought feasible.

When envisioning educational goals, it became evident from the participants' responses in the journals that it was not simply a matter of considering existing material and human resources. The ability to envision goals was also tied to the individual's values, beliefs, and attitudes, which were shaped by their family and community. As a consequence, Brenda, who was presented with seemingly insurmountable material and human barriers, was able to envision and pursue her educational goals. By questioning and rejecting the values and attitudes of her community regarding her role in society, she was able to envision goals beyond the resources in her society.

Four of the six participants did not envision educational goals beyond their resources because of not only material and human resource barriers but also because of values and attitudes derived from their families and communities. The values and attitudes that played a role in their ability to make decisions about potential educational opportunities were those relating to their perceptions of gender-roles and the role of education. Carol opted to expedite her learning at a career college because her partner discouraged university and, upon reflection in her journal, Carol realized that her career choice was reflective of the options she had seen reflected in her rural community. Diane, despite voicing her belief that gender roles were not responsible for limited career opportunities in her community, admitted that she did not believe in the traditional stay-at-home role for women she saw modeled in the community. Esther and

Fern, despite being raised in families that did not place value on formal education, tried to instill the importance of education in their children. However, in envisioning their options, Fern and Esther's values and beliefs about gender roles, as a mother and grandmother, played a larger role in their decisions than the value they placed on their own education. These four participants also had one similar criterion when describing what makes a successful woman: "women who work hard and are able to balance the demands of work and family successfully". None of them identified education or a career alone as a mark of success. Interestingly, Diane noted that most women who may be deemed by society as successful are "lacking in compassion, they have a coldness towards them" that she did not admire. The two participants, Alison and Brenda, who had overcome the barriers presented by the values and beliefs of their communities, both included the term "open-minded" in their description of successful women.

One "value", which was referred to by most participants and on which they held widely differing opinions, revolved around values associated with faith and religion. Alison, from a traditional Mennonite community, saw both the positive and negative influences of religion on her transition to PSE. While her religious faith and support from her religious community has provided her with values that continue to inspire her, she recognizes that the "parochialism of some of the members" can be limiting. She saw herself as someone who was not confined by her community, but someone who would be an asset to her community. Brenda, conversely, experienced the influence of religious values as limiting, "they have these expectations of you even though they are not part of your life which holds you down". She tried to "run away from here – the judgments, the religion". However, she eventually found drawn to return to her community after university, armed with an ability to "question the rules, religion". Carol indirectly referred to the religious nature of her community by stating that she did not agree

with the “close-mindedness” and did not agree with “forcing beliefs on others”. Carol did not, however, see the religious beliefs of her community as limiting to her educational choices. Diane did not seem aware of the influence of religion on her as a woman in the community, which could be due to the fact that she had arrived in the community only in the past two years and had not been raised there. She did reflect that “this is a religious town, with definite gender roles, and whilst I may not agree with all things, I find the basic values... to be the right ideals for communities”, which shows an awareness of the effect of religion in the community. Esther strongly identified with the religious values in her community and saw the role of religion and the pursuance of PSE as two separate issues. Fern recognized that while she respected the religious values of her community and felt a part of that community, it could be limiting to certain individuals who did not “fit in”. She did not see the religious community as linked, in any way, to a limiting of educational opportunities. On the contrary, she saw her church community as being extremely supportive of her desire to study. While Esther and Fern did not associate the influence of the church with the gender role expectations in their homes, their narratives revealed a link between the two that had had an impact on the pursuit of education. As stated previously, religious institutions have traditionally been the cornerstone of patriarchal societies and the gendered expectations and limitation’s experienced by the participants within their rural communities find their origins in the the influence of the religious institutions.

Conclusion

The themes that emerged from research questions 2, 3, 4 and 5, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, are all directed towards understanding research question1 : What influences the decision-making of rural women to return to formalized education at an ALC and, later, to PSE? Some themes that have emerged in understanding this question have already

been explored above when considering the experiences, barriers, and supports along the journey from ALC to PSE, and the attitudes, values, and beliefs surrounding gender and education.

While some of the participants cited financial and geographic location as potential barriers to PSE, most participants did not see these factors as insurmountable. The participants who had transitioned to PSE listed other considerations as bigger deterrents to the pursuance of PSE than financial and geographic factors. Two of the three of the participants who had not transitioned to PSE stated that stage of life was a greater barrier than rural location or money. The three participants who had not transitioned to PSE had also acquired the identity and self-esteem they desired from attending the ALC and from their roles in their family and their community, and thus did not have a sense or urgency about transitioning to PSE. The three participants who had transitioned to PSE worked around their rural location by either relocating temporarily to the city for their studies, or by commuting.

My anticipation of the role rural gender-based roles and expectations played in decision-making correlated with the findings from the pilot study (Webb, 2014). Not all of the participants recognized that rural gender-based expectations had played any role in their decision-making. Diane and Esther admitted that they had not given much thought to the role of gender in their lives and were unconvinced that it played a significant role in determining their career and educational decisions. Alison and Brenda easily identified what their expected roles were as women in their communities and how they had had to work around these expectations. Carol had not given the matter any thought before she considered the question about gender in the journal, but concluded that, unknowingly; she had fit into the gendered role her society expected of her. Interestingly, all three participants who had children did not recognize the work they did in the home as gendered, or that it fulfilled the gender role expectations of their

communities. Brenda stated that she found it challenging to balance the role of full-time mother and full-time student while she was in PSE, but that that was just the way society was for mothers in her community.

In discussing their transition from ALC to PSE, the three participants who had continued with their education found that they missed the small, structured, guided atmosphere of the ALC. The supports from staff, teachers and fellow students they had experienced at the ALC had been key to their success, and their experiences in PSE had not always provided the same supports.

In Figure 1, I identified the two conceptual areas that would guide the analysis of the findings: the barriers and supports along the journey from ALC to PSE, and the attitudes, values, and beliefs surrounding gender and education. In Figure 1, I also identified the subheadings related to the two themes and indicated how some of the sub-themes intersected. The intersection of the theme of a rural patriarchal society with family and community expectations, rural gendered roles, and education tied to gender roles was explored as a barrier to the envisioning educational goals and the pursuance of PSE. The envisioning of educational goals was inextricably linked to all the sub-themes in Figure 1, and thus concluded discussion of the findings.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter V I sought to explain the findings according themes identified and developed from the participant's responses to the interview and journal questions. A diagram, Figure 1, was provided to illustrate the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. The two broad concepts identified in Chapter 1 that guided rural women's decision-making regarding PSE were (a) the experiences, barriers, and supports along the journey from ALC to

PSE, and (b) the attitudes, values, and beliefs surrounding gender and education, were used as the basis for exploring and categorizing the themes. The concept of barriers and supports experienced in the education journey yielded the themes of the ALC community and family and community as strong support structures. Family and community also, however, presented barriers to education. Further barriers were geographic location and the patriarchal structure of rural society. The questions focused on attitudes and values relating to gender and education resulted in the following themes: Stage of life as both a barrier and catalyst to education, limiting role of female role models and rural gendered roles and education as an undervalued commodity in rural areas. In Chapter VI, I will provide an analysis of the themes and a discussion of issues arising from the analysis.

CHAPTER VI Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter examines the themes that emerged from the interviews and journals in relation to the literature on rurality, adult learning, and women's learning as presented in Chapter IV. The results are also viewed through the feminist lens, identified in Chapter III, in an attempt to answer the question that frames this study: What influences rural women's decision-making with regards to PSE. Finally, the implications of the research study, limitations, and possible future questions are examined.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the decision-making process of rural women who had attended an Adult Learning Centre. I hoped to uncover the reason why rural women, despite having taken a first step to education via the ALC, sometimes do not pursue PSE. I also wished to understand what the transition from the ALC to PSE had been like for the three women who had done so and whether they encountered any barriers in their journey.

Findings Related to Rurality

Themes pertaining to rural women from the literature were in some cases supported by the participants and in some cases refuted. Themes related to issues of rurality that were identified both from the literature and the coding were those of gender roles in rural areas, rural values regarding education, and communities as both supports and barriers.

Gender roles in rural areas. Because rural women are seen as caregivers and rural men are seen as providers and decision makers, Leach (2013) contends that these gender-role beliefs have contributed to limited options outside of the home for women. For example, when Fern assumed the role of student and had to set aside her duties as wife and mother, she experienced the same guilt that Graveline (1990) reported rural women felt when they did not accept the

status quo. Her guilt resulted from her belief that she was neglecting her duty as a mother, as she noted, “there were a lot of frozen meals”, and “my kids kinda lost me for a year”. She also acknowledged her perception that she was imposing a financial burden on her husband, “that’s a huge part of why my husband didn’t want me going back to school...that was imposed on him because now he had to carry that which was huge”. Graveline (1990) also found that rural women’s roles were limited to running the home and raising the children. Further, because rural women were often involved in a personal relationship, for example marriage, with the “oppressor” they were strongly affected by the “male-dominated milieu” in which they lived and, thus experienced guilt when they did not accept the status quo (Graveline, 1990, p.175). Stalker (2001) affirmed this finding and stated that women have very little desire to disrupt intimate relationships with partners or close family members for educational activities. As mentioned in Chapter I, Graveline’s (1990) work, though seminal, is now dated and Wallin (2003) contends that due to economic pressures of the past two decades, rural women have assumed greater roles outside of the home and in their communities. Despite women assuming greater roles in leadership roles outside of the home, the findings this study revealed that the women still assume the burden of work relating to child-care and taking care of the home. This finding supports Neustaeter’s (2015) research showing that some rural women in Manitoba valued what they believed their “natural role”, without considering how it perpetuated stereotyped gender roles and their own subordination. Furthermore, expressing views that are contrary to their community’s, and could potentially be equated with feminism, such as equal sharing of childcare and house work, could damage their position in rural communities and possibly lead to social rejection (Neustaeter, 2015; Teather, 2014; Walby, 2011). Bourgeois (2009) reported that, among the women she surveyed in rural Newfoundland, self-sacrifice was

still a highly valued trait in women. Both Neustaeter's (2015) and Bourgeois' (2009) findings are supported by the women in this study. Part of their "natural role" was maintaining the home and being mothers. All six participants defined successful women as women who are mothers, and like Fern who put her daughter's needs before her own, self-sacrifice is an expectation of the mothering role. Neither Brenda nor Fern indicated that they resented the role of primary care-giver of their children, but Brenda did reflect that "we do not get as much appreciation or acknowledgment for the amount that is asked of us. Sometimes it still feels that if a woman chooses to work then they have to learn to deal with work and balance home life", acknowledging the unfairness of a woman's role in her society.

Education: community and family values. Community values in the rural U.S. that are based on the church and family expectations have been reported as constraining factors in young women accessing PSE (Bundy, 2004). Bundy (2004) further suggested that rural women's willingness to engage in PSE was frequently limited by their own life experiences and a fear of being unable to fulfill the roles of mother and student simultaneously. The three participants in the present study who have not pursued PSE did not specifically identify family expectations as limiting factors. They did, however, reflect that although education in their early years was encouraged, no emphasis was placed on PSE. Early role models were people who had succeeded in life despite not having attended a PSE institution. When asked to evaluate success and whom they saw as successful women, family was a common factor. One participant referenced a successful family member who had succeeded with no formal education, one referenced her employer who juggled both a career and her family and the last participant referenced herself, as she saw her completion of her grade 12 diploma as a success story despite the odds against her. Thus, for the three participants who have not pursued PSE,

Diane, Fern, and Esther, the definition of a successful woman was: A woman who is valued in her community because she works hard in her career and community and has created a supportive, loving home. Fern saw the aforesaid definition as attainable but not realistic currently because she could not balance a career as a student with creating a supportive home for her family. Esther believed that she had achieved this level of success, as she had successfully juggled her job, community work, and demands of her home. Diane viewed the goal as unattainable, as the women she had witnessed who had achieved career success, were “cold and lacking in compassion”; compassion being quality incompatible with career success. Diane’s belief that a woman cannot successfully juggle the demands of successful career and home life may be due to the fact that she is young and has not experienced many successful role models; however, this also speaks to the rural concept of femininity. Diane’s concepts of femininity may be based on the traits of idealized rural femininity that Leach (2013) reported where rural women saw themselves as primary caregivers, and Davis (1998) reported that values such as indirectness, unassertiveness, and self-sacrifice were highly valued in wives and mothers. These assertions by Leach (2013) and Davis (1998) are supported by the positive value placed on motherhood by all the participants.

All three of the participants who had pursued PSE, despite being successful in their education and careers, indicated that successful motherhood was a desirable quality in a successful woman. Successful motherhood was defined by qualities such as: “strong willed, determined, wise, kind and compassionate”. As noted in Chapters IV and V, Alison and Brenda equated successful mothers with being open-minded and supportive of their education, but they were the exceptions. For the other participants, motherhood implied self-sacrifice and a willingness to work hard, qualities that they equated with success. These beliefs are supported

by the literature that found the high value placed on motherhood and its associated qualities in rural areas, was of greater importance than pursuing an education (Alloway & Gilbert, 2003; Bundy, 2004; Corbett, 2007; Pinhorn, 2002). Even though Alison had not acquiesced to the pressures of her rural community to marry and have children, she recognized that to attain status in her community, as a woman, her career could not supplant motherhood.

More recently, Bourgeois (2009), in Newfoundland found that attitudes were changing and that young women were viewing PSE as welcome escape. Brenda's journey through PSE supports this assertion, as she felt trapped in the community's expectations of marriage and motherhood and thus left the community to escape the judgment. Carol also left the community as she recognized that "Most people would just graduate from school, get married and just start a family. To my knowledge, less than half of the people I grew up with went on to pursue a further education", and this expectation was impacting negatively her ambition. Alison's move to the city and her reluctance to return to her community, once she completes PSE, further speaks to Bourgeois' (2009) assertion that PSE is frequently a welcome escape from rural community expectations of marriage and motherhood for young rural women.

Findings Related to Adult Learning Theory

This next section examines how this study both supports and refutes adult learning theory as articulated by Knowles (1980), Transformative Learning Theory (English & Peters, 2012; Mezirow, 2000) and Women as Learners (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). The goal of including adult learning theory is two-fold: to understand the participants' journey through the ALC and to assist in uncovering their decision-making process regarding PSE.

Stage of Life. Knowles (1980), drawing from the work of psychologist Robert Havighurst (1972) acknowledged that at certain stages of a human's life, situations arise that

create a “readiness to learn” and these are what Havighurst (1972) called “teachable moments” (p.51). For most of the participants in this study, their decision to enter the ALC was precipitated not only by a stage or situation in their lives that created a readiness to learn, but also by a deeper need for fulfillment. While Diane’s lack of specific motivating life event/stage may be ascribed to her age, I believe Diane is representative of what Hayes and Flannery (2000) address in their concerns about the limitations of andragogy theories. Hayes and Flannery (2000) caution that diversity amongst women gets lost when trying to generalize all women’s experiences to fit into a framework of andragogy, as is the case with Diane. A closer examination of the life situation that precipitated the return to education in each of the participant’s lives reveals that there is more to their decision-making than a “teachable moment” that arose. According to Knowles (1980), the accumulation of life experiences will result in the development of an identity and self-concept that adult learners will possess when they reenter formal education. Women frequently have multiple identities resulting from their roles as mothers, wives, daughters, breadwinners, and homemakers and, thus, may experience conflict in their new roles as students. Many women in this study struggled with issues of self-concept and identity when entering the ALC, thus, their decision to return to formal schooling was motivated as much by a life situation as it was by a need to explore their identities and self-concept. Indeed, one of these roles, mothering, is cited as one of the most important motivators for returning to formal education. Thus, a stage of life can create the opportunity for a teachable moment to arise precipitating an exploration of identity.

Teachable moment vs. disorienting dilemma. Is Havighurst’s (1972) “teachable moment” the same as Mezirow’s (1978) disorienting dilemma? I believe that it may be based on the similarities between a disorienting dilemma and a teachable moment. The nature of a

disorienting dilemma need not be one dramatic event but an accumulation of events over a period of time that may result in a readiness for change (Mezirow, 2000). Both are situated within the context of the person's life and are derived from an accumulation of experiences. As noted above, all of the participants with the exception of Diane reported that it was a series of life events that led them to their decision to complete their grade 12. Alison had reached the ceiling in her career, as a school principal of a small school in her community, and after her volunteer work in a hospital was ready for a new life. Brenda was propelled by an accumulation of events that included the desire to provide a better life for her son, the inadequate amount of Social Assistance she received and a desire to escape from her community. Carol was desperate to not become yet another Aboriginal statistic and found herself feeling left behind when all her friends graduated. Esther had always wanted to be able to check off the box: Level of education grade 12, on forms she filled out and now that her children were grown it was "her time". Fern experienced the most noticeable disorienting dilemma of all the participants- she recognized that she had reached a stage of her life that she did not know who she really was. Fern's determination to set her son an example at school represented the accumulation of years of suppressed uncertainty and desire to find her identity. The above examples demonstrate that a disorienting dilemma, as articulated by Mezirow (2000), can be viewed as the same experience as Havighurst's (1972) teachable moment and that regardless of what the experience is called, it is pivotal in precipitating the education journey of many adult learners. Once adults had experienced the impetus to return to formal education, Knowles (1980) stated that they were self-directed in their learning. Was this the case for the women who participated in this study?

Self directed learning. When considering women as independent learners, it is easy to see how the participants in the study, who did not have to play the dual roles of mother and

student, were able to be far more independent and self-directed in their learning than those who straddled both roles. While all six participants independently initiated the first step to fulfill personal goals, the two participants, Brenda and Fern, who currently have children living at home cited the interdependent needs of the family unit as a prime motivator. Brenda's need for a better job to support her son and Fern's desire to motivate her son propelled them both towards the ALC. For Esther, her children were grown and so it was "her time".

The independent study model, which allowed Esther to pick up her work and complete it at home as opposed to attending classes daily, used by the local ALC, enabled Esther to be self-directed in her learning. Esther could do all the work required in her own time: "and so I got the list of topics so I could pick what I needed and then one of the teachers at school kind of mentored me through it and then I would write it and then I would hand it in", and did not need in class guided instruction. For Esther, Alison, Carol, and Diane, the supportive network provided by their families enabled them to become independent and self-directed in their learning without demanding anything in return. They could maintain part-time jobs and easily balance jobs with the needs of their studies and their lives. For the four above-mentioned participants, PSE could be, and in Alison and Carol's case is/was, readily accommodated into their lives. However, for Fern considering PSE, the 'conflicting feelings of guilt' (Hayes & Flannery, 2000) when attempting to balance the needs of her family and her studies while at the ALC prevented her from pursuing PSE.

Knowles (1980) further asserts that as adult learners are independent and self-motivated they will, when entering an educational institution, resist pedagogical strategies that limit their independence. Esther was the only participant who indicated that she preferred a 'hands-off' self-directed approach to learning. She enjoyed not having to attend classes, rather taking work

home to complete on her own. Diane found the exact opposite of Esther. She cited the self-directed approach from the first ALC she tried to attend as the reason she did not succeed: “I tried doing the one in Town B, and then I just gave up on that because I’m not the best for ... basically it was like here’s your stuff for your courses, you can go home and do it, you can show up... it didn’t really matter?” When she found an ALC with classes where she had to attend, Diane reported class attendance and teachers as her motivators: “I loved the ALC here- it was actually my teacher for my first two semesters, my courses”. Brenda also needed the expectations set by the ALC to motivate her “it helped me, it helped me wake up in the morning, it also helped me at night when my son went to bed and I had nothing or no one to talk to, so I kind of just dove in there”. Fern found that the group of friends she made at the ALC became her most important source of motivation during her time at the ALC: “the group of people when I found when I went back to school, those people became my core”.

The three participants who pursued PSE engaged successfully with the more self-directed approach of PSE, but credited the small class size and directed approach of the ALC for getting them to that point. Alison credited the close connection forged with teachers at the ALC for her more measured approach to teachers and academic expectations at her PSE institution. She felt that the small classes, academic expectations, and confidence gained at the ALC prepared her for the self-directed approach of PSE. Brenda experienced PSE as “a huge ant colony and they all seem to blend in a move together,” and she felt alienated and insulted that they did not know her name at first, but later acknowledged that the relationships she built with faculty provided her with the support she needed:

I’ve had really great profs who have supported me along the way and I have some profs that I’m still connected to that um keep encouraging me that I can keep going

doing another step further to where I want to be and inspiring me... so I would say that would be my community... that's pretty sad.

Carol experienced her PSE institution as a “step down” from the ALC academically and missed the guidance and direction she had experienced at the ALC.

Transformative Learning: did it transform? The basis of transformative learning, as defined by Mezirow (1991), is that the structures of assumptions by which adult learners understand their experiences must undergo a fundamental shift in perspective. Once the perspective of the adult learner is changed, actions and behavior will be changed (Cranton, 1994). These structures of assumptions shape and define our expectations, feelings, thinking and understanding (Mezirow, 2000). Therefore, a key difference between transformative learning and other adult learning theories is that the learning must result in a basic change in “habits of mind” (Mezirow, 2000) that form the “psychological self-image, cultural expectations and epistemic frameworks about what counts as important knowledge” (English & Peters, 2012, p.105). The changes need not be striking; they may be incremental and may occur over a period of time (Mezirow 2000).

Viewed against the above synopsis of transformative learning, have any of the participants undergone a fundamental shift in perspective leading to a basic change in their “habits of mind” and, thus, a transformation? An understanding of whether any transformation has taken place requires a thorough knowledge and understanding of the participant, based on an authentic relationship during their period of study at the ALC. It would be impossible to assess transformation based on the interviews alone. Even when combined with the journals, Diane and Esther’s stories did not yield sufficient information to be able to assess whether transformation occurred. Diane did report forming good relationships with her teachers and

changing her career direction based on what she had learned in her psychology class: “doing the Psychology courses I realized being a psychologist wasn’t for me. As much as I loved it, it was... I would just be way too personally involved”, which may indicate a fundamental shift in perspective, but without further evidence, it would be impossible to assume that a change in “habits of mind” occurred. Esther did not engage with the teachers and the community of learners at the ALC in a way that seemed to form authentic relationships and that would lead to the critical thinking and re-examination of assumptions required for transformation to occur.

In their transition to PSE, Alison, Brenda, Carol, and Fern spoke at length about the role the ALC staff and community had played in their ALC journey and transition to PSE. Although the interview questions had not set out to specifically interrogate instances of transformation but rather the impact of the learning experience at the ALC, the journal responses and in some cases the information provided in the interviews, pointed to transformation occurring. As I had had a previous teacher/ student relationship with all four of the participants who indicated transformation in the learning process, I had to consider that this relationship may have prompted a sharing of information I may not have been party to otherwise.

Alison’s transformation came via gradual personal reinforcement by teachers who, in her words, “acknowledged my ability”. By the time Alison had concluded her studies at the ALC, she had not only gained the confidence for PSE but could reconcile the contradictory limiting expectations of her faith-based community with her newfound desire for independence. A teacher who believed in her also propelled Brenda’s transformation and she was shocked, because she did not think that she “could be smart enough” for university. However, before this event, Brenda had been gradually undergoing a transformation in her way of thinking as the ALC:

gave me new perspectives...I also, um ... I wasn't able to question my life, or my beliefs or what I stood up for or valued and then being in a past relationship it also prohibited me from thinking about myself and who I was and so um the school itself allowed me to ask questions and enquire and take another look on life

Because of the new perspectives gained at the ALC, Brenda was able to challenge the assumptions and judgment of her community and embark on PSE. She was also able to challenge and redefine her relationship with her rural community and reflected:

I think when I first began my journey through university; I was trying to run from here- get away from the judgments, religion, exes, and my past. As the years went on the outlook of my community changed. When I came back I realized that I just needed to find my place.

Carol and Fern were both at the ALC while I was teaching there, but I left the ALC before they had completed their studies. However, I had taught both of them Family Studies and through the classroom conversations and their journal entries in the course, I was able to establish a relationship of trust. Carol, in her interview and journal, for the purpose of this study, did not reveal any significant change in the way she thought felt from her time at the ALC. She did, however, demonstrate some transformation in her thinking when journaling about gender roles in her community. She stated: "I didn't realize until this moment that it might have been influenced by the gender roles in my community".

Fern demonstrated the most dramatic transformation as a result of her learning experience at the ALC. Fern's disorienting dilemma presented as an identity crisis and this propelled her, with little thought of the consequences, to the ALC. Fern's experience involved many of the elements identified by English and Irving, (2012) as typical of women's

experiences of transformation; namely, relationship building and the body and emotions as part of the transformative experience.

Fern established a close and supportive relationship within the class and this group of women provided a safe space to share their life narratives, which according to Brooks (2000), is at “the heart of their transformative experience” (p.250). Fern experienced her entry into the ALC as a physical experience: “I actually just went in to College A that day, I was scared, my knees were shaking and I walked in and said to her ‘I think I want to go back to school’”. English and Irving (2012) include the importance of body in the female version of transformative learning as a way to balance the emphasis on rational, cognitive emphasis in transformative learning theory. Fern’s weight gain while at the ALC, “Your health takes a hit! I gained; when I went back to school I gained 47 pounds! I haven’t been able to lose it, you know...”, is a further example of how the transformation was not merely cognitive. On an emotional level, Fern found that her ALC experience and the completion of her grade 12 gave her “contentment”. She no longer felt powerless. She was empowered to become involved in the household financial management, to assist her teenage children with their homework and to assume leadership roles in her community. The experience had enabled her to become self-reflective in her needs and she stated that she no longer sought a career in law-enforcement because she did not feel disempowered. Fern concluded the interview with these words, which indicate how profound her transformation had been: “there’s a point in everybody’s life and for me it was the year I went back to school, um when things have to turn, things have to change, it’s inevitable in everybody’s life, um and I think I didn’t realize what education can do for a person”.

Relationships. Relationships are crucial in women's transformative experiences (English & Irving, 2012; Ferris & Walters, 2012). It is uncertain as to whether all six participants underwent transformation in their learning, but those who did credited the relationships they formed with both their teachers and fellow students at the ALC as the catalyst for the transformation. Brenda found that the ALC gave her "new perspectives . . . I also, um . . . I wasn't able to question my life, or my beliefs or what I stood up for or . . . and so um the school itself allowed me to ask questions and enquire and take another look on life ". Carol engaged with her teachers and learning materials that opened up a new world of possibilities to her: "I remember taking your class and I remember you talking about people from all over the world and different things and like Japan and I wanted to . . . I don't know how it related but it some how made me want to do like Aboriginal governance". Fern described both the supportive relationships with fellow students and the engagement with the teachers as crucial to the transformative nature of her ALC experience: "my social community was school so those people drove me and . . . they . . . R (support staff) was fantastic um and I had great teachers, so they drove me um when I didn't understand something they could...they drove me even harder because they knew I could understand". Brooks (2000) argues that the ability to share their life stories is at the heart of the transformative experience, and thus, the relationships created during the adult learning experience are key to the transformation. Within the Family Studies and English Language Arts courses I taught, students constantly shared their life stories with me and with their fellow students and thus further strengthened the relationship network. These relationships with fellow students and their teachers were, for Brenda, Carol, and Fern, catalysts equal to the disorienting dilemma in the path of transformation (Cranton & Wright, 2008).

If one of the key elements of transformative learning is a basic change in “habits of mind” that form the psychological self-image, then identity formation and self-esteem in the participants should be discussed (Mezirow, 2000). Hayes and Flannery (2000) also include identity formation and self-esteem as important elements in a discussion of women as learners. We now turn to Hayes and Flannery (2000) to understand how the important elements of not only identity formation and self esteem contribute to women as learners, but also how the development of voice adds to their development and decision-making through their education journey.

Women as learners. Hayes and Flannery (2000) suggest that that women’s learning cannot be understood without understanding the social contexts in which the learning takes place. When women return to formal education and experience a role conflict in being both a mother and a student, they frequently become overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and feel inadequate in their new roles (Rice & Meyers, 1989). Furthermore, Hayes and Flannery (2000) assert that these conflicting feelings of guilt and inadequacy are some of the major obstacles to women pursuing further education. Within the social contexts of home and formal education, women not only experience a role conflict, but may also begin to explore their own identities. Feelings of inadequacy and role conflict may lead them to the path of identity and self-esteem formation. With identity and self-esteem formation comes the developing or reclaiming of voice. All of these elements combine to contribute to the rural women’s educational learning and decision-making process.

Identity and Self-Esteem. Both Knowles (1980) and Hayes and Flannery (2000) speak to the topic of identity formation and self-esteem as important parts of adult learning. While Hayes and Flannery (2000) address identity formation and self-esteem as separate topics,

Knowles (1980) presents the development of identity as something that develops as a consequence of life experiences and role fulfillment. Hayes and Flannery (2000) consider women's identity development with a nonessentialist focus and give weight to how social forces and individual interpretations of those forces help shape women's identities.

Identity formation. For rural women, identity formation is tied not only to the roles they fulfill as daughters, wives, and mothers, but also to the social forces present in rural communities. While fulfilling her role as a daughter in her family Alison also sought her identity in the career path she followed. Alison realized what her community expected of her, "I should have gotten married instead of doing stuff like this . . . some of my aunties were like, 'Well aren't you getting married anytime soon?'" but she pursued her goal of health care and forged an identity acceptable to her needs and her community's expectations.

Brenda experienced internal conflict with the expectations of her community and her identity development was forged from that conflict: "they also have these expectations of you even though they are not part of your life which holds you down too". For Brenda, because she did not feel part of her community, her feelings of alienation, in part, drove her from formal schooling to home schooling, to an abusive marriage, to divorce and finally to the role of a single parent. As a consequence of years of alienation, Brenda's identity formation was limited to the roles she fulfilled: adopted daughter in the CFS system, wife and mother and her struggles to meet those role expectations: model student despite CFS background, marriage and early motherhood. Linked to Brenda's struggles with family and societal expectations, is the issue of cultural identity. Brenda, who is part Filipino, part Aboriginal, grew up in foster-care and was never exposed to her cultural heritage. Today, Brenda still struggles with that part of her identity. In her rural community Brenda experienced racism and said, "I am still afraid in

my community to say that I have Aboriginal in me...if somebody asks me, I will say I am Filipino”. While in PSE, Brenda was introduced to her Aboriginal heritage, but struggled to identify with it: “I actually failed one course because my perspective was from a European perspective . . . I don’t yet know my heritage and I don’t know if I ever will that I can’t connect to those Aboriginal perspectives . . . because I just don’t know where my identity is . . . so” Education, both at the ALC and in PSE has enabled Brenda to start exploring her identity and developed her ability to think critically about a rural society that still is intolerant of her mixed race heritage.

The participant with the most clearly articulated identity formation as a consequence of her time at the ALC was Fern. Fern, in the narrative of her decision to return to school stated “Cause I had been a mom and wife up to this point and who was Fern? Where was I going to be in all of this when everybody was gone”? For Fern, it was more than deciding what her new role would be when her children had graduated, it was finding out who she was. She had put her personal development on hold at the age of 14 and had dedicated herself to her roles as mother and wife. However, those roles and her life experiences had not enabled her to fully explore her identity. Fern related that even though she had returned to school to set an example for her teenage son, she soon found that something else was happening, something she had not anticipated: “It woke up something in me once I registered...it was really weird because I didn’t see it coming”. She had always wanted to go into law enforcement because “I realized that was probably...because I wanted, I thought I wanted power...I needed to have that power”. By the time she graduated a year later she had realized that she did feel that urge to go into that field. She noted “I have power from that year I spent in school and it hasn’t left...like it’s

funny...it just hasn't left". For Fern, the development of her identity was coupled to the new role she was playing as a student, but also to the development of her self-esteem.

Roles such as motherhood and paid employment that perpetuate gendered expectations, may reinforce or alter the way women view themselves (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). However, in their identity formation, women should not be seen "passive recipients of...societal prescriptions" as, frequently, they are the ones affecting the change (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 68). This assertion is supported by the participants of this study who cite better paying jobs, more fulfilling careers and self-fulfillment as reasons for reentering formal education.

Self-esteem. Hayes and Flannery (2000) state that women actively seek to develop their own identities and promote their self-esteem when they take the first step to adult education. They are, Knowles (1980) contends, intrinsically motivated, by their need to develop their self-esteem, rather than driven by demands of the labour market. Some of the participants support Knowles's (1980) position, but others, like Alison, do not.

Alison was already the principal at her school, and secure financially when she decided to attend the ALC. However, she stated that she saw no "advancement opportunities" and "the challenge wasn't there anymore" in her job. Career opportunities for women were limited to teaching or health care in Alison's community, and thus, Alison responded to the demands of the labour market by choosing the only well-paid job she could find. However, while Alison may have been initially motivated by the demands of the labour market, she stated her time spent in the ALC gave her the ability to deal with her life situation of being an unmarried woman in her community. In her community, where marriage and having children is not only expected but is the way in which self-worth for women is attained, Alison though initially

driven by labour market demands may also have been unknowingly propelled by her desire to affirm her self-worth and self-esteem.

Brenda was also motivated intrinsically and extrinsically. Her extrinsic motivation was her financial need to raise her son. She was also intrinsically motivated by her son's positive mindset, and she adopted that to help her cope with her life. The ALC not only gave Brenda a reason to get up in the morning, but also gave her "hope". She stated that she was still stuck in the foster child mindset where she believed that she could not amount to anything when she started at the ALC, but learned that she could have "a have a happy home but still further my future and understand who I am as a person in this world". Thus, her need to improve her self-esteem, as well as her financial need, contributed to her decision to embark on her educational path. Like Brenda who was struggling against the foster child stereotype, Carol was also motivated to return to school by her desire not to be seen as yet "another statistic, an Aboriginal woman who dropped out of school kind of thing and did nothing". Esther's stage of life coupled with the opening of a new ALC in her town enabled her to pursue a lifelong desire to complete her grade 12. Esther stated that her decision to return to school was entirely motivated by a need for "personal fulfillment". Fern's entire journey to the ALC was a quest for identity and self-worth. She did not register at the ALC to improve her job opportunities but to set an example for her son and to challenge herself. She stated, "I believed I was stupid" and that her experience at the ALC changed how she saw herself, "it gave me such confidence and self-worth".

All six participants in this study reported that their time at the ALC improved their self-worth and gave them renewed confidence in their abilities. Alison became emboldened enough, after her years at the ALC, to challenge rural stereotypes when she encountered it at her PSE

institution. Brenda gained the confidence to challenge her community's expectations of her expected role as a mother and entered into PSE studies despite community and family pressures. Diane reported that it "made me feel so much better about myself". For Esther, simply having the ability to check off on any form that she filled out that she had grade 12, improved her self-worth. Fern felt empowered to take a more active role in supporting her children with their homework and running the family finances. Furthermore, the ALC education empowered her to the point where she realized that she did not need a career that gave her power:

like my intent was to possibly go back into a career of law enforcement somewhere, um and I realized that was probably... because I wanted, I thought I wanted a power. I needed that to have power and now I don't which gave her control, as she had gained that control in her own life.

The learning experience at the ALC played a significant role in the creation of self-worth in the participants because of the changes they experienced in how they viewed themselves as learners. While many women had a positive view of themselves as learners in the "school of life", they did not necessarily experience that same sense of worth in formal education. Esther and Fern struggled with formal education and both emerged from the traditional high school with feelings of inadequacy. Esther stated that "within the traditional high school setting I struggled...struggled sitting at a desk. So for me the Adult Education situation, how it was structured and how I could do it just fit into my lifestyle and how I like to learn". Fern said:

when I went to school I was a horrible student . . . I had reading . . . learning disabilities . . . I couldn't read well, my teachers had me in Special Ed. classes I just

wasn't a good student and so when I went back to school and now I'm doing . . . I wasn't just doing these papers, but I was doing really well at them.

Esther and Fern's reflections support Hayes and Flannery's (2000) results that women not only felt more in control of their lives but also developed more positive perspectives on their own intelligence and abilities as learners after their journey through the ALC. Education, via the ALC experience, not only provided improved self-esteem to some of the participants, but also enabled them to develop and give voice to their lives.

Voice: giving and developing. "Giving voice" to women is an empowering process, whereby women who have not previously been able to express themselves are able to do so (Hayes, 2000). Giving voice to an experience or situation can be a transformative experience, but can also, according to Hayes (2000), be a challenging process. Alison, in her community as an unmarried woman, has not had a voice. Through her foray into formal education, both at the ALC and now in PSE, she has gained a voice in her community. She says:

Maybe I won't have a spouse and kids and that, but I do have something else and my cousins see that too like just at this last Christmas they said you know . . . we could have a husband for you here Alison and my other cousin was like 'stick with what you are doing you're going to be so much smarter than the rest of us'.

The ALC gave Brenda "new perspectives" and enabled her to question her life and beliefs and gave her the voice she had not had in her relationships and in her community. It "gave her hope" and made her realize that she could be a mother and be successful in her career. Giving voice to her thoughts was a transformative and challenging experience. She still felt trapped by her family and community's expectations, but articulated that she now knew that

she could “branch out of that” and still have a happy home. Fern also found her voice in her relationship with her spouse:

I always felt I was lesser in the head than everybody else and when I went back to school I realized very quickly . . . as a matter of fact my husband and I in years previous, had some . . . abusive kind of behavior between each other, for each other, and I believed I was stupid and I remember an argument we had . . . and I was like you know I’m not stupid and you’re not going to fool me to think I am and that was the first time I could actually feel I wasn’t stupid.

Fern was also able to express herself in the way financial decisions were made in her home and instead of handing over decisions to her husband when he got home from work, she started taking an active role in the family decision making.

Voice can also be seen as “developing a voice” and this can lead to women’s voice taking on different forms as they develop and they “learn to express their identities” (Hayes, 2000, p. 93). Diane, while appearing confident and self-motivated, acknowledged that her grade 12 made her feel better about herself, and initially, she had not succeeded in going back to school because she did not have the confidence that she was going to finish her grade 12. As her confidence grew at the ALC, her anxiety lessened and she changed her attitude towards education. In developing her own voice, she is still learning about herself but she does not yet see herself as having a voice in her community.

Brenda’s voice also developed throughout the ALC and PSE process. She did not see herself as having a voice in her community and moved away from her community for a while. She returned after PSE and realized that because of her education she now has a voice and a place in her community. She said: “I am a stronger person now, able to question rules, religion.

I am able to be proud of myself and my accomplishments without having to please anyone else other than my children.” She now sees that she can use her voice to influence her community, “I believe I can instill a new sense of community within the hearts of the children I teach”.

Carol did not see herself as having a voice in her community and stated that, “There are leaders and there are followers within the community, I suppose I would be a follower”. She had, during her time at the ALC, started to develop her own voice, but a combination of financial setbacks and spousal pressure directed her to an educational path that did not assist in the development of her voice. However, in her own home her voice was beginning to develop, as she reflected that she was conflicted about the choice she believed she would be expected to make as a woman if she had a child. She valued family above everything else, but worried that “I may just give everything to my career and never be able to have a family with my husband”.

To reclaim, develop, or find their voice, women need to “learn to express their identities” (Hayes, 2000, p. 93) and to feel that they have achieved some success in their lives. Success fosters the confidence to find and develop, or reclaim their voice. A definition of success and what that looks like in women that the participants admire gave me insight into why some participants have found their voice more easily than others. Throughout the above discussion, I have referenced the feminist issues of gender and patriarchy as part of the discussion on rural women’s decision-making. How has the feminist lens brought further clarity to this discussion on adult learners?

The Feminist Lens

A feminist lens is important to bring to this study because it “problematizes gender and brings women and their concerns to the centre of attention” (DeVault & Gross, 2007, p. 174). As a feminist, I wished to bring attention to the women in this study and not simply as adult

learners. I have deliberately focused on gender and brought the specific concerns of these rural women to the center of this study. I also included feminist standpoint theory because it deals with power relationships, individual authority and how the individual's point of view is shaped through political and social experiences (Hartsock, 1999).

One of the challenges in conducting feminist research is the difference between women. This research does not speak on behalf of all rural women in Manitoba. It gives voice to a group of women who have embarked upon a new path, formal education at an ALC, in two rural areas of Manitoba. As the researcher I recognize that as a white, able-bodied, socio-economically advantaged, woman I can only bring one perspective to this research (DeVault & Gross, 2007). I acknowledge that while I lived rurally for almost 30 years, my perspectives on education and gender roles were formulated prior to moving to a rural area. Therefore, while I can reflect on a shared rural lifestyle with the participants of this study, I will always be an outsider "looking in".

DeVault and Gross (2007) state that an essential part of feminist interviewing for researchers is "interviewing themselves" and making sense of the experiences of the participants on both a personal and political level (p. 177). I found this part of the research, and adult education, exciting but daunting, as when I was conducting this research it made me reflect on my role, not only as an educator but also a coach. I had always believed that education had the power to transform people's lives and enjoyed being part of the journey of transformation. However, what happened to the women in my class when they went back to their lives with their newfound sense of awareness? Had I awakened in them a desire for change that might conflict with the patriarchal structure of their family and community? If their newfound ability to question led to a desire to formulate decisions independent of their partner,

what would be the consequences? As an educator, I was told, frequently, that the students' learning could "get them into trouble" at home if it disrupted the natural flow of the household: meals cooked and served on time, children taken care of, cleaning done before the partner arrives home. My findings support Stalker's (2001) study that reported that women cope by "making learning invisible" (p. 295). By making the learning invisible women are required to maintain the rural domestic ideology of the home as a sanctuary (Stalker, 2001). Education at the ALC was, at times, viewed as a threat to the power men retained over their partners and resulted heart-wrenching discussions when women were being pressured to withdraw from the ALC by their partners. When I persuaded them to stay and continue with their education, how much responsibility did I bear on the potential impact on their home lives? Two of the three participants in the pilot study had divorced while at the ALC and had relocated to pursue PSE (Webb, 2014). The impact of the new ways of thinking and new opportunities, which had opened up to them owing to their ALC education, was profound and life changing. This conflicting role of educator and disruptor in the lives of women is one that, given the scope of this study, I am not able to pursue more fully but would be important for further study.

In keeping with the feminist lens, issues of power relationships, individual authority, and how the individual's point of view is shaped through social experiences is essential to understanding the findings of this study (Hartsock, 1998). To understand the participants' decision-making process, I had to understand the power relationships that existed in their homes and communities. Rural communities could produce different power relationships and social experiences from their urban counter-parts, and thus the impact and implications of rurality on women's roles and education was introduced and discussed. The power relationships in rural areas are dependent on the maintenance of a patriarchal system where women are valued

primarily in the roles of mother, wife, and homemaker. For all the participants, the measure of a successful woman was her ability to be a “good” mother first and then to balance the demands of her job. Two participants, Diane and Fern, doubted that it was possible to do both successfully without losing either the essential womanly quality of “warmth” or creating a home that was dysfunctional. This belief supports Neustaeter’s (2015) findings: many rural women held onto an idyllic notion of what their natural role was without considering how it perpetuated stereotyped gender roles and their own subordination. The perpetuation of stereotyped gender roles within rural societies, by both men and women, results in ways of thinking that both influences and supports a patriarchal society.

Socialized into a patriarchal society, rural women may lack the individual authority to question and challenge limiting gendered roles and expectations (Neustaeter, 2015). However, after accessing education at an ALC, some of the participants of this study found themselves in a position to consider opportunities outside of their gendered roles. In accessing the education, they not only gained a grade 12 diploma but also, according to Brenda “It also gave me new perspectives...I wasn’t able to question my life”. Alison and Brenda gained their voice and were able to take educational decisions that conflicted with the expectations of marriage and motherhood in their communities. Exposure to education at an ALC, resulted in changes in feelings of individual authority and self-esteem, and consequently when participants accessed PSE, this could disrupt power relationships in their homes and communities even further.

None of the participants recorded in their journals that PSE was highly valued in their home communities or within their social experiences. With the exception of Carol, the women they had cited as role models did not have PSE. The role models they encountered outside of the home were women working in the fields traditionally associated with the nurturing role of

women: education and nursing. Values are the basis of goal setting, and it is vital to consider how the value attached to gender-based roles in rural communities has shaped the participants' ability to set educational goals (Deacon & Firebaugh, 1988). The deeply entrenched patriarchal system in rural areas, which values women in the role of caregiver to both family and friends, I believe, limits the ability of rural women to envisage educational goals beyond these. The barriers to envisaging PSE are, thus, not only based in the material and human resources available to the participants but also in their ability to set educational and career goals which they perceive are valued in their communities. This viewpoint was supported by the findings of this study. Of the six participants, only two, Carol and Fern, discussed PSE options in fields other than careers traditionally associated with women. Neither of them pursued these options, and they justified their decision-making in terms of lack of material resources available to them. Diane wondered why she did not see women working on construction sites in her rural area, but did not attribute this to gender inequality but rather that women were not applying for the positions. Carol, after considering her own PSE choice, came to the realization that, unbeknownst to her, she had slipped into a gendered career choice. The barrier to envisaging educational goals is thus not the visible one of existing resources but the invisible one of the patriarchal structure of the rural community. Both Fern and Carol cited spousal resistance as a barrier to PSE, as their spouses were focused on the available family resources and their personal needs and used these as barriers to resist further education. Thus, Carol and Fern's barrier to PSE was not only the cited lack of material resources available to them but also the barrier presented by the patriarchal structure within their home. Caught up in the focus on existing resources (resource-based planning) as opposed to potential opportunities (goal-based planning), the six participants, to varying degrees, acknowledged that the barriers to PSE were

sometimes greater than a lack of resources. It also must be stated, as many of the participants referenced the role of religion in the communities, that the patriarchal barriers preventing women from accessing PSE have been, largely, influenced and supported by the religious beliefs present in the community.

While there are many feminist theories, most feminist theorists would agree that people have been socialized into a sexist ideology, gender roles, and ways of thinking that usually give males more institutional, social, and economic power than females (Tisdell, 2012). Despite those systems of power being challenged regularly, change in the rural areas of Manitoba seems to be slow, as the participants in this study suggest (Neustaeter, 2015). In 2001, Stalker urged the Adult Education Community, in her study of women accessing PSE in Hamilton, New Zealand, to acknowledge that the traditional theoretical approaches to understanding obstacles to PSE have been unsuccessful. Stalker (2001) asserted that these approaches had failed because the existing research stemmed from a gender-neutral, “blame-the-victim, individualized, psychologized view of the potential learner” approach (p. 290). Stalker (2001) argued for a need to move away from “nice” concepts that have not delivered the answers we are seeking and to interrogate the misogyny that underlies the patriarchal structures that prevent women from accessing PSE (p. 288). As suggested above, when women are envisaging their educational and career opportunities, the patriarchal structures present in their homes and communities were powerful deterrents. This study has demonstrated that the decision-making process of rural women regarding PSE has to be viewed through a feminist lens to interrogate and understand the importance of power relationships within families and communities. DeVault and Gross (2007) stated that researchers, in feminist interviewing, need to be aware

that they are also “interviewing themselves”. Therefore the next section explores the limitations of this study as it pertains to personal bias and reflexivity.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study focused on the stories of six rural women in South East and South Central Manitoba. While the cultural backgrounds of the participants were diverse, five of the six participants attended the same ALC and thus based their educational experiences on the same educational institution. The findings regarding the positive role the ALC, in Town A, played in providing supports to the participants may have been influenced by individual ALC practices and needs further investigation within the broader framework of how individual ALC practices influence student outcomes. Four of the six participants live in the same town and experienced the same socio-cultural community expectations, which may have skewed their narratives, as this part of SE Manitoba is culturally very distinctive. The extent to which culture influences rural women’s decision-making regarding PSE was not part of this study, and needs further research to fill this gap in the literature on rural women in Canada.

To make this study more representative of rural women in Manitoba, some might recommend a larger sample size and a broader range of interview questions. However, without adopting a detailed interview approach, I do not believe the interviewer would get the depth of responses required to understand the decision-making process of rural women. Initially, I had not considered the level of trust required in the interviewer/interviewee relationship to facilitate the depth of understanding required in this research study. In making a recommendation for future study in this area, I would recommend limiting the number of participants in the study to two, one participant who has accessed PSE and one participant who has not, and working very closely with them through a number of interviews, journal entries, and restorying accounts.

In the field of Transformative Learning Theory, English and Irving (2012) contend that women and gender issues have been pushed into the background in favour of “other causes in the struggle for equality” (p.246). Thus, there is very little current research in this field, especially direct linkages between transformative learning and feminism (English & Irving, 2012). As this study included transformative learning theory as one approach to adult learning, a recommendation for further study would be to examine the links between rural women and transformative learning theory from a feminist perspective. Within transformative learning theory, the role of the educator as coach is highlighted as an important aspect of relationship building; however, very little research exists on the responsibility the educator assumes in this coaching and, potentially, life-altering role. Cranton & Wright (2008) urge educators to establish boundaries and Meyer (2009) encourages journaling and coaching to promote transformation, but neither discusses the personal implications for the mentor/educator of this responsibility and relationship. This is another aspect of not only transformative learning theory, but also adult learning theory, that needs further research. Women’s learning is central to adult education and deserves further focused research.

A final further recommendation for research would be the impact the changes in ALC structures have had on rural women. The ALCs, in many rural areas, have been amalgamated with alternative high school programs, so that the classes are primarily composed of high school students. Esther alluded to this happening to the ALC she had attended and reflected that she would not like to attend the ALC with high school students. This study shows that both relationships and a relevant, supportive class environment at the ALC are crucial to rural women in their education journey and these changes could, potentially, have a dramatic effect on their educational decision-making.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how rural women in Manitoba made decisions regarding Post-Secondary Education (PSE) once they had graduated from an Adult Learning Centre (ALC). To formulate the guiding questions for this study, I looked to the findings and limitations of the pilot study. The barriers encountered by the pilot study participants directed my guiding, interview, and journal questions. Not all the participants in this study experienced the same barriers as those from the pilot study. Even the participants who had not transitioned to PSE in this study included other factors in their decision-making process indicating that their decision-making process surrounding PSE is complex and multifaceted.

Some important findings in rural women's decision-making processes were the influential roles played by stage of life, geographic location, and the ALC community. Stage of life and geographic location influenced the participants in that they provided barriers to accessing PSE; however, the underlying perceptions of gender roles and gendered expectations within families and communities exacerbated the barriers presented by both stage of life and geographic location. The participants could cope with long commutes and even relocation to the city if they had sufficient support from family and friends. Similarly, those participants who were limited in accessing PSE by the demands of child care or family expectations could transition to PSE successfully if their families or communities supported them. While important, these findings were not the most significant factors contributing to the decision-making process of rural women when considering PSE.

One significant finding of this study was the barriers presented to PSE by continued gender role expectations within the home and community. Family demands affected the women

in the study in terms of reducing the time they had available for their studies, limiting what type of PSE they could access and even, in one case, preventing her from accessing PSE. Because the role of mother is highly valued in rural communities, and self-sacrifice is an expected quality of a good mother, none of the participants questioned the barriers to further education presented by their family demands. The self-sacrificing demands of motherhood were not only viewed as essential to being successful mothers, but also essential to being successful women. Successful women were seen as women could balance the demands of a job and a family successfully. Some participants felt that this goal was unattainable, as the sacrifices that would have to be made for a happy family life would negate the possibility of a career. When the demands of being a student made juggling the roles of mother and wife more difficult, feelings of inadequacy and guilt at not fulfilling the role led to women abandoning their education in favour of family demands.

Another important finding was that the participants in this study did not view PSE as important for success. Although, as noted earlier, this viewpoint is changing, the participants in this study did not mention education, especially at a post-secondary level, as an essential measure of success. Furthermore, educational opportunities and the envisaging of career opportunities for the women in this study were limited by the gendered role expectations in their families and communities.

Crucially, this study revealed that rural women experience barriers in envisaging educational goals because they are not only focused on the resources available to them, but are also limited by the options available to them within the patriarchal structure of rural societies. The role of a woman in rural communities has traditionally been one of caregiver and homemaker. While this is changing and evolving because of socio-economic pressures and

influences from educational institutions, like ALCs and newcomers to the community, the embedded gender-role expectations within the patriarchal structure of the community has been slow to change. The female role models in the participants' lives and in rural societies are frequently in occupations that involve caregiving, whether for the sick, elderly, or children. These roles support and perpetuate the stereotypical role of women as carers and nurturers. Envisaging educational options beyond the traditional female roles and careers, while possible, is unlikely given the lack of role models and the reluctance of rural communities to dismantle the patriarchal construction of gendered roles.

When taken together, did the deeply entrenched patriarchal system in rural areas, which depends on women maintaining their roles as caregivers and homemakers, present a barrier to the ability of rural women to envisage educational goals in Manitoba, in 2017? I believe that this study has shown that patriarchal structures have created and maintained these barriers, and that this is the most important result to emerge from the data. The barriers to envisaging PSE are not only based in the material and human resources available to the participants but also in their ability to set educational and career goals which they perceive are valued in their communities. Spousal resistance to PSE, cited by Fern and Carol, community-based gender role expectations with relation to marriage and motherhood, cited by Alison and Brenda, and an inability to recognize gender based limitations, in Diane and Esther, all contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal systems of oppression and control. Caught up in the focus on existing resources, as opposed to potential opportunities, the six participants, in varying degrees, acknowledged that the barriers to PSE were sometimes greater than a lack of resources.

These findings are important in the context of rural research in Canada in the 21st century. The many advances that have been made in gender equality in rural communities should be celebrated, but these celebrations should be tempered by the knowledge that there is still much work to be done in dismantling patriarchal systems of oppression and control that continue to limit rural women's opportunities. The effects of patriarchal systems of oppression and control present in many rural areas in Canada should be included in conversations and research regarding rural women's access to PSE. Spousal resistance, gender-role stereotypes, and a lack of gender based role models all reinforce Stalker's (2001) call for new ways of looking at barriers to PSE. Stalker (2001) criticizes the "niceness" of adult education research, that is focused on women's attitudinal and situational obstacles to PSE, and calls for a recognition of the role misogyny plays in the creation of patriarchal structures of oppression that continue to limit women's access to PSE.

While feminism has played very important role in discussions on equality in the past century, it still has not affected the transformative change in Canadian society that some may contend (English & Peters, 2012). Feminism has the power to transform education and society; however, in the rural areas of Manitoba it is not widely associated with educational research and planning. This study builds on the important work dealing with rural women started by Graveline (1990), and furthered by more recent (Neustaeter, 2015; Ramsey et al., 2002; Weir, 2007) feminist research on rural women; however, there is still much work to be done in this field.

Finally, this research study is very important to the lives of rural women in Manitoba and, as such, should help to inform ALC directors regarding course planning and career counseling services for rural women and PSE administrators seeking to recruit rural women.

ALC and PSE institutions need to promote and support career choices not typically considered by rural women. Post-secondary administrators should also be made aware of the barriers present when rural women attempt to access PSE, and more thought needs to be given to online outreach to rural women. In the nine years I taught at the ALC, I witnessed continual provincial cuts to funding for adult learning, which led to limited course offerings focused on the job market demands as opposed to the needs of the learners. The barriers presented by child-care demands and home-making demands should not be underestimated by the ALC when deciding on course schedules. ALC administrators who decide on the course offerings and educators in ALCs should not underestimate the influence they have in students' lives and should aspire to create safe, supportive spaces for their students to collaborate and share their experiences. Without the strong supportive relationships formed at the ALC, and continued supportive relationships provided by family and friends, many rural women will never be able to challenge patriarchal structures of oppression and control.

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Appendix A (1)

Interview questions for participants who have *not* transitioned to PSE.

1. I would like you to tell me the story of your decision to return to school to obtain your grade 12 certificate?

Some factors to consider in your answer:

- What influenced your decision to return to school at this stage of your life? Could speak specifically about your decision-making process and which, if any, of these factors may have played a role:
 - Job-related
 - Spouse
 - Children
 - Community
 - Extended family
 - Personal fulfillment.

2. Please tell me about your Adult Learning Centre experience and how it influenced your thinking regarding:

- Career and educational choices available to you after completion
- Your own life and attitude to education

3. Tell me a bit about what you have been doing after completion of your grade 12.

Some factors to consider in your answer:

- Changes, if any, in:
 - Employment
 - Family responsibilities
 - Roles in the community.

4. In considering further education and training, what barriers do you foresee facing you if you were to start a program?

- Some factors to consider in your answer:
 - Financial
 - Family commitments
 - Time
 - Community support
 - Geographic location.

Appendix A (2)

Interview questions for participants who have transitioned to PSE.

1. I would like you to tell me the story of your decision to return to school to obtain your grade 12 certificate?

Some factors to consider in your answer:

- What influenced your decision to return to school at this stage of your life? Could speak specifically about your decision-making process and which, if any, of these factors may have played a role:
 - Job-related
 - Spouse
 - Children
 - Community
 - Extended family
 - Personal fulfillment.

2. Please tell me about your Adult Learning Centre experience and how it influenced your thinking regarding:

- Career and educational choices available to you after completion
- Your own life and attitude to education

3. How did it come to be that you considered post-secondary education?

4. What kind of post-secondary opportunities did/are you pursue/ing?

5. In considering post-secondary education, what were the greatest barriers you faced?

- How did friends and family support your decision?
- How did your community support your decision?
- How did living in a rural area affect your choices and eventual decision?

6. Explain what your post-secondary education experience has been like.

- What is/ has been your level of support from friends, family, community
- What is/ has been your level of support from your post-secondary institution?
- What has the transition from an Adult Secondary to a post-secondary environment been like for you?

Appendix B

Journal Entries

For all participants in the study

1. Please reflect on the role of education in your life.

Specifically think about:

- The role/ value of formal education in your home growing up.
- The role of education in the community you were raised in
- The value you place on education within your own home.

2. Please reflect on gender roles in your life:

Specifically think about:

- Expected gender roles in your home growing up
- Job opportunities related to gender roles in your community
- How your gender role has or has not influenced your decisions regarding education and a career.

3. Please reflect on women in your life and /or community who you admire?

Specifically think about:

- What is it about them that you admire? Are they successful at what they do? How do you define success?
- What would prevent you from attaining the same level of success?

4. Please reflect on the community that you live in.

Specifically think about:

- What are the values in your community that resonate with you? (one's you agree with)
- What are the values that do not resonate with you? (one's you disagree with)
- How do you see yourself within that community? What is your position in the community?

Appendix C

College Permission Form



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Adult Learning Centre

Attention: [REDACTED]

Town A

Manitoba

Faculty of Education

Department of Educational Administration,
Foundations and Psychology

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T2N2

Telephone (204) 474-9018
Fax (204) 474-7550

July 21, 2015

Dear [REDACTED]

My name is Colleen Webb, and I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba. I am writing to request your permission and to ask for your assistance in engaging some of your past students in a research study that will provide the necessary data for my thesis. The study is focused on past students who attended the ALC and who have now continued to post-secondary education (PSE) or not yet pursued PSE. The title of my study is: **AFTER THE ADULT LEARNING CENTRE: Rural women: decisions and transitions to Post-Secondary Education**

Advisor: Dr. Marlene Atleo

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I am requesting permission to conduct this research based on the following parameters:

- An email invitation, sent out by the Red River College ALC administrative staff, asking female alumni who graduated from the ALC 2011-2014 to participate in the research study.

I am interested in interviewing female students who have continued their studies in a post-secondary institution and those who have not continued with post-secondary studies. My email contact will be provided on the invitation letter.

- All those who wish to be interviewed will contact me directly to ensure the anonymity and arms length of the college. Once the participant has emailed me her willingness to participate, she will receive a consent letter where all the parameters of the project will be explained to her.
- The participant's names will not appear on the results and they will be provided with a pseudonym to protect their identities. All their responses will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential. I will be the only person with access to participants' names, although my advisor and course instructor may have access to anonymized data.
- The findings of the study will be used for presentations, publications, and to complete the requirements for my thesis. The findings of this study may also be beneficial to ALC's in assisting them to develop supports for students wishing to pursue post-secondary education. Career counselling may also be enhanced. It will also assist post-secondary institutions, like the college, in developing supports for rural, female students.

I have attached for your convenience a copy of:

- The invitation letter
- The letter of consent for participants.

The support I am requesting from the ALC consists of:

- Campus manager permission to invite alumni of RRC ALC to participate in the research.
- Assistance from administrative staff in sending out the email to female alumni (2011-2014) to their last known email contact address.

Your signature on the consent form will authorize your approval for this research project and an agreement to provide the support requested. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122 or email

margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

This research has also been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the Red River College Research Ethics Board; participants with concerns or questions respecting their involvement in the study may contact:

The Red River College Research Ethics Board
c/o Research and Planning

Sincerely,

Colleen Webb



Faculty of Education

Department of Educational Administration,
Foundations and Psychology

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T2N2

Telephone (204) 474-9018
Fax (204) 474-7550

Thesis Title: AFTER THE ADULT LEARNING CENTRE:

Rural women: decisions and transitions to Post-Secondary Education

Dear Colleen:

I hereby give permission for the research study: *After the Adult Learning Centre:*

Rural women: decisions and transitions to post-secondary education

,to be conducted during 2015-2016. I understand an invitation email will be sent out by the ALC staff to select ALC alumni, and that Colleen Webb will be conducting interviews with alumni of the ALC who self-select for this purpose. I understand that my signature on this form indicates that I have understood to my satisfaction the information regarding participation and supports listed in this request. In no way does this letter waive my legal rights nor release the researcher from her legal and professional responsibility. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, and am free to ask for clarification or new information throughout the study.

Campus Manager

Date

Appendix D

Interview Invitation Email



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Department of Educational Administration,
Foundations and Psychology

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T2N2

Telephone (204) 474-9018
Fax (204) 474-7550

Colleen Webb

July, 21, 2015

Dear ALC Alumnus:

My name is Colleen Webb, and I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba, currently conducting research for my thesis. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that is focused on the experiences of women from rural areas, who have completed a grade 12 diploma at an Adult Learning Centre and have considered, but not yet enrolled in post-secondary education, or have embarked upon a post-secondary education pathway. As you are a woman who has attended a rural Adult Learning Centre, I felt you were ideally suited to this research study.

Research Project Title: *After the Adult Learning Centre: Rural women: decisions and transitions to Post-Secondary Education*

Researcher: Colleen Webb, graduate student.

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Marlene Atleo

This letter will provide you with the basic idea of what this research is about and what participation will involve. If you would like more information about something not mentioned here, feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully.

The primary purpose of this research is to: investigate what motivated you to return to formal education at an Adult Learning Centre; what role attending an Adult Learning Centre has had

on your decision to pursue/ not pursue post-secondary education; what barriers you have encountered while pursuing post-secondary education or what barriers have prevented you from pursuing post-secondary education, and if you have embarked upon a post-secondary education course, what your post-secondary education experience has been like.

To complete this study, I am inviting you to participate in a personal interview, which should take no more than one hour of your time. If you to participate in the study, we will arrange an interview that is mutually agreeable, in order to ensure that you are comfortable and to protect the privacy of our conversation. You have the right to only answer the questions you feel comfortable answering and you **have the right to withdraw from the study at any time**. You will receive a copy of the interview questions via email before the interview, so that you can gather your thoughts. You will also be asked to keep a reflective journal(provided by me) where you will record your thoughts and ideas, guided by prompts and some questions. The journal will require you to spend about 30 minutes, once a week for four weeks, reflecting on the prompts and questions. At the end of the 4 week period we will meet again, for about 1 hour, to discuss the journal. Any information you wish to withhold, from the journals, at this point **may be withheld**.

Although the risks of participating in this research study are low, participants may experience varied emotional responses in recollecting their past experiences. Every effort will be made to sensitively approach the questioning, and participants may refuse to answer questions and withdraw from the study at any time.

Your name will **not** appear on the results and you will be provided with a **pseudonym** to protect your identity. All your responses will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential. All data will be kept in a locked file cabinet or a password protected computer. I will be the only person with access to participants' names, although my thesis advisor may have access to anonymized data. The findings of the study will be used for my thesis and possibly presentations and publications.

The transcripts of the audiotaped interview will be transcribed by me and returned to you via email, so that you can add, delete, or change your responses to ensure that all identifying information has been omitted. This should take about 30 minutes to review. The narrative that I will 're-story' from your journals will also be sent to you so that you can add, delete, or change responses to ensure all identifying information has been omitted. This should take no more than one hour. You will have two weeks to review your transcript and restoried journal, after which I will assume that you are comfortable with the information and I will proceed with analysis. All data will be kept in a locked file cabinet at my home, or a password protected computer by me, Colleen Webb. I will be the only person with access to participants' names, although my advisor may have access to anonymized data. The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board (s) and a representative(s) of the Research Quality Management/Assurance Office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes. The electronic data will be erased or trashed, and the hard data will be shredded once the study is complete, which is January, 2020.

At the end of the process, you will be able to access an electronic version of the thesis via the Theses and Mspace portal on the University of Manitoba Libraries webpage. The Campus

Manager of the Steinbach Campus of Red River College will also have the opportunity to access a copy of the thesis electronically via the Theses and Mspace portal on the U of M Libraries webpage. If you choose to do the interview, **you will be provided with a consent form to sign that provides all the information about the study.**

If you are interested in being part of this research study, please let me know via email within one week at: Colleen.Webb@umanitoba.ca.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If there are any concerns or complaints about this project contact any of the above-mentioned persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat.

This research has also been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the Red River College Research Ethics Board; participants with concerns or questions respecting their involvement in the study may contact:

The Red River College Research Ethics Board
c/o Research and Planning

Thank you,
Colleen Webb

Appendix E

Interview Consent Letter/Form



Faculty of Education

Department of Educational Administration,
Foundations and Psychology

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T2N2

Telephone (204) 474-9018
Fax (204) 474-7550

Colleen Webb

January 29, 2014

Dear Participant:

My name is Colleen Webb, and I am a graduate student from the Faculty of Education, at the University of Manitoba, currently conducting research for my thesis. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that is focused on the experiences of women from rural areas, who have graduated from Adult Learning Centres and have either transitioned to post-secondary education or postponed further study.

Research Project Title: *After the Adult Learning Centre: Rural women: decisions and transitions to Post-Secondary Education*

Researcher: Colleen Webb, graduate student.

Advisor: Dr. Marlene Atleo

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The primary purpose of this research is to: investigate your decision-making process in your to return to formal education at an Adult Learning Centre; what role attending an Adult Learning Centre has had on your decision to pursue/ not pursue post-secondary education; what barriers you have encountered while pursuing post-secondary education or what barriers have prevented you from pursuing post-secondary education, and if you have embarked upon a post-secondary education course, what your post-secondary education experience has been like.

To complete this study, I am inviting you to participate in a personal interview, which should take no more than one hour of your time. The questions I will ask will relate to:

a) Your initial motivation to return to formal education; b) your experiences at the ALC prepared which made you consider/ or not post-secondary education; c) the decision to pursue/ not pursue post-secondary education; d) if you embarked upon post-secondary education, the barriers you experienced and how you dealt with the barriers; e) if you did not pursue post-secondary education what impacted your decision not to continue? You have been chosen to participate in this study because you are a female student from a rural area, who graduated from an ALC and has/ has not pursued post-secondary education. This proposed research hopes to identify barriers to post-secondary education, experienced by female students from rural areas, to better assist career counseling at rural Adult Learning Centres. This research will hopefully, benefit rural Adult Learning Centre students who are intending accessing post-secondary education.

Although the risks of participating in this research study are low, participants may experience varied emotional responses in recollecting their past experiences. Information about local counselling services will be provided to participants at the first interview. Every effort will also be made to sensitively approach the questioning, and participants may refuse to answer questions and withdraw from the study at any time.

If you agree to participate in the study, we will arrange an interview that is in a mutually agreeable location, in order to ensure that you are comfortable and to protect the privacy of our conversation. You have the right to only answer the questions you feel comfortable answering and you **have the right to withdraw from the study at any time**. You may withdraw by contacting me; Colleen Webb, at the email address provided on this form. You will receive a copy of the interview questions and journal prompts, via email, before the interview, so that you can gather your thoughts. All your responses will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential. I will audiotape the interview using a digital voice recorder.

Your name will not appear on the results and you will be provided with a pseudonym to protect your identity. All your responses will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential. Should any comments suggest the identity of another person, the data will not be used in the results of the final study. Identifiers, which may indicate geographic or personal information, would be taken out of the commentary to afford anonymity.

The transcripts of the audiotaped interview will be transcribed by me and returned to you via email, so that you can add, delete, or change your responses to ensure that all identifying

information has been omitted. This should take about 30 minutes to review. You will also be asked to keep a reflective journal where you will record your thoughts and ideas, guided by prompts and some questions. The journal will require you to spend about 30 minutes, once a week for four weeks, reflecting on the prompts and questions. At the end of the 4 week period we will meet again, for about 1 hour, to discuss the journal. Any information you wish to withhold, from the journals, at this interview may be withheld.

I will email you the transcripts and restored journal at the email address you have used to respond to the participant invitation. You will have two weeks to review your transcript and restored journal and respond to me via email, after which I will assume that you are comfortable with the information and I will proceed with analysis. All data will be kept in a locked file cabinet at my home, or a password protected computer by me, Colleen Webb. I will be the only person with access to participants' names, although my advisor and course instructor may have access to anonymized data. The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board (s and a representative(s of the Research Quality Management/Assurance Office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes. The electronic data will be erased or trashed, and the hard data will be shredded once the study is complete, which is January, 2019.

At the end of the process, you will be able to access an electronic version of the thesis via the Theses and Mspace portal on the University of Manitoba Libraries webpage. The final report will be read by my advisor, Dr. Marlene Atleo. The Campus Manager of the Steinbach Campus of Red River College, will also have the opportunity to access a copy of the thesis electronically via the Theses and Mspace portal on the U of M Libraries page. The results of this study may be used for publication and presentation purpose, and to become part of the data for my thesis.

Sincerely,
Colleen Webb
Graduate Student

Advisor: Dr. Marlene Atleo

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

This research has also been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the Red River College Research Ethics Board; participants with concerns or questions respecting their involvement in the study may contact:

The Red River College Research Ethics Board
c/o Research and Planning

PLEASE ADD SIGNATURE

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix F

Ethics Approvals: University of Manitoba and Red River College



Research Ethics and Compliance
Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)

Human Ethics
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB
Canada R3T 2N2
Phone +204-474-7122
Fax +204-269-7173

APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

October 16, 2015

TO: Colleen Webb (Advisor M. Atleo)
Principal Investigator

FROM: Zana Lutfiyya, Acting Chair
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: Protocol #E2015:083
"After the Adult Learning Centre: Rural Women: decisions and transitions to post-secondary education"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). **This approval is valid for one year only.**

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.


Please note:

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, please mail/e-mail/fax (261-0325) a copy of this Approval (identifying the related UM Project Number) to the Research Grants Officer in ORS in order to initiate fund setup. (How to find your UM Project Number: <http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/mrt-faq.html#pr0>)
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Quality Management Office may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/ethics/human_ethics_REB_forms_guidelines.html) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL


PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER(s) Webb, Colleen		DEPARTMENT University of Manitoba		NUMBER 2015/16-03	
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT Red River College					
CO- RESEARCHERS N/A					
SPONSORING AGENCIES N/A					
TITLE: After the Adult Learning Centre: Rural Women: decisions and transitions to post-secondary education					
APPROVAL DATE November 24, 2015	TERM (YEARS) One	AMENDMENT	AMENDMENT APPROVED	ANNUAL REPORT/ RENEWAL DUE DATE November 24, 2016	
CERTIFICATION					
<p style="text-align: center;"> The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Red River College Research Ethics Board and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects. </p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 20px 0;">  </div> <p style="text-align: center;"> <i>Approval of the Research Ethics Board by: Ashley Blackman, Chair</i> </p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;"> <i>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.</i> </p>					

Appendix H

TCPS Core Certificate

PANEL ON
RESEARCH ETHICS
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE



Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Colleen Webb

*has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)*

Date of Issue: **9 January, 2014**