"Just doing what needs to be done:"

Rural Women's Everyday Peacebuilding on the Prairies

by

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ABSTRACT

Usually bubbling under the surface of the ordinary everyday routines of life, women's volunteering in their communities, helping out and just doing what needs to be done, represent a significant phenomenon in sustaining and developing human life and civilization. Embedded within their everyday community action is a dialectical learning and cognitive praxis which informs their situated public care practice. Grassroots peacebuilding is dependent on the efforts of volunteers. As well, volunteering itself is a means for building social cohesion, solidarity and trust—factors fundamental to sustainable development and peace. Rural women's community involvement is situated within the everyday of their diverse communities. There is diversity both within and between rural communities; as well rural women represent a diverse group in regards to age, race, class, ethnicity, language, marital and family status, ability, and religion.

Blending participant observation and in-depth interviewing, this ethnographic study explored rural women's community involvement practice and learning in South-Central Manitoba. This study invited women from across the region; representing a mix of age, race, education, ability, ethnicity, religion and areas of involvement, to share their stories of being involved in their communities. Their narratives revealed a rich story of women's peacebuilding for individual and community wellbeing fitting into a tradition of rural women's community development. As well, their learning narratives revealed a situated community involvement learning within the action and reflection of being community involved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In peace,

with love.

Thank-you.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Tabitha and all who continue the tradition.

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Spring Supper, May 3, 2013

Dark clouds slowly move across the mid-afternoon sky and cast shadows on the young green

shoots breaking through the black spring soil. A bolt of lightning flashes behind the trees. In the

west and north the sun is shining. The storm is moving southwest. The rain starts and the wipers

slap across the windshield. My daughter fell asleep somewhere between mile roads 5 and 8

East[1]. We reach our turn off and head one mile north on a well-travelled corduroy[2] road.

In the middle of farmyards, fields, and brush stands the hall. The faded, peeling light blue

plywood walls contrast against the bright wet emerald green grass and the charcoal sky. Thunder

rumbles and another bolt of lightning cracks the heavens. Rain pours down. We park and under

an umbrella quickly run inside straight into a flurry of preparation for the local annual spring

supper.

In the kitchen, three men with carving knives slice baked hams to fill the waiting roasting

pans. Women are negotiating how to fit all the colourful Tupperware, glass, and ceramic bowls

of coleslaw, potato, and carrot salads in the fridges. Dutch ovens[3] are warming on the stove.

Every kitchen outlet is in use. In the hall, the long tables are decked with cups, filled creamers

and sugar bowls, and saucers of salt and pepper packages. The front stage is a hive of pie-

cutting: apple, pineapple, blueberry, lemon meringue, mixed berry, banana, raisin, sour cream

and raisin, chocolate, coconut, and rhubarb. Women cut pies into sixths, carefully lifting and

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[1] Southern Manitoba is surveyed on a grid system with road allowances based on mile roads indicating miles east and west of the Principal Meridian (north south roads), and north of the United States-Canada border (east west roads). Rural civic addresses are located based on this system. Thus, mile roads 5 and 8 east are located 5 and 8 miles east of the Principal Meridian which runs through the eastern portion of the research area.

[2] Corduroy roads are gravel roads worn by travel, wind and rain into ridges going across the road which resemble the ridges of corduroy material. Driving on them creates a vibrating effect.

[3] A Dutch oven is a large heavy cooking pot with a lid. The thickness of the pot retains heat ensuring that the food inside keeps hot for longer periods of time – making it a favoured choice when putting hot food out for serving.

placing each piece onto white Styrofoam plates and arranging each plate according to pie in long queues, front to back on the stage. The assembly of pies wait patiently for the hungry folk. Parents remind their children not to stick their fingers in the smooth whipped toppings.

To the side of the hall the regular silent auction features prizes donated by the members of the women's group. When the doors open neighbours fill their plates and settle next to friends, acquaintances and family members, some they may only see annually at this event.

PRELUDE

Women's Everyday Peacebuilding on the Prairie

Have you seen the roots of prairie tall grasses? The long thin subterranean fractals of these native

plants spread wide and go deep into the soil to gather moisture and nutrients for the thin erect

blades scorching in the hot prairie sun. Like these grassroots, women's everyday peacebuilding

in their communities goes deep and wide, and often below the surface or radar of

acknowledgement. Traditions and cultures of women's community involvement and

peacebuilding stretch deep into our collective history. Like the early settlers who brought saved

garden seeds from the 'Old Country' over to the prairies in their trunks (Fisher, 2015; Lehr,

1996), women brought their community and peacebuilding knowledge and practice with them to

the New Country. Long before Europeans settled in this area Indigenous women had been

actively caring and advocating for their families' and communities' wellbeing. Similarly, Métis

women have been involved in ensuring their communities' wellbeing over generations and on

into the future.

Why I wanted to do this study

Wherever I've found myself—in North America, Europe, Asia or the Caribbean, in urban

or rural settings—I've witnessed the same phenomenon: women involved in their communities.

Through formal volunteering with organisations, or through the informal volunteering of helping

others outside of their family, women perform a plethora of public acts of caring in their

communities. This community work is fundamental to ensuring and improving the wellbeing of

communities for individuals, families, and the women themselves. Women are creating

abundance in their communities. Unfortunately, all too often, women's community action goes unnoticed leaving an incomplete picture of what really happened and is happening in the social, economic, political, and cultural development of our communities, societies, and nations (Boulding, 1995; Dominelli, 1995, 2006; Reinharz, 1983). Lena Dominelli (1995) once wrote "without women's community work, life as we know it would not exist" (p. 133). Women's acts of public caring represent a crucial aspect of women's work which sustains communities.

Not only is it important to consider what women are doing and how—such as advocating for new seniors housing or a foodbank, organising a farmers' market, or fundraising for new safe playground equipment or a skate-park—we also must acknowledge that the connecting, reciprocity, and trust-building that happens when a group of citizens come together to address a need in their community are vitally important to building peace. United Nations Volunteers (2011) points out that volunteering can build social cohesion, cooperation, solidarity, and social capital, which are all factors for building sustainable communities and civilly resolving conflicts and differences.

Imbedded in community involvement are informal and incidental learning processes. Learning, I argue, is a crucial factor in community involvement. Developing an awareness of community involvement and learning to be community involved, as well as gaining all the required knowledge are fundamental to our involvement practice. After all, if we never learned to do this, would it happen? Community involvement, I propose, is not only a significant site of learning, it is also a phenomenon with unique learning and teaching cultures that inform people's knowledge and practice. Like women's community action, this learning is under-examined in literature and research due in part to the informal and tacit ways in which it is achieved.

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Community involvement learning occurs within the general and nuanced geographies of where people live. Considerations of place contribute to building a real and emotive understanding of how cultural geographies inform the lived everyday experiences within a particular setting. Place, writes Phoenix de Carteret (2008), is "how we know ourselves" (p. 513). David A. Gruenwald (as cited in de Carteret) recognizes how, historically for people the "local and cultural geography were the contexts and the 'texts' to learn who they were and what they needed to know to live" (p. 513). Rural women are a diverse group, there is no quintessential 'rural woman.' Rural women live in towns, villages, hamlets, small cities, as well as on reservations, colonies[4], and farms. They represent different racial, class, ethnic, linguistic, ability, and religious groups. They are mothers, sisters, daughters, granddaughters, aunts, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers; they are friends, neighbours, strangers, and citizens. What they have in common is their rurality, the experience of being rural; yet for each woman this is unique to their lived experience.

Locating the researcher

Women's community involvement runs through my veins. The stories of the women who participated in this study reflect what I have been observing my entire life. Helping hands for anyone in need: cooking, baking, and serving at community suppers; fundraising and advocating for resources are some of the examples of multiple generations of community involvement among women in my family, myself included. My grandmother was active in her community and in her church, while raising her children and working on and off the farm. Later, she was active in the local curling club, started a walking club and, once she retired, was involved with the local

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[4] Hutterite colonies.

seniors' centre. The infiltration of technology, specifically computers and the Internet, prompted my grandmother, born in 1928, to retire from formal involvement several years ago, although she is still a regular attender and supporter of community events and organisations.

In the 1980s my mother was a member of the early Parent School Advisory Council. I recall her co-organising film nights and soup-and-pie suppers to fundraise for new playground equipment. She advocated to the school board for a new gymnasium for the school—which was finally built nearly twenty years after her own kids left that school. She was also a Sunday school teacher and, for a while, a girls' club volunteer, while working out of the home, and for a period of time also pursuing post-secondary studies.

Like many adults in rural Manitoba my mother and grandmother were curlers, and spent many hours curling, raising money for the local curling rink, and organising the annual men's and ladies' bonspiels[5]. My grandmother proudly admits to being involved in her community for years, and one evening passed to me three dusty black-covered notebooks with yellowed pages: "I found these in the dresser in the basement" she clarifies. I open the top book. The opening sentence reads:

> Gretna, Manitoba, January 11, 1951. The Ladies Aid of St. Peter's Lutheran Church met on the above date at the home of […]

Not only do I recognize my grandmother's name in the pages of cursive writing, but also my great-grandmother's name – this is the first time I've learned of her community involvement. The three books contain minutes my grandmother took as secretary to the Gretna Ladies Aid Society and the above-mentioned committee.

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[5] Bonspiels are curling tournaments in which numerous rinks or teams play off in an elimination style of tournament competition. These are often significant rural community events.

Now my daughter is watching my community involvement, often coming along as my side-kick. At home I've watched her arrange her dolls in a circle on the floor and appoint a 'Chairperson.' What follows is a lively board meeting as per Robert's Rules of Order. Now she's running her own fundraisers selling her bracelets and art to raise money for Syrian refugees coming to the area. Through her mother and other women around her my daughter is 'acquiring the consciousness,' to borrow Donna Chovenac's (2006) phrase, of community involvement and social action.

Beginning early in our lives, we four generations of females have observed our mothers doing what they can to help out and address a community need in order to improve individual, familial, and community wellbeing. For some of us this community-care work was done while caring for families, working out of the home, pursuing post-secondary studies, and working on the farm. In doing so our foremothers have demonstrated their strength, resilience, capabilities, and potential, and their abilities to dream and learn.

What is 'it'?

The tradition of women being actively involved locally to improve their communities and individual wellbeing has many names. 'Volunteering,' 'community development,' 'peacebuilding,' 'community-building,' 'community activism,' and 'grassroots activism' are some of the examples found in the literature. When designing this study I wanted to use a general term that would include all the formal and informal ways women are building their communities and be relevant to the research context. The plethora of names in the literature across academic disciplines raised the question: What do women call this work? This prompted me to put this very question to those engaged in it themselves.

Peacebuilding

While none of the women's activities in this study are done in the name or under the banner of peacebuilding, all the women's activities contribute to building peace in their communities. This study takes a broad and inclusive approach to building peace that is not exclusive to people and communities who are experiencing or have experienced war or violent conflict. Nor is it exclusive to people working under the banner of peacebuilding or who self-identify their actions as peacebuilding. An inclusive perspective of peacebuilding considers how particular processes and goals relate to understandings of peace.

This study is built upon a feminist concept of positive peace reflecting the absence of direct and structural violence and the presence of the ethics and practices of caring, interconnectedness, and social justice (Galtung, 1969; Brock-Utne, 1989; Noddings, 2008; Reardon, 1990, 1993, 1996; Snyder, 2008). This is not to say that peace is the absence of conflict, but rather peace is addressing conflict with holistic, collaborative, nonviolent processes that focus on relationships and building understanding (Harris and Morrison, 2003; Reardon, 1988, 1990). Peace is dynamic, not static; it is a process, a transformation (Reardon, 1985; Vellacott, 2000). Taking this inclusive definition of peace, upon which to consider the actions of individuals and groups involved in their communities through formal and informal volunteering, opens possibilities for considering these everyday public acts of caring as grassroots peacebuilding.

A note about feminist and feminism

It is important to realize that although there is a sensitivity to the word "feminist" locally and in many rural areas, this does not mean there is no feminist or women's movement or

feminist consciousness in these areas. While local rural women may never have marched with placards down their main streets demanding rights for women, a consciousness for women's empowerment, significance, equity, equality and rights, and critical thinking around gender issues are present. The exciting challenge is to discover the local women's movements situated within the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities, and women's communities of practice—in local politics, community centres and organisations, churches, and relationships.

For example, a friend, in her early sixties, recently recounted that as a child growing up in northwestern Ontario, her mother would hitch the wagon to the tractor, get all the kids in the wagon, and drive through the woods to her Women's Institute (WI) meeting. Her mother didn't know how to drive a car but she could drive a tractor. It was under the table at WI meetings, silently playing by the feet of her mother and the other women, that she had her first lessons in feminism.

This research is intentionally and unashamedly about women. I am inspired by the astounding commitment and efforts women put into their communities to make the world, our world, a more humane, holistically healthy, sustainable, safe, and peace-filled place to live. Across this globe women work tirelessly to: create safe communities for children, seniors, and families; create income-generating opportunities; resolve conflicts; as well as advocate and fight for healthy environments, justice, security, safety, equality, and equity.

At the same time as I recognize women's agency, knowledge creation, and ability to leverage and wield power, I also acknowledge that patriarchy and the systems that maintain patriarchy limit all women and men in achieving their full potential. One way that patriarchy is sustained is when women's stories and experiences are not shared or told, and the perspectives of women have long been left out of the historical record (Naples, 1998). It is important to consider

how women are involved up front, backstage, and everywhere in between in regards to community action. As such this research is feminist research.

An overview

This study tells a story of rural women's community involvement, their learning to be involved, and what they learn through community involvement. Rural women in South-Central Manitoba were invited to share stories of their past and present community involvement, focusing on how they learned to do this work and what have they learned along the way. From their words and situated knowledges, the quest was to create an understanding of rural women's community involvement, practice, and cognitive praxis.

Nestled between the chapters are snapshots of women's community involvement. These vignettes are pieces of creative nonfiction telling stories of women's community involvement. Some of the snapshots recount experiences of participant-observation during this research experience. Some recount specific examples of women's local community involvement. Others are composites inspired by the participants' stories. These vignettes present another voice in telling the story of women's community involvement in the research area.

Considering the power of naming, and the plethora of names given to women's community involvement, the next chapter explores women's names for community involvement, and how names give and relay meaning and significance to women's community action. A name provides a window into how women construct and perceive their actions within their socio-cultural experiences.

The context chapter will take us into the research setting in South-Central Manitoba. Consideration is given to understanding rural and rurality, particularly in regards to gender. The

geographical, historical and cultural landscapes tell stories of settlement, survival and success. Introducing stories of local rural women's historical community building efforts locates the participants' stories within a collective, long memory of rural women's community action in southern Manitoba.

The theoretical foundation for this study is presented in Chapters Three and Four. Chapter Three focuses on everyday ordinary routines and the informal and tacit learning, which for the women's communities, make all the difference in the world. Chapter Four provides an integrated examination of peacebuilding and community development as relevant to this study. Chapter Five summarizes the research methods and considerations of doing ethnographic research in rural Manitoba for this study.

Using the women's own words to most accurately recount their experiences and knowledge, Chapter Six presents women's community involvement practice as imbedded in their everyday lives across their lifespans. Chapters Seven and Eight focus on learning and involvement; reflecting on how they learn community involvement and what they've learned through their practice. The stories the women shared for this study—stories of pleasure, frustration, joy, challenges, success, family, work, and community—are ultimately stories of hope.

A summative concluding analysis, Chapter Nine, will pull together the threads of rural women's peacebuilding on the prairies and put forward recommendations for community peacebuilding practice and community involvement learning.

SNAPSHOT

"You just do what needs to be done[6]"

Once upon a time long ago, or maybe it was yesterday, far away or just down the street, five women gathered in a kitchen, or was it a garden. Maybe they were in the shade of a whitewashed summer kitchen, a tree, or house to escape the blazing July sun baking the prairie around them and under their feet. Perhaps they were in an air-conditioned kitchen. They were cleaning strawberries, ripe and freshly picked; sweet red juice stained their fingertips. A platter of fresh baked cookies and jug of iced tea sat among them.

As they were sitting together, eating together, working together, they talked. They talked about summer, family members, children, neighbours, and the community:

"Volunteers are needed at the local festival happening in two weeks. Remember the Elvis impersonator last year? He was so good, and such a good dancer."

"The new kids' soccer program is looking for volunteer coaches and just sent out donation requests to help pay for new balls and team pictures. We had sixty-seven kids come out last week—they are having so much fun."

"Sunday school teachers are needed at the church starting in September."

"Anne McTavish is in the hospital and her family would like some pre-cooked food that is easy to warm up—the youngest daughter is allergic to peanuts."

"Abe Pauls who still lives out on the farm just turned 98. He still calls every morning so that someone knows he's still kicking."

"The pastor called and asked if someone could take Lorelei Winters to swimming lessons this week as her mom's car is in the shop."

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[6] Helena, a research participant.

"The Ladies Auxiliary's quilt auction and bake sale raised over two thousand dollars for the hospital."

"Speaking of quilts, don't forget Tuesday and Wednesday next week is blanket-making day. Don't forget your thimble again. Last month we nearly had to stitch up your thumb!"

"The women's shelter still needs non-perishable food, toiletries and diapers. Do you wanna chip in together again for a Co-op giftcard to donate so they can buy what they need? I'll drop it off at Lucy Fredrick's – she's chair of the board now."

"Did you see the call for municipal candidates? Are you thinking of running again? Well, if you aren't, maybe I will. Someone's gotta talk some sense into that council and make sure it's not just a bunch of men sitting there."

Slowly the cookies disappear along with some strawberries. Glasses are emptied and refilled. Strawberries are hulled and all the tops are tossed back into the garden. The monthly get-together is now a habit within the women's routines of work, family, and community. Just "getting-together with the girls" they call it. They check-in, catch-up, and make sure things are taken care of—"just doing what needs to be done."

CHAPTER ONE

"You just do what needs to be done"[7]:

Naming women's community involvement

A doorway to understanding how women are involved in their communities is to consider the names they give their community involvement practice. The scope of their involvement ranges from volunteering with organisations to broader acts of neighbourliness, caring, and actions that many consider "just something that needs to be done."[8] This plethora of actions makes succinctly naming women's community-building a challenge. Consciously or unconsciously naming itself is a considered a political act.

At the outset of this study I continuously discovered in scholarly literature new names for this phenomenon I intended to study. The terms differ across time, disciplines, and theorists. Initially, I called this practice 'community-building' what I considered an all-encompassing term that included the work women do and recognized that women actively contribute to creating—to building their communities. At the time I opted not to use the term 'volunteer' for fear it would generate responses reflecting popular concepts of volunteering, specifically volunteering with an organisation or particular initiatives. While these were to be included in this study, I wanted to paint the broadest picture possible of women contributing to their communities. Initial discussions with women about 'community-building' produced scrunched up eyebrows and I ended up having to explain what I meant. Alternatives such as 'building better communities,' 'making the community better,' and 'improving your community' didn't connect with women as

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[7] Helena, research participant.
[8] Helena, research participant.

often women did not consider their work as making things better or improving—these terms seemed to insinuate a judgement or assumption. I suspected the phenomenon at the centre of this study has many names and no name. This raised more questions: Why does women's community-building have so many different names? Why does it seem so difficult to name?

Initially I felt a disconnection between the academic literature and the research field. Yet with analysis, I came to realize the gap was indeed much smaller. This chapter explores the complexity of naming the everyday community involvement of women by delving into the practice as discussed by the women who participated in this study.

The practicality of field research required a common term that would be understood by potential participants and allies. I had to initiate the conversation by succinctly explaining my research in the field. One evening, while having supper with my grandmother, she asked me about my research. As I was explaining it to her she looked at me and said, "Well, I've been involved in my community for years." Here it was, the missing piece of my puzzle. If my grandmother used and understood the term 'community involvement' there was a good chance so would others. 'Community involvement' and 'community involved' became the catalyst to many inspiring conversations about women's community building and caring work across South-Central Manitoba.

My own challenge to succinctly name women's community-building and the range of names used in the literature prompted me to ask the women what do they call what they do in their communities. I posed this question once we were well into our conversations and the women had already talked about some of what they had done or were doing. This way they had already talked about their involvement, which gave them reference points to refer to when I asked them what they called their community-building.

Reviewing our conversations, two things about naming community involvement stand out. First, when asked specifically what they call their community involvement some women had no name for their community work while others had a specific name. Second, sometimes when she didn't have a name for it, a woman would consistently use a particular term to refer to specific involvements, initiatives, and actions. Even when she did have a name for it, sometimes a woman would consistently use a different term to refer to her community work. What women call it can be circumstantial depending on the action, the audience, and the question. Naming community involvement is fluid. The plethora of names in academic literature, reflects the variety of names, including no name, for community involvement used by the women themselves.

'It's who I am.'[9]

Numerous women, like Wanda, did not have a name for it when asked:

> I don't know. I don't have a name for it.

Helena gave a similar response:

> No. You just do what needs to be done but no specific name.

Being a bit of a joker, Pearl called it "stupidity," then added:

> I don't know. If I was idle I think I'd go nuts. You gotta do something.

While Georgia did not have a name for it she pointed out that there's value in what she does:

> I don't know if I have a name for it because I will probably do anything if I
> see value in it.

Others replied "just being involved," using the same terminology my grandmother used. These latter responses may have been influenced by my own language in presenting the research.

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[9] Jackie, research participant.

Although, some women do not have a specific name for their community involvement, they spoke of its value to themselves and its necessity in their communities suggesting that, name or no name, they're motivated to do what just needs to be done.

Several of the women explained that they did not have a name for it because it is simply part of their being and comes naturally. As Margaret said:

No, I don't have a name for it. I just be.

Similarly Simone said:

For me personally it just came naturally. It's natural.

Jackie, who was eighty-five years old and involved in her church, community, and curling when we met, was the eldest woman to participate. For her being involved not only keeps her going, it's who she is:

Some people tell me I'm crazy. A name for it? I don't know it's just what keeps me going, keeps me abreast of life, for me. It doesn't for everybody. But to put a name on it, I don't know, it's just who I am.

For these women, the notion that they're doing what needs to be done, that their involvement is natural and just who they are highlights the everyday, habitual practice of community involvement.

Volunteer

Of the names given in response to the question "What do you call it?" and used in our discussions, 'volunteer' was the most common. Lois referred to herself as "just a volunteer." While Helena said she did not have a name for her community involvement throughout our conversation she used the terms 'volunteer' or 'volunteering' forty-four times. She also repeatedly used the term 'help.' When asked what she calls it, Lena replied:

You are just volunteering. You are just doing your thing.

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Of the terms used to refer to their involvement, 'volunteering' was the most common, even when women stated they did not have a specific name for their involvement.

Mia and Gail used the terms 'volunteer work' and 'volunteer job.' Their associations with work and job signified how they place their volunteering on par with their paid work, implying that work does not necessarily equate to monetary gains or remuneration. Equating volunteering with work reflects a sense of duty and responsibility to the volunteering that is typically associated with paid work. Wanda shared a similar sentiment:

> I always treated everything I did as kind of the same whether I was being paid for it or not. […] You know, making sure that I get those volunteer things done as well as if I was being paid for it.

Hyphenating volunteer with work and job suggests that women assign responsibility and value to their community involvement—taking their commitments as seriously, Wanda noted, as paid work. That volunteering on its own is not associated with these traits for these women raises the question of how individuals and society assign value and responsibility to work and volunteering and how and why these may differ.

'Volunteering' was typically used in connection to involvement with organisations such as community non-profits and churches, institutions such as schools, and specific community events. When Mia decided to become involved, her first thought was to volunteer with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). Many mothers talked about volunteering in their children's schools as classrooms, lunch monitors, field-trip chaperons, or on the school's Parent-Teacher Association. Simone talked about all the volunteers needed to run the community quad derby:

> It takes hundreds of volunteers and we are just a small community and we get all the volunteers.

All the women who participated dedicate enormous amounts of time and energy into their

community involvement, often balancing paid work, and house and family responsibilities with

their community involvement. A few of the women also pursue education or work on their farm,

or all of the above.

Entrepreneur

Barbara and Kathleen used the term 'entrepreneur.' Both these women have been

involved in taking an idea for community services, resources, or programs and collaboratively

building these from the ground up—qualities and actions typically considered entrepreneurial in

the business-world. Kathleen described her involvement as 'entrepreneurial.' Barbara referred to

herself as a 'social entrepreneur,' a hybrid concept between social development and business

entrepreneurship.

When asked what she calls what she does in the community, Barbara replied:

> Social entrepreneur. And whether sub-consciously that I picked it up
> somewhere, I don't remember that. I came across the word, and then I
> googled it and it is. I could have heard it somewhere and not have had it
> consciously register.

As a former small business owner, Barbara could see connections between her community

involvement and entrepreneurship that are encapsulated in the concept of social

entrepreneurship. While I had heard this term in my previous development work in Jamaica,

Barbara's response was the first time I had heard 'social entrepreneur' used in South-Central

Manitoba. What stood out in Barbara and Kathleen's responses was not only the decisiveness in

which they named their involvement which contrasted against the hesitancy of other women in

giving it a name, yet also the names themselves.

Helping

When talking about her own and her role models' work in the community, Suzette repeatedly used the term 'helping out.' The term 'help' connotes assisting, saving, rescuing, supporting, promoting, improving, and being a benefit to something or someone (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/help). Suzette used 'help' to refer to her community involvement and her work on the family farm, work that is in addition to her professional career. Her casual dual application of the term 'help' highlights the potential for understanding how community duties and other duties are categorized and integrate into each other.

Interestingly, 'help' and 'helping' were common concepts used by the women when talking in general about their community involvement. Debra used the term 'help' thirty-one times in reference to what she is doing in her community. As previously noted Helena also used the term frequently. For example Kathy commented:

> Wherever I can help out. If I feel that I would like to do it or that I feel that it is a good thing, I like to volunteer and help out. And sometimes even if it's a frivolous thing, I just help out.

Kathy used both 'volunteer' and 'help' to describe what she does, and like others using the words almost interchangeably. Talking about what she does, Helena noted she'll get involved in whatever is happening and she's asked to help. Like Helena, Louise used the term 'help,' also noting various local organisations that need 'help':

> The Health Care Auxiliary, they are always looking for members. They are always looking for *help*. There is the [thrift] store. They are always [looking] for *help*. And at [the care-home], they are always looking for *help* in different areas to visit, to *help* feed, *helping* to bake. *[Emphasis added]*

Louise, Kathy, Helena, Suzette, and others, spoke of helping organisations, initiatives, and other people in their communities.

Fitting in

Over half of the women who participated in this study moved into their current community. A couple of months before we met, Pam and her husband moved into a new community. For Pam, an artist, environmentalist, and grandmother, her current community involvement focus was "fitting in" and "bringing my own voice" to her new community. She clarified:

> Now my work in the community is learning and trying to get to know my neighbours and having them know me and finding ways to become creatively and productively involved in our community.

Pam's use of the concepts like 'voice,' 'creative,' and 'productive' suggest that community involvement is an active expression of her being, a space for her to speak, be as well as be heard. Her responses harken to previous responses of "it's just who I am." In this sense "fitting-in" presents community involvement as a negotiation between individual and collective identities, suggesting that community itself is a gestalt of the individuals which make up the community. Pam's determination to be involved underscores its importance to her, and that she sees value in her being involved.

Responsibility

Naming community involvement as a responsibility highlighted a sense of civic duty and beliefs that someone has in regards to their relationship to their community and what they need to do in regards to their responsibilities as citizens of a community. Maria stated:

> I believe that at it is my responsibility to do what I can—to use the abilities I have to make things work.

She added:

> When we are part of something—a school organization, a community, a church—it is our responsibility to make it work. And to improve it if necessary/possible.

For Tanya, community involvement is a responsibility to:

> Ensure that our small communities survive and become stronger.

Tanya's reference to the survival of small communities is a real concern for many small rural communities as times change, particularly in regards to agriculture and population trends, and with it the very idea of what community is and what it means to live in a community. Maria and Tanya both acknowledge that involvement can reflect that individuals have a responsibility to step-in to ensure organisations and communities function to serve the needs of people. In this sense, responsibility is both a name for community involvement and a motivation.

For many women the idea of community involvement as civic responsibility may connect to childhood experiences in community organisations such as 4-H, which have a strong emphasis on civic education, involvement, and responsibility. One third of the women participated in 4-H as children or adults, or both. Here, responsibility connotes citizenship and being an active citizen in one's community. The notion of community involvement as responsibility also raises connections to caring and feeling the responsibility to care for people and communities, which informed women's motivations for being involved.

Service

Sonia consistently used the term service in reference to her community work:

> Well I don't know if this is kind of what you are looking for but it is a word that I think describes what community involvement is for me and I think I would probably call it service. I don't know if that is the word that you are looking for but I think I have said that often in what we've been saying here. I'm hearing myself say it often enough.

Her concept of service is rooted in her faith:

> I think also for me as a Christian I feel very strongly that we are called to serve. I really believe that we have to love and care for others.

She clarified her rationale, which highlights how service denotes both name and motivation:

> We need to be serving in our communities and you know on our baseball teams and all our things going on in our communities. If we are really going to serve the people then we need to be in those places and well, you are not asking this but I feel like I just want to say it. As far as serving goes, like really serving the poor um I'm talking within the community but there are all kinds of poor in our community as well. I just want to add that I mean the physically poor and emotionally poor and all of those as well.

Like Sonia, Wanda also used the term serve to connect what she does with her faith:

> I think it's basically who I am, like probably a lot has to do with, um, my faith; my reality that loving God means serving others.

Sonia and Wanda attribute and construct their community involvement as an expression and responsibility of their faith. While the majority of women who participated in this study are connected to a church or religion, and some are active or involved in their churches, not all of the women expressed their involvement as a practice of their faith. Considering community involvement as service, particularly as informed by one's faith, highlights that the names given to actions are influenced by beliefs and value systems.

Advocacy

Belinda and Fiona considered their work advocacy. Fiona, whose involvement has often focused on marginalized groups used the term 'advocate':

> I guess I've always seen myself as an advocate or have seen myself as an advocate.

Belinda, also used the term 'advocacy'—with a catch:

> I would call it advocacy. You know, I would call it advocacy—asking for
> what you need. But I don't know, if anybody was to ask me what I was
> doing with that I would say that I was a volunteer. I think people are
> put off with words like advocacy, it sounds like you are fighting.

Advocacy connotes a particular form of being involved in one's community. In conversation Wanda used the term 'advocacy' to describe her actions.

By using the term 'advocate,' Fiona and Belinda are identifying that they are speaking or working on behalf of marginalized groups in their communities. 'Advocate' is a complex term when considered within the research context and the dominant perception of the rural idyll and rural communities. On the surface homogeneity insinuates no marginalized groups or othering would exist in their communities. Othering based on race, culture, gender, ethnicity, income, education, language, or religion for example. By self-identifying as advocates for marginalized groups in their communities, Fiona and Belinda are debunking the assumptions and constructions of their communities as homogenous. As Belinda points out advocates must carefully choose how they present themselves inorder to be effective.

Belinda's community, like several in the area, have a strong Mennonite ethno-religious background. Her comment incites questions regarding how does a dominant ethno-cultural presence influence how other identities are negotiated within the community? In particular, identities that challenge strongly held norms and ideals of the dominant group. How do these identity discourses inform the pursuit of social transformation and social justice within their communities?

Activist

Similar to advocate yet nuanced in that it focuses on creating social or political change is the term 'activist,' an identity Tanya gave herself:

> I would consider myself an activist, in a small way. I'm very conscious of social justice issues and I get involved in ways that I can.

Tanya is the only one who called herself an activist. It is not common to hear local people speak of themselves as activists, especially within the local community, which raises questions regarding what is the local concept of the activist identity and the cultural connotations which support or inhibit people from self-identifying as activist within the local context? This is a comparable consideration in regards to the name advocacy as discussed above. While Tanya self-identifies as an activist she quantifies her activist identity as small and then justifies her activism based on being conscious of social justice issues.

Connecting

As someone who sees the big picture, Wanda named her involvement "connecting"—connecting people and resources or initiatives, as well as connecting problems to potential solutions. One puzzle Wanda connected involved three key pieces to get a six year old girl into gymnastics. Wanda described the situation:

> There is a young girl who, it's a long story, and she really needs to be in gymnastics. And it's cold for a six year old to be walking to gymnastics. And her mom is a mom of four and she doesn't have a driver's [license]. And here's the key [Wanda points to her car key]. And here's the gymnastics program you are not supposed to get into *[Wanda points at a spot on the table across from her key]* like you register in September or not at all. It seems ludicrous.

After identifying the pieces, Wanda described how through drawing on her networks and advocacy she was able to connect the pieces to get this girl into gymnastics:

So that is where my community, my advocacy comes in. And [I] say [to the recreation department] can this girl register in January? And [they] had already decided that yes she could. And then for me it's like who in this community can drive this kid.

After a few phone calls transportation was arranged and a delighted girl experienced her dream.

After all is said and done, for Wanda, community involvement is connecting:

Figuring out how can we connect this amazing thing to this amazing person and there's the sparkle. And those happen so often which is very cool.

Connecting, as Wanda named it, points to what could be an essence of community involvement— identifying the problem or need, connecting people, and connecting people with resources in order to build solutions to problems. And the result, as Wanda puts it, is 'the sparkle.'

When asked directly what they call it, some women had a name and others did not. However, throughout our conversations all women used various names to refer to their community involvement. How women refer to their involvement sheds light onto how women perceive and understand this activity within the reality of their lives.

'I'm just…'

Listening to women talk about their involvement, I noticed that *'just'* was a common prefix to what women called their community involvement. Linguistically, *just* has the potential to dismiss the activity despite the impacts that it has on people's lives and the community. At the same time, it can inform us that, for the speaker, volunteering is a reasonable, fair, and proper expectation—something that should not stand out in society or the lives of individual people. It simply is what it is and they do it. In this sense *just* evokes the ordinary and mundane nature of involvement, which reflects how society typically views and values community work, and women's work in general.

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At times I found myself getting defensive and frustrated by this prefix. I thought to myself, "this woman is not *just volunteering.* She's *making a difference* in the lives of people and her community. She's changing her world—the world." Language reflects thinking and is informed by perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. We speak of the world as we know the world in order to understand the world (Freire, 1999).

Naming strategically

The names that we give ourselves or that others assign to us can determine our allies and adversaries. Identities such as 'activist' and 'advocate' are potentially controversial compared to 'volunteer' within the patriarchal homogeneity of rural communities. As noted earlier, Belinda distinguishes between private and public names for herself in consideration of her audience and context. Some women had no name when asked specifically, yet used various terms, commonly 'helping' and 'volunteering', when speaking about what they do in their communities.

Similarly, not having a name for their involvement can also be a strategy as, without a name, it is less visible and can exist under the radar of those in positions of power who may object to or challenge women's work outside of the home, even public acts of caring work. As soon as we name something it's identifiable. We give it attention. Sometimes, this attention is not wanted for it can challenge, undermine, or sabotage women's work for change. When you are trying to bring forward your concerns or the concerns of a group you are associated with, you must be strategic in how you identify yourself so as not to create adversaries or challenges. Nor do you want to turn people away before you have had a chance to present your ideas or concerns. Rather you want to build allies and be heard. You want to use a name your audience can

positively connect with. Thus, the names we choose for our actions are strategic, conscious or unconscious political choices.

Naming women's community work within the scope of this research raised a potential dilemma–by asking and talking about women's everyday peacebuilding is the research putting any of the women's community involvement initiatives or goals at risk? Perhaps one of the reasons women's community peacebuilding and public care work have been so effective is because it was less visible. In response to this dilemma, I strategically named this study, sought confidentiality, and by raising this question itself I hope to invite further critical dialogue on women's everyday peacebuilding, power and equality within patriarchal societies.

Names women give their community involvement can reflect pro-social and caring behaviours such as helping and volunteering, highlight values and beliefs, for example service and responsibility; and are specific to situations and actions such as fitting-in, advocacy, activism, and connecting. Entrepreneur and social entrepreneur represent an approach and ideology for framing and understanding involvement as social development using a business entrepreneur discourse.

CONCLUSION

The inspiration for asking women what they call their community involvement was inspired by the plethora of names for what women do in their communities within the academic literature and my own challenge of identifying a relevant name within the research context. Naming an activity that is a passion and takes considerable time, energy, skill, and knowledge is a significant, strategic act. It reflects a cultural code around gender, women's work, and community peacebuilding that for the most part is unwritten and unspoken. Naming is a political act. Women may choose to name or not to name their involvement based on their values, how

they identify themselves, and the public image that they want to try to build for themselves in their communities. When choosing a label for themselves and their actions, they must ask themselves what is appropriate for the audience and context. Not having a name, and the casual and referral to 'just' community involvement, opened opportunities to reflect on women's everyday community work in ways that have not been considered before, particularly in this rural context.

SNAPSHOT

Ladies' Aid Society[10]

Southtown, Manitoba, January 11th, 1951

The Ladies' Aid Society of Southtown Church met on the above date at the home of Mrs.

Pankratz.

Present were eleven members and two guests.

The meeting was opened with the singing of the beautiful hymn "Nearer My God to

Thee." Rev. Tillmann conducted the devotion. For his monthly topic he chose 'Abigail.' He also

showed us a film on India which proved to be quite interesting to the ladies. After which another

hymn was sung.

Minutes of the December meeting were read and approved.

Treasurer's report was as follows: Balance on Dec. 14th—$150.52.

Since this was election month the following officers have been elected:

Mrs. Lindh – President
Mrs. Pankratz – Vice President
Mrs. A. Smith[11] – Secretary
Mrs. Johnson – Treasurer
Mrs. J. Smith and Mrs. Kratz were appointed to check the treasurer's book.
Mrs. Baumgartner and Mrs. Perry on the sick committee.

A motion was made by Mrs. Ulrich and seconded by Mrs. Kratz that the aid give another

$5.00 towards the Christmas bags.

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[10] For this snapshot I read minutes of a Ladies Aid Society in the research area spanning three years. These minutes are a composite representing typical Ladies Aid Society meetings. The meetings were quite formal and followed the ubiquitous Robert's Rules of Order. Many churches had Ladies Aid Societies or Ladies Auxiliaries, however it appears that the number of these groups are diminishing (Redekopp, 1996).

[11] Reading through historical documents of minutes of women's organisations women are typically identified by their husband's names. This example highlights how two married women with the same last name were differentiated by the initial of their husband's first name.

A motion was made by Mrs. Katz and seconded by Mrs. A. Smith that $15.00 be donated to the March of Dimes.

A motion was made by Mrs. Alderman and seconded by Mrs. Lindh that the church be cleaned on the 8th of February at 1:30.

The aid has decided to make two layettes for sending overseas to needy children. Each lady is to donate some articles. If we are in need of anything it will be bought with aid money.

Birthday hymns[12] were sung for Mrs. Baumgartner, Mrs. Lindh, and Mrs. Perry.

The next meeting is to be held at the home of Mrs. Perry.

Adjournment was made, followed by the Lord's Prayer and a table prayer was sung. A dainty lunch was served after which we all thanked the hostess.

Contributions—$5.25

Mrs. A. Smith (Secretary).

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[12] For their birthdays women could request a favourite hymn for the group to sing.

CHAPTER TWO

In the Field

Extensive horizons, open skies, and flowing seas of grain make up the vast prairie vista. In early July, a bird's eye view over the research area reveals a colourful patchwork quilt of ripening crops stretching roughly 4,500 square kilometres over nine rural municipalities. The bright rich yellow of canola, the soft gold of winter wheat, the fresh green of spring wheat, the deeper olive green of corn, snow-white blossoms of potatoes and beans await pollination, and the upright black heads of young sunflowers crowned in yellow criss-cross in one-mile square patches stitched together by gravel, dirt, and paved roads. Strewn across these patches are the various shapes of towns, villages, farms, reservations, sloughs, hills, ponds, meadows, and parks; and swaggering lines of rivers, creeks, railways, and valleys. All are hemmed on the south edge by the unnaturally straight ditch with evenly spaced stone markers of the International Boundary Commission along the forty-ninth parallel indicating the Canada-United States of America border. Woven into the visible physical geography of this space are the political and cultural geographies including, for example, federal and provincial ridings, rural municipalities, First Nation's Reservations, religious communities, social networks, school divisions, and sport rivalries.

The context for this research is an infusion of conceptual and experienced spaces. Theoretically, this study spreads into various academic fields within the social sciences and humanities. Geographically, this study is nestled in agricultural fields. Field research in this sense is a double entendre. In light of this, this context chapter is written in two parts. The first half, "In the Fields," examines the theoretical considerations of the research context attending to

the concept and experience of rural and rurality, with particular focus on gender. The second half, simply titled "Here," looks in detail at the research context highlighting the everyday, lived experiences.

IN THE FIELDS

This examination of the research context intersects historical, cultural, political, economic and social considerations to build a thorough understanding of the rurality—the lived experience of being rural (Cloke, 2006a; Panelli, 2006)—the research area. Aiming for both the general and specific, the intent here is to explore the conceptual and experiential, the general and common, as well as the specific and nuanced, of this particular rural space. Specific attention will be given to gender, women, and women's spaces. Perhaps Ray Silvius and Robert Annis (2007) clarified it best when they compared rural communities to snowflakes:

> It is perhaps useful to think of rural communities as snowflakes. From afar, one sees a certain similarity amongst them, with each exhibiting common properties and tendencies. One could certainly distinguish them from what they are not, for example, raindrops. And yet with closer inspection, it is apparent that each snowflake is radically different from one another, exhibiting different shapes, patterns and sizes. Rural communities, similarly, exhibit common properties and tendencies amongst them [...] [yet] each rural community is distinct from the next. (p. 126)

In other words, like an ice physicist examines snowflakes, this chapter examines the common concepts, properties and tendencies of rural communities, as well as considers what makes "rural" communities unique. Considerations of 'rural' for this study focus primarily on the geographical area described and the lived experiences of the people living in this area—in other words, a holistic concept of rural is incorporated. Complimentary, contradictory, experiential, and perceived definitions of rural draw upon socio-cultural factors, including lived- experience, culture, and media (Bell, 2006; Cloke, 2006a; Bryant and Pini, 2011; Ramsey, Annis, and Everitt, 2002; Ramsey and Beesley, 2006; Wagner, 2014; Woods, 2011). Before moving onto

the specifics of the research setting, it is helpful to gain an understanding of the concept of

rural—a value-laden term seldom thoroughly considered outside of geography and rural studies.

Rural

When you read or hear the word 'rural' what comes into your mind's eye? What do you

see? Hear? Smell? Feel?

I've asked these questions at numerous presentations and workshops and the results were

always intriguing. Respondents often identify images from pop-culture such as the children's

books series and television show *Little House on the Prairie[13]*. Some recall personal experiences

of visiting grandparents who lived or live in rural areas or their own rural lives as children or

adults or both. For respondents and the researcher, drawing out conceptualizations of rural

enables critical consideration of the images, meanings, and values held in relation to rural and

rurality, and how these ideas inform the negotiation of meaning of rural, for the researcher in

particular within this study.

Pointing out rural spaces from urban spaces is typically easier than explaining what

makes a space rural (Woods, 2011). 'Rural,' 'urban,' 'city,' and 'country-side' are value-laden

terms in western societies informed by beliefs about modernization and human progress (Cloke,

2006a; Neustaeter, 2015a; Woods, 2011). At times rural and urban are considered a dichotomy;

other times they are seen as a continuum (Cloke, 2006a). Rural areas are significant to rural and

urban people alike, and provide people with commodities, natural resources and spaces, and

amenities, while also holding onto the collective heritage. Reimer writes:

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[13] 'Little House on the Prairie' is a youth non-fiction book series turned into a television show in the 1980s depicting the pioneer life of Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867–1957) from childhood to young adult living in Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota, and South Dakota.

Rural areas provide the commodities that give us a positive balance of trade, they hold the sources of our water, the location of recreational and natural amenities to which we turn to be refreshed, they contain much of our biodiversity, they process most of the urban pollution, and they contain a large part of our social and cultural heritage. Without the people to extract, process, and transport those commodities, safeguard those amenities, and sustain our heritage, we would all be worse off—rural and urban alike. (2007, p. 3).

Rural and urban are interdependent, and co-exist in a complex relationship of ideologies, ideals and exchange.

'Rural' is an evolving and contested concept informed by ideologies, values, geography, demography, politics, and nostalgia, with functional, experienced, and perceived definitions (Halfacree, 2006; Neustaeter, 2015a; Ramsey, Annis and Everett, 2002; Ramsey and Beesley, 2006; Woods, 2011) and continuously recreated through policy, culture and media.

There is no consensus on what is rural at the official, cultural, or popular levels (Halfacree, 2006); definitions of rural are "many and varied" (Ramsey and Beesley, 2006, p. 87). How one defines rural determines who is considered rural (Crosato and Leipert, 2006; du Plessis, Belshiri, Bollman, and Clemenson, 2002; Statistics Canada, 2002). A simple Canadian solution to geographically determine rural is to use postal codes as all rural Canadian addresses have a '0' the second character of their postal code (Crosato and Liepert, 2006; Canada Post, 2015). Much weight is also given to Statistics Canada's definitions of rural and urban, as this institution's data and research informs policy in Canada (Ramsey and Beesley, 2006).

Rural, according to Statistics Canada (2011) refers to "persons living outside centres with a population of 1,000 AND outside areas with 400 persons or less per square kilometre." Communities with a population of 1,000 or more and a population over 400 persons or more per

square kilometre are population centres[14] of which there are three categories: small population

centres (1000-29,999), medium population centres (30,000-99,999), and large urban population

centres (100,000 and more) (Statistics Canada, 2011). A previous definition of rural

recommended by Statistics Canada was the Rural and Small Town (RST) definition: "the

population living in towns and municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres

(i.e. outside the commuting zone of centres with population of 10,000 or more)" (du Plessis,

Beshiri, Bollman and Clemenson, 2001, p. 1).

Factors defining rural areas often consider population density and characteristics, life-

style, demographic structure, land use, environmental characteristics, and commuting patterns

(Crosato, and Leipert, 2006; Ramsey, Annis and Everitt, 2002). Rural communities and areas are

typically defined by their population, population density and distance to other communities, in

particular large urban centres (Reimer, 2007). Lower population density and greater distances

typically means there will be fewer services and greater distances to drive to access services

(Reimer, 2007).

Rural is also informed by our values and cultural psyche, which construct what rural

represents to individuals and societies. Cloke (2006a) states:

> Somewhere deep down in our cultural psyche there appear to be
> longstanding handed-down precepts about what rurality represents,
> emphasizing the enabling power of nature to offer opportunities for lifestyle
> enhancement through the production and consumption of socially cohesive,
> happy and healthy living at a pace and quality that differs markedly from
> that of the city. Rurality has thus become cross-referenced with tranquillity,
> goodness, wholeness and problem-freedom, and at a more obviously
> political level it maps onto cartographies of identity encapsulating for some
> a treasury of norms and values which both illustrate and shape what is
> valuable in a nation, a region or a locality. (p. 380)

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[14] In 2011 Statistics Canada replaced the term urban area with population centres (Statistics Canada, 2011)

Cloke's (2006a) description of the cultural psyche of rurality highlights its construction as utopia and the rural idyll as noted by others (Little and Austin, 1996; Short, 2006). A rural idyll forms a hegemony which displaces other rurals that do not fit into the image of the rural idyll. Social constructions of rural are typically "dominated by white, middle-class male narratives," which "exclude individuals and groups of people from a sense of belonging to, and in, the rural on the grounds of their race, ethnicity, gender, age, class and so on" (Cloke, 2006b, p. 381). These other rurals are displaced and negated from mainstream rural discourse. Concurrently, a deficit construct of rural focuses on rural areas as homogeneous in regards to class or race or gender or all (representing a deficit of diversity), poverty troubled, and lacking education opportunities (Wagner, 2014). In their research on rural and remote women's health in Canada, Suthers, McPheddron, and Haworth-Brockman (2004) found that rural women are at a higher risk for violence and poverty. These perceptions conflict with the idyll of rural being a sanctuary without social issues (Bell, 2006b; Wagner, 2014).

Perceptions of homogeneity in rural areas suppress the realities, diversities, and conflicts pertaining to the differences that exist and persist in rural spaces—for example gender (Bryant and Pini, 2009; Hughes, 2005; Little, 2006; Pini and Leach, 2011; Pini, Moletsane & Mills, 2014); sexuality (Little, 2006; Valentine, 2005); class (Cloke, 2005; 2006b; Naples, 1994; Pini and Leach, 2011); race (Agyeman and Spooner, 2005; Cloke, 2006b; Wagner, 2014); as well as culture and ethnicity (Cloke, 2006b; Naples, 1994). Critical examinations of homogeneity, difference, and religion are rare in the literature on rurality. The construction of the homogenized rural typically means white settler rural and ignores the Indigenous population, which can make up a significant percentage of the rural population in certain areas (Wagner, 2014). Based on my own experiences, working and volunteering with immigrants and refugees in a rural area, similar

warnings can be extended to immigrants who represent visible minorities and the racialized other in rural areas, as Cloke (2006b) also noted. Poverty is delegitimized in rural spaces as the perceived benefits of rural life constructed and perpetuated by the rural idyll are argued to compensate for any poverty (Cloke, 2006b). In other words, living in poverty in this rural area would be compensated by the big open spaces, lower crime-rates and housing costs and sense of community.

Community, writes Michael Woods (2011), "has long been synonymous with rural life" (p. 164). Concepts of community are associated with locality, social ties, and common interests (Cloke, 2006a; Falk and Kirkpatrick, 2000; Ramsey, Annis, and Everett, 2002; Ramsey and Beesley, 2006; Falk and Kirkpatrick, 2000) as well as communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 2006) and communities of common purpose (Falk and Kirkpatrick, 2000). The social structure and interaction of rural communities has been examined in regards to gemeinschaft (Tonnies, as cited in Cloke, 2006a, 2006b; Woods, 2011), which refers to "community as a social grouping based on mutual bonds, a feeling of togetherness and collective goals" (Woods, 2011p. 164). Discussions of rurality and community consider wellbeing (Ramsey, Annis and Everett, 2002; Ramsey and Beesley, 2006) and social capital as inter-related and significant to community sustainability (Falk and Kirkpatrick, 2000; Ramsey and Beesley, 2006). The rural idyll and dominant agrarian ideology emphasizes harmonious social relationships, community and the collectivity of gemeinschaft (Cloke, 2006a; Panelli, 2006), which creates the perception of homogeneity in rural communities while suppressing gender, class, and race differences (Brandth and Haugen, 1997; Hoggart, 1998; Naples, 1994; Panelli, 2006; Pini and Leach, 2011). Manifestations of these differences are nuanced to their intersectionality within their specific

localities, rendering generalizations impossible to make and guesses at best (Pini, Molestane, and

Mills, 2014). The emphasis is on understanding the specific rural locality and rurality.

Gender

The complexity and diversity within and between rural communities and areas makes it

cautionary to claim a universal or generic assessment of gender and rurality (Pini, Molestane and

Mills, 2014). Rural gender scholars typically take a relational view of gender, where

masculinities and femininities are created and recreated in relationship to each other and

changing social and economic conditions and policies (Brandth and Haugen 2005; Campbell and

Bell, 2000; Coldwell, 2010; Taylor, 1999). Gender roles in rural areas "tend to be more strictly

proscribed" (Heather, et al., 2005, p. 88) for both men and women. Coldwell writes, "Men as a

group tend to experience advantage over women in terms of social and economic power but

social conditions also reward certain masculinities over others" (p. 174). The privileging of a

hegemonic masculinity creates a hierarchy of gender, including masculinities which, to varying

degrees, marginalizes femininities and masculinities in a perpetual othering (Coldwell, 2010).

Illustrating relational-gender identity in regards to empowering rural women, one farm woman

said, "I don't want him to be less, I just want to be more" (Teather, 1991, p. 5). Relational

identity development produces otherness and othering (Little and Cloke as cited in Coldwell,

2010, p. 175), which devalues and marginalizes some gender identities by legitimating and

naturalizing others.

Rural gender identities are continuously created and recreated in the media and

mainstream culture (Brandth, 1995; Brandth and Haugen, 2003). For example, in the first half of

the 20th century agricultural capitalism brought specialization and mechanization to the once

small family farm and changed gender roles (Loewen; 1993; Naples, 1994). The mechanization led to the masculinization of farming (Brandth, 2002a; Loewen, 1993). Since women's help-mate labour was no longer needed on the farm, their labour moved into the household as they became housewives (formerly they were farmwives) and off the farms into towns (Brandth, 2002a; Loewen, 1993).

Rural women's experiences are numerous and varied (Neustaeter, 2015). Rural women may live in small or large towns, small cities, villages, and First Nations Reservations as well as Hutterite colonies. The majority of rural women do not live on farms though many have direct, indirect, or historical connections to agriculture and farming (Krug, 2000; Neustaeter, 2015; Panelli, 2006). For women who do live on income-generating farms, their households may be all, in part or not at all, supported by agriculture (Neustaeter, 2015). Historically, many of these agrarian rural areas reflected an agrarian ideology influenced by the economic, political, and social forces within the agricultural industry, which spilled over into community culture and identity, including ideas of gender roles and cultures. Feminist and rural gender writers highlight the role of gender in the unequal power relations in farming and rural communities and the challenges many farm and rural women experience (Shortall, 1992; Brandth, 1994; Brandth and Haugen 1997; Heather, Skillen, Young & Vladicka, 2005; Little, 2002; Naples, 1994; Teather, 1996, 1998).

Most research on women and farming has focused on the family farm (Brandth, 2002a). The concept of the family farm raises critical questions on the gender relations and paradigm within the family and how these translate into the practices of farming. Labour on the family farm is gendered (Brandth, 2002a; Ghorayshi, 1989; Little 2002; Reimer, 1986; Sachs, 1983; Whatmore, 1991). Women are responsible for caring for the family and the household, as well as

performing productive work on the farm, as they are also interested in the survival of the farm. Women often prioritize the farm over their oppression as women (Brandth, 2002a). However, the general assumption is that the farmer is a man (Brandth, 1995[15]), while most women in farming are considered farmers' wives or housewives (Brandth, 2002a) or helpmates (Fairbanks & Sundberg, 1983; Miles, 1991; Naples, 1994). Brandth (2002a) writes that farm wives "have no independent status, thus their occupational identity is weak and hardly recognized" (p. 184). Contrarily, men are defined by their occupation as farmers and even enjoy the prestige of the farmer as producer status (Brandth, 2002a; Loewen, 1993). This is identified in the different position titles of men and women associated with their farms. Married male farmers are not referred to as farmhusbands as women have been referred to as farmwives. The label of their marital identity is not associated with their position on their farm.

Many farm women supplement the farm through their off-farm work (Brandth, 2002a; Naples, 1994). Many carry not only the double burden of housework and farm-work, but also the third burden of off-farm work, plus the fourth burden of community service (Heather, et al., 2005). Women's off-farm work represents a step in the transition from the family farm to a "one-man farm" (Brandth, 2002a, p. 189), contributing to the masculinization of farming. Women's off-farm work represents women repositioning themselves as subjects in society. These changes in women's gender identity and subject positions in society also change the identity and positions of men (Heather, et al., 2005; Naples, 1994).

Berit Brandth and Marit Haugen's (1997) and Nancy Naples' (1994) examinations of agrarian ideology, feminism, and rural identity critically considers identity conflicts in rural communities, particularly in regards to gender and class. The emphasis and value of harmonious

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[15] Brandth's (1995) research on Norwegian tractor advertisements highlight how marketing reproduces gendered ideals of farmer and farming.

social relationships and gemeinschaft emphasized in agrarian ideology, and the perception of homogeneity in rural communities, suppresses gender conflicts. The lingering agrarian ideology among rural and farm women made them suspicious of the women's movement as being critical of the nuclear family, hostile to men, and for emphasizing the differences between women and men (Brandth and Haugen, 1997).

Feminism, a term associated with the women's movement, "has been associated with an image of women as victims, and rural women reject that label" (Heather, et al. 2005 p. 90). Haley (1991) notes how farm women have been socialized to "take a back seat" (p. 169). The farm comes first. Women fear that fighting for their own needs "would undermine the struggle of their farms and their communities and that would be selfish" (Heather, et al., p. 90). Many farm women may be silent about their own emancipation for fear of lessening the "public status and private ego of their men folk" (Teather, 1996, p. 5). This can be particularly poignant when farms are struggling to survive in the face of: precarious fluctuating market values for crops and livestock, rising costs of fuel, land, equipment, seeds, and chemicals; as well as severe weather and climate change.

Typically in rural areas "the women's movement has been perceived as a threat rather than a liberating factor" (Brandth and Haugen, 1997, p. 326). This is not to say there is no women's movement in rural areas. More specifically, there is no women's movement as conceived by the popular media images of placard carrying women walking down main streets (Neustaeter, 2015a). Women who do pursue gender equality and equity are strategic in their efforts. Actions, language, and labels must be considered and responsive to the local culture to ensure acceptance, understanding and cooperation (Heather et al. 2005).

The agrarian ideology that many rural residents hold onto is deeply gendered (Brandth, 2002a, 2002b; Brandth and Haugen, 1997; Little and Panelli, 2003; Naples, 1994; Teather, 1996, 1998). Deborah Fink, as quoted in Naples (1994) defines agrarian ideology as the "celebration of farming and farmers as the heart of American society" (p. 115). This ideology informs economic, political, and religious institutions while also informing policies and values that support the preservation of the family farm and independent producers (Naples, 1994). The ideal of farming is centred on the 'small-independent male producer' (Naples, 1994, p. 115) with a wife and children living on the farm. This reified image emphasizes as natural the heterosexual two-parent family and traditional gender division of labour with male as farmer and female as mother, homemaker, and farmwife/helpmate (Naples, 1994). Exposing the contradictions in agrarian ideology, Naples (1994) points out that the revered 'rugged individualism' of the early pioneers through to the present day small-scale independent producers contradicts with the community-based, grassroots, democratic 'agrarian populism[16]' as well as the idealized collective experience of gemeinschaft.

Brandth (2002b) writes "that agrarian ideology and discourses have produced romanticized narratives of rural life that legitimize the subordination of women" (p. 107). Women tend to hang onto the collective experience of the gemeinschaft ideal (Naples, 1994) without critically considering how it validates their subordination within gender and community relationships. For example, while women are socialized into the ideal of gemeinschaft, it is less acceptable for women to be individualistic. Yet for men, individualism is accepted, if not prized (Naples, 1994). The rural idyll often limits women's ability to make individual choices,

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[16] Agrarian populism is recognizable in Canadian history through the various cooperative and credit union movements across rural Canada, the United Grain Growers and United Farmers Associations, and the Canadian Cooperative Federation – the precursor to the current New Democratic Party (NDP).

particularly when these choices may challenge gender roles (Little & Panelli, 2003). Rural women often downplay the significance of their efforts to maintain the rural gendered idyll, and they avoid choices that challenge gender roles and using terms such as feminist which could alienate them from local allies (Brandth, 1994; Little and Panelli, 2003; Naples, 1994; Neustaeter, 2015; Teather, 1996, 1998). Also, farm women have been socialized to believe that fighting for their own needs "would undermine the struggle of their farms and their communities" (Heather, et al., p. 90).

One example of this back seat mentality (Haley, 1991) is the absence of the women's movement in rural areas (Brandth and Haugen, 1997; Shortall, 1994). A second example is found in community history books, which are a key resource on rural history. Although women made up the majority of community history committees, in part due to their social-gender role as carriers of culture, the books they created tended to ignore or only mention in passing women's work and contributions (Massie, 1997). The prevalence of farm machinery pictures compared to ringer-washer images speaks to the devaluation of women's contributions to community-building and community life in general, and both highlights and perpetuates the assumption that history is a male domain (Massie, 1997).

As mothers, workers, caregivers, and community volunteers, rural women balance their multiple roles in contexts which may or may not offer them significant economic, education, employment, and health and wellbeing support (Kelly and Idehen, 2005). Community social supports such as churches, community centres, and community programming provide much needed assistance to women and families (Suthers, et al., 2004). Local social gender attitudes and assumptions can also hinder or create barriers for women, leaving them more isolated and vulnerable. As farm women strive to meet their ascribed gender expectations by taking on the

quadruple roles of parenting, farm-work, off-farm work, and community involvement their

personal health and wellbeing may be jeopardized (Heather, et al., 2005; Kelly and Idehen, 2005;

Suthers et al, 2004). Women in rural areas face various challenges in their education and

employment and service work (Kelly and Idehen, 2005; Suthers, et al., 2004) including

"geographic isolation, transportation, and limited child-care, networking, and mentoring

opportunities" (Davis, 2011, p. 5).

Gender roles and ideologies inform the unequal power relations in farming and rural

communities, create challenges for many farm and rural women, and legitimize the subordination

of women (Brandth, 1994, 2002a, 2002b; Brandth and Haugen, 1997; Heather, Skillen, Young &

Vladicka, 2005; Leckie, 1993; Little, 2002; Little and Panelli, 2003; Naples, 1994; Sachs, 1996;

Shortall, 1992; Teather, 1996, 1998). Still, rural women continue to use their feminine values to

convert spaces within their communities to become agents of change and community

development (M. Epp, 2008; Naples, 1994; Redekopp, 1996; Teather, 1996, 1998).

Women, home, and homeplace

Historically and presently, the home continues to be associated with women (Armstrong

and Armstrong, 1994). Like the rural, home itself is both a concept and experience, significant,

dynamic, and complex (Moore, 2007). Wardhaugh (1999) distinguishes home as a physical

space and "an expression of lived space, of human meaning and being-in-the-world" (p. 94-95).

Home is "more a state of being" (Wardhaugh, p. 145).

Jean Moore (2007) notes that—as both a means for expressing individual identity and

cultural belonging—home pivots between social and cultural forces: "home signifies not only a

physical space but also represents a centre of activities, source of identity, belonging from the

past, a goal for personal and social development, an abstract state of being, and a legal concept" (p. 145). Further, she notes that home itself has "discrete social, personal, physical, political, and cultural qualities, although these qualities are experienced as a whole" (p. 145). Saunders (1990, as cited in Moore, 2007, p. 145) identifies home as "the crucible of our modern society." It is also recognized as "an anchor for living" (Moore, 2007, p. 145). Distinctions have also been made between 'big home' (Magat, 1999) referring to a larger territory or national space, for example homeland, and 'little home' which considers the tasks and experiences of daily living that are "fully embedded in problematic normative assumptions and larger social power relations" (Hart, Brigham, Gouthro, Nash, Alfred, 2005, n.p.). Home is more than a physical and private space such as a house, it is also a state of being, a lived space, a source of identity, a centre of activities, a goal, and a legal concept.

Home as both a geographical and lived space remains socially and culturally associated with women's work and caring (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1994; Noddings, 2003). For many women, their everyday experiences in their homeplace as caregivers and mothers are catalysts for their community-building (Gouthro, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2009; Krauss, 1993; Naples, 1998). Like the rural and home, the homeplace is both a conceptual construct within the lifeworld and a lived reality (Gouthro, 2000). The homeplace is "a core aspect of the *lifeworld:* the place of everyday existence within our homes and local community in which all human experience is grounded" (Gouthro 2005, p. 6, emphasis in the original). Each person's idea of the homeplace is connected to their everyday lived experience; thus it is influenced by each person's social position and situatedness or standpoint (Smith, 1987). While it is associated with the physical individual residence, homeplace can be expanded to include "extended family, community and culture" (Gouthro, 2000). The homeplace plays an important role in identity formation,

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relationships, and labour (Gouthro, 2005) as well as the reproduction of and resistance to cultural, social, economic, and political structures (Fuller, 2004; hooks, 1990; Mullings, 1999).

For marginalized and oppressed peoples, the homeplace can also serve as an important site of resistance (Fuller, 2004; hooks, 1990; Mullings, 1999). For women, community-building that promotes the development of people and communities (Belenky, Bond and Weinstock, 1997) is intimately connected to their homeplace (Bookman and Morgan, 1988; Jetter, Orleck and Taylor, 1997; Krauss, 1993; 1998; Naples, 1998a, 1998b; Seitz, 1998). When women extend their motherwork into community-based organisations and initiatives, these spaces become public homeplaces (Belenky, et al., 1997). Examples of community homeplaces include churches, schools, markets, and community centres. Gouthro (2000) calls for expanding ideas of the homeplace to include civil society and to acknowledge the significant work women do as community leaders and activists. Many rural women use their feminine and feminist values to become community change agents converting community spaces and norms to improve the lives of people in their communities (Epp, 2008; Naples, 1994; Redekopp, 1996; Teather, 1996, 1998; Wiebe, 2010). Rural women continue to negotiate their own community-building knowledge and practices in order to build a more just society to meet the needs of the people.

Rural communities are constantly being shaped by global, national, regional, and local forces. 'Rural' is a complex term informed by practical (demographic and geographic), conceptual and experienced definitions and ideas which determine who is and what is rural. This study incorporates a holistic understanding of rural encompassing conceptual and experienced considerations. Discussions of rural community explore wellbeing, social capital, and gemeinschaft. The latter has been criticized for prioritizing homogeneity over the heterogeneous reality within diverse rural communities and experiences. The theoretical field of rural and

gender theory highlights the gendered nature of the rural idyll and the socialization of women within a patriarchal rural structure. Negotiating their own rural and gendered identities within the respective communities, rural women continue to forge ahead to better their communities. The concept of the homeplace has a contextual significance for women's social, cultural, and political everyday knowledge and practices that inform their community-building.

<div align="center">HERE</div>

This study focuses on a specific area located in southern Manitoba, Canada—an area abundant in narratives of settlement, struggle, survival, and success. Broader details of Manitoba are informative for building an understanding of the context in order to paint a rich image of where the women who are the focus of this study live, work, play, and, importantly, are involved in their communities.

Long before the first Europeans settlers arrived, the Ojibway and Dakota Anishnabe First Nations and Métis[17] called this land home (Child, 2012; Peters, 1988). This is Treaty One territory, signed in 1871 (Child, 2012). July 15th, 1870, marks the birth of Manitoba, when the Hudson's Bay Company transferred Rupert's Land and the Northwest Territories to the Dominion of Canada (Canadian Heritage, 2013; Peters, 1988). This original area of land shaped like a postage-stamp of roughly eleven thousand square miles, or 36,000 square kilometres in size, with 25,000 inhabitants along the Red River valley became Manitoba (Canadian Heritage, 2013; Peters, 1988). The province was enlarged in 1882 and again in 1912 when it gained its current shape and size of 650,000 square kilometres (Canadian Heritage, 2013).

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[17] The Metis are descendants of European, mostly French, and Indigenous North Americans who formed a distinct nation in the late 1700s and were 'a prominent and independent people' in the 1800s (Manitoba Metis Federation, n.d.). The Metis represent 6.7% of the population of Manitoba and 30% of the Indigenous population of Manitoba (Statistics Canada, 2015).

Demographics

Ninety percent of Canada's landmass is rural (Pong, Pitblado, and Irving, 2002). The population living across this vast space varies from twenty to thirty-nine percent of the population of Canada depending on the definition of rural is being used[18] (Burns, Bruce, and Marlin, 2009; Crosato and Leipert, 2005; du Plessis, Beshiri, Clemenson, and Bollman, 2002; Munro, Alasia, and Bollman, 2011). Kathy Davis (2011) calculates that thirty-five percent of the population of Manitoba is rural. When also considering the surrounding commuter areas of cities as urban population, the rural population of Manitoba can be adjusted to twenty-seven percent (Statistics Canada, 2011). Fourteen percent of Manitobans live on farms (Statistics Canada, 2011). Women make up nearly half the rural population of Manitoba (Davis, 2011), making rural women approximately fourteen percent of the total provincial population.

A rough breakdown accounting for all rural municipalities, cities, and towns in the region puts the population of the research area at just over fifty-nine thousand people[19] (see Table 1).

Table 1—Municipality, City, or Town Population.

Rural Municipality	Population	City or Town	Population
Municipality of Dufferin	2,394	Altona	4,123
Municipality of Franklin	1,786	Carmen	3,027
Municipality of Montcalm	1,309	Emerson	671
Municipality of Morris	2,999	Gretna	556
Municipality of Pembina	1,561	Manitou	808
Municipality of Rhineland	4,373	Morden	7,812
Municipality of Roland	1,058	Morris	1,797
Municipality of Stanley	8,356	Plum Coulee	843
Municipality of Thompson	1,397	Winkler	12,005
		Roseau River Anishnabe First Nation	2478 1127[20]
Total	25,233		34,131

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[18] An examination of definitions of rural is discussed earlier in this chapter.
[19] Based on Statistics Canada 2011 data.
[20] In 2013 the total registered population of Roseau River Anishnabe First Nation is 2478. Total population living on reserve is 1127 (Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council, n.d.)

In Manitoba the minimum population required to be incorporated as a city is 7,500 (The

Municipal Act, 1996). That is a bureaucratic formality. More often, I've noticed in conversation

residents refer to their hometown as a town rather than city, using 'city' to reference local

municipal government, for example, city hall, city works, or city council, or to reference

Winnipeg, Manitoba, the largest urban centre and provincial capital.

Politics

In Canada there are three levels of government: federal, provincial and territorial, and

municipal. Each level has its own specific responsibilities as mandated by the Canadian

Constitution (Parliament of Canada: Our Country, our Parliament, n.d.). At each level

representatives are elected to bring forward the concerns and wishes of the citizens within their

electoral jurisdiction. Federal and provincial candidates are partisan or members of political

parties, while territorial and municipal representatives are non-partisan (Historica Canada, 2015).

Presently, at the federal level, Canada has a Liberal majority government; and at the provincial

level, Manitoba has a Progressive Conservative majority government. First Nations communities

elect their community leaders, for example a chief and council[21] (Indigenous and Northern

Affairs Canada, 2015). At the municipal level towns and cities have their own elected

committees, councils, and mayors. Rural municipalities are represented by councillors and

reeves. Local Urban Districts (LUDs) are communities with a minimum population of 250 and

population density of 400 residents per square kilometre (Government of Manitoba, 2015a)

within rural municipalities. LUDs are represented by elected citizens who sit on the LUD

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[21] Elections of community leaders in First Nations communities is determined by the status and agreement the
community holds with the federal government. First Nations communities may hold their elections as per the Indian
Act, Community or Custom Leadership Selection Process, The First Nations Election Act, or as per their self-
governance process (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2015)

committee, which is a committee of the council of the municipality (Government of Manitoba, 2015a). Categories and status such as town, city, village, and LUD are dynamic and can change in response to new legislation or population increases or decreases.

In 2012, the Government of Manitoba announced new legislation requiring any town with a population less than 1,000 to amalgamate with its surrounding municipality (Association of Manitoba Municipalities, n.d.) and to transfer from a mayor and town council system to an LUD committee. This legislation affected four towns in the research area—Emerson, Gretna, Manitou, and Plum Coulee. While the government saw this as a move to save costs, improve efficiency, strengthen rural communities' abilities to utilize government services and funding, as well as streamline services (Manitoba Municipal Government, n.d.), many local residents were not pleased with losing their municipal autonomy under the reformed amalgamated structure. In fact, some communities, including Plum Coulee, took the government to court challenging the legality of the governments tactics – the case proved unsuccessful for the municipalities (Pembina Valley Online, April 2, 2014).

The research area falls within two federal ridings (Portage-Lisgar and Provencher) and four provincial ridings (Midland, Morden/Winkler, Emerson, and Morris) (Elections Manitoba, n.d.). In the October 2015 federal election, the Canadian voter turnout was 68.5percent (Elections Canada, October 19, Election Results, n.d.). Voter turnout broken down by gender for the October 19, 2015, federal election is not yet available. However, in the 2011 federal election 59 percent of eligible female and 57 percent of eligible male voters cast ballots (Elections Canada, 2012). In 2015 voter turnout in Portage-Lisgar was 68.1 percent with the incumbent Conservative candidate receiving 60.8 percent of the votes (Vandaele, 2015). In Provencher, in 2015, voter turnout was 69.8 percent with the Conservatives taking 55 percent of the vote

(Froese, 2015). At the provincial level voter turnout in the 2016 election was significantly lower, ranging from 57.43 percent provincially (Elections Manitoba, 2016), to 53.47 percent in the Morden/Winkler riding (Stockford, 2016).[22]

In all general elections over the past sixty years Conservatives (Federal) and the Progressive Conservatives (Provincial) received an overwhelming majority of the vote within the research area. While Provencher voters have elected Liberal candidates in the past, since being created in 1871 this riding has had a majority Conservative representation with shorter periods of Liberal representation (Parliament of Canada, n.d.). Politically, the area is predominantly conservative (Morden Times/Swystun and Faloon, 2011) and right-wing (Friesen, 2003).

Griffen (2004) notes that the local stable agricultural economy in the first half of the 20th century ensured that agrarian radicalism did not take hold in southern Manitoba, a historical factor which could inform current conservative and right-wing tendencies. Local lore in southern Manitoba, confirmed by Vic Schroeder[23], suggests that in election campaigns "you can run a yellow dog as long as you put a P.C. [Progressive Conservative] sign on him and he'll get elected" (as quoted in Friesen, 2003, p. 187). Among Mennonite voters, who make up an ethnic-religious majority in several communities, Vogt (as cited in Friesen, 2003) speculates that their Conservative support is influenced by a traditional Mennonite belief that "the state is divinely ordained" (p. 187), and that people should not challenge the status quo. However, Friesen (2003) points out that, prior to the 1950s the status-quo vote among Mennonites was Liberal because it was a Liberal government with whom Mennonites in southern Manitoba favourably negotiated[24]

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[22] At the time of writing voter turnout results for all ridings for the Manitoba April 19, 2016 general elections were are not available. Voter turnout results for each provincial riding in 2011 were: Emerson – 44.42percent. Morris – 50.7percent, Morden/Winkler – 40.8percent, Midland – 51.4percent (Elections Manitoba, n.d.).

[23] Vic Schroeder was a New Democratic Party Member of Legislative Assembly of Manitoba from 1981-1988.

[24] As part of their immigration to southern Manitoba Mennonites from the Ukraine negotiated exemption from military service and swearing an oath, freedom to set up their own row-villages, and independent schools (control of

their immigration from Russia, present-day Ukraine, and settlement in Canada. More broadly

speaking, Palmer's (1991) description of ethnicity and politics in Canada reveals historical

connections between ethnic groups in Canada and their political support, organising, and voting

tendencies. However, Palmer (1991) and Friesen (2003) warn against making blanket

assumptions about how members of ethnic groups and regional citizens vote.

Women, Politics and politics

November 4, 2015, marked the first appointment of a Canadian federal cabinet with

gender parity[25]. In recent years, the number of female members of Parliament steadily increased,

from 10 in 2006, to 21 in 2008, to 28 in 2011, to 88 female members currently (Library of

Parliament, 2015).[26] The gender parity in the federal cabinet signifies a shift in appointing

women to senior leadership positions at the federal level. While gender parity can be recognized

and debated as a milestone in women's participation in conventional partisan politics, the reality

remains that women's participation in political nonpartisan spaces tends to be higher than in the

higher level systems.

Pauline Rankin and Jill Vickers (1998) identify three categories of women's political

involvement—formal political institutions, local communal politics and unofficial politics. These

categories present women's political involvement as a continuum across these spaces of political

power, influence, and change. While women's involvement is growing at the formal level,

including institutional politics at the federal, provincial and municipal governments, women's

continuous involvement in community, grassroots, unions, and other political venues, including

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their own education) (Friesen, 2007).
[25] This is the first federal cabinet with gender parity in Canada. Numerous provincial cabinets have reflected gender parity.
[26] In the 2015 election the number of seats in the House of Commons (parliament) increased from 308 to 338 (Parry, 2015).

civic, political, and otherwise, is significant (Rankin, 2002; Rankin and Vickers, 1998; Vickers, 1988; Wine and Ristock, 1991). This nonconventional politics "by another means" (Rankin, 2002, p. 1) accounts for a tradition of women's political culture that predates women's right to vote and participate in formal politics (Rankin, 2002; Vickers, 1988) and continues to be a preferred arena of political participation for many women (Rankin, 2002). The ground-breaking Royal Commission on the Status of Women (Government of Canada, 1970) identified barriers women face in engaging in formal politics and put forward recommendations on dismantling said barriers. Since the publication of this report barriers continue to be addressed, some dismantled. Yet even when all the barriers are eliminated, some women may decide to engage in informal politics (Rankin, 2002).

Women's political participation, notes Rankin (2002), is informed by a "female design of political living," (p. 58) which should be considered unto itself rather than measured against the yardstick of male political participation (Rankin, 2002). It is crucial to look at women's political participation in its own right. In considering why and how women organize within the areas they do, Rankin and Vickers (1998) explain, "where women in a particular locale or jurisdiction choose to be active reflects their understanding of opportunities for and constraints to their activism" (p. 343). Women's political cultures are dynamic and may vary based on race, class, age, education, religion, culture, ethnicity and other factors. Geographical commonality does not equate to a common women's political culture. In order to understand women's local political participation it is important to develop a clear understanding of women's political cultures (Rankin and Vickers, 1998; Vickers, 1988) and their perspective of their contexts.

Manitoba women were the first[27] in Canada to be granted the right to vote in January 1916. All women west of Quebec had provincial voting rights by 1917. Canadian women were granted the federal vote in 1918 (Carstairs and Higgins, 2004). In 2016, Manitoba will celebrate 100 years of women's suffrage and enfranchisement. Nellie McClung, the famed suffragist who championed women's right to vote in Manitoba, and who later became one of the Canadian "Famous Five"[28], taught school in Haskett near Manitou in the research area, met her husband in Manitou, where she started her literary, community and suffragist careers (Carstairs and Higgins, 2004).

The United Nations identifies thirty percent as the "minimal percentage of women required for government to reflect women´s concerns" (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2015). Women's representation in Canadian politics is still growing. Women's representation at the provincial and territorial level range from 10.5 to 36 percent (Parliament of Canada, Party leaders and standings, n.d.) and 25.3 percent at the federal level (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015) of elected representatives respectfully. Manitoba women hold fifteen of fifty-seven seats in the provincial legislature (26.8 percent) (Parliament of Canada, Party Leaders and Standings, n.d.). At the municipal level, women make up 26 percent of councillors and sixteen percent of mayors across Canada, and in Manitoba women represent 17 percent of councillors (16percent in rural areas, 21 percent in urban areas) and nine percent of mayors in both rural and urban areas (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2013). Locally, in the research area women sit on

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[27] Notably some Manitoba women were granted the right to vote in provincial elections 1916. Indigenous women were not granted the right to vote until 1960. In Manitoba widows who owned land were able to vote in municipal elections beginning in 1887, in school board elections in 1890 – which is also when women could run for the school board (Women win the vote, n.d.).

[28] The Famous Five refers to a group of five Canadian women, Henriette Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Emily Murphy, and Irene Parlby, who took the government of Canada to court to clarify that women were considered 'persons' under the British North America Act and could be appointed to the Canadian Senate (Carstairs and Higgins, 2004). This case is known as 'The Persons Case'.

numerous town and municipal councils, as well as committee members for LUDs. However they are still in a shuddering minority. As not all LUDs have publically posted their representatives online the exact number of women elected at this level within the research area is difficult to calculate.

Globally, as of November 2015, Canada ranks 48th in regards to federal female representation (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015). In 2013 eighty-five percent of Canadians were governed by a female Premier (EqualVoice, n.d.). However, due to elections and other factors, this has changed. Manitoba has yet to elect a female premier though other provinces have. The first women elected to a provincial legislature in Canada were Louise McKinney and Roberta McAdams in Alberta in 1917 (Carstairs and Higgins, 2004; Library and Archives of Canada, n.d.). Manitobans elected Edith Rogers, their first female Member of the Legislative Assembly, in 1920 (Manitoba Women's Advisory Council, 2008). Canadian women were granted the right to be elected in 1919, and in 1921 Agnes MacPhail was elected the first woman Member of Parliament (Carstairs and Higgins, 2004).

The federal riding of Portage-Lisgar, which includes the western half of the research is currently represented by a woman, Candice Bergen, of the Conservative Party. Ms. Bergen was the first woman elected at both the federal and provincial level for the area in 2008 (www.candicebergen.conservative.ca, n.d.). At the provincial level elected representatives have consistently been male. One area of elected representation where women have had more success is at the school board level. Here, women make up over half of the elected school board trustees within the five school divisions[29] represented within the research area. Of these five school boards, only one employs a female Superintendent—this is not an elected position.

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[29] The school divisions include Borderland, Garden Valley, Western, Prairie Rose and Prairie Spirit.

Culture

Paging through the South-Central Manitoba telephone book, the last names of residents still to a degree reflect the continued legacy of the early immigration groups to various areas/communities within the research setting. Many Manitoba rural communities were settled by certain cultural or linguistic groups and their effects are still seen today (Silvius and Annis, 2007). Due to migration; ethnic integration; and economic, social, and cultural development rural communities continue to develop their own unique cultures (Panelli, 2006). Some communities have an ethnic majority, for example French and Mennonite communities (Ens, 1984; Epp-Thiessen, 1982; Winkler Homecoming Committee, 1982). Other communities, large and small, continue to be or have become more multi-cultural. For example, as Mennonites who initially lived in villages surrounding Winkler moved into town and established businesses, the cultural diversity of the business community disappeared (Winkler Homecoming Committee, 1982). Changing cultural community dynamics continue as rural areas see both in and out migration (Friesen, 1996; Reimer, 2007). Today, there is more cultural diversity in South-Central Manitoba than ever before (Southern Health, 2014). Walking through communities in the western portion of the research area, which holds the majority of the population, I hear not only English but also: French, Low German[30], High German, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian, Ojibway, Arabic, and Tagalog. It is important to note the diversity among and within rural communities (Silvius and Annis, 2007).

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[30] Low German (*Plaut Dietsch*) is a dialect of German spoken among the Mennonites in the research area and brought to Canada by the early Mennonite immigrants who came from what is now Ukraine between 1870 and 1920, whose descendants came from northern Germany and Prussia (J.J. Friesen, 2007).

South-Central Manitoba has been the traditional territory and home of Indigenous people for thousands of years. The Anishnabe[31], members of the Dakota-Ojibway First Nations, live on or off reserve. Indigenous people make up 16.7% of the population of Manitoba (Statistics Canada, 2015), just over half live on reserves[32] (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, n.d.). Indigenous people were forced from their traditional lands and relocated to reserves established by the Canadian government (Doner, Isfield, Haworth-Brock and Forsey, 2008; Warry, 2007). Mandated by the federal government, the residential school system removed Indigenous children from their families and communities, and placed them into government and church run schools with the mandate to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Christian Canadian culture[33] (National Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Indigenous people and communities in Manitoba have unique and common historical and current experiences. The colonization of Indigenous people in Canada wreaked havoc on their socio-cultural, familial, education, economic, and political structures and has resulted in economic disparity and oppression of many Indigenous people (Doner, Isfield, Haworth-Brockman, and Forsey, 2008; Wadden, 2008; Warry, 2007).

The marginalization and discrimination of Indigenous people in Manitoba is deeply gendered (Carter 1996; Laroque, 1994, 1996). Emma Laroque, a female Indigenous scholar, states that "racism and sexism found in the colonial process have served to dramatically undermine the place and value of women in Aboriginal cultures, leaving us vulnerable both within and outside of our communities" (1996, pg. 11). The current issue and reality of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada attests to this appalling legacy.

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[31] 'Anishinabe' means 'the people' in the Anishinabemowin language of the Ojibway or Anishinabe people of Manitoba (Craft, 2011).
[32] In total 63 First Nations communities are in Manitoba (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, n.d.).
[33] The residential school system operated in Canada from 1830 to 1969. It was enforced by the Government of Canada and schools were operated by the government and churches.

Metis have lived in the research area, mostly in the Red River Valley, for hundreds of

years. Their efforts to defend their homeland and self-governance in the mid-1800s were

undermined. Following the defeat of their resistance came "an enduring period of dispossession,

injustice and impoverishment that caused the denigration of the Metis' political and social

structure" (Manitoba Metis Federation, n.d.). In the 1870s and 1890s, Francophone communities

in the area were established and settled by Metis and Francophone immigrants from Quebec and

the United States (Joie de Vivre Manitoba, n.d.). The Metis continue to practice and celebrate

their culture and heritage, as well as organize and advocate for their rights within provincial and

federal law and legislation (Manitoba Metis Federation, n.d.).

Between 1871 and 1874 most settlers to Manitoba arrived from Ontario, and "nearly all

were practical farmers with means" (Peters, 1988, p.12). Others came from Quebec, the

Maritimes, and Great Britain (Peters, 1988). These settlers were predominantly English-

speaking. In 1874 'group' immigration began with French settlers from Quebec who settled

around Winnipeg and southern Manitoba where there were existing Metis communities,

Mennonites who settled in what is referred to the East and West Reserves[34] in the Red River

Valley, and the Icelandic pioneers who settled on the western shores of Lake Winnipeg (Peters,

1988). Between 1874 and 1876, 7,000 Mennonites immigrated to Manitoba settling first in what

is referred to as the East Reserve near Steinbach then in the West Reserve west of the Red River

and north of the Canada-U.S. border (Friesen, J.J., 2007). Many of these early settlers travelled

west from Emerson to Gretna, Altona, Winkler, and many small villages, along what is still

referred to as the Post Road, yet was once also called the Colonization Trail (Enns, 1987; Petkau

& Petkau, 1981). Over the coming decades other group migrations, mostly from Europe, settled

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[34] The research area includes what is referred to as the Mennonite West Reserve.

in Manitoba, including the study area (Coates and McGuiness, 1987; Enns, 1984; Ewanchuk, 1998; Friesen, G., 1984; Friesen, J.J., 2007; Peters, 1988).

Many ethnic and religious groups settled in block settlements, which ensured social and ontological security on the frontier (Lehr, 1985). Mennonites tended to migrate and settle based on their church denominations in their home villages which ensured a level of social, religious, and cultural cohesion and continuity as well as isolation which were emphasized in their beliefs (Friesen, J.J., 2007). Ukrainians from the Galacia and Bukowina regions of the Austria-Hungary Empire, tended to settle in cultural blocks across the Manitoba prairie, including the eastern portion of the research area (Lehr, 1996). Ukrainian settlers opted for the marshy, wooded land determined to have a richer resource base for these 'capital deficient' pioneers (Lehr, 1996, pg. 99) and to settle on land with people from their European villages (Friesen, 1996; Lehr, 1996). These cultural block settlements ensured people were within close proximity to others who spoke a common language and held common cultural or religious practices.

International immigration recruitment initiatives between local businesses and provincial and municipal governments, to meet local human resource needs, contribute to population growth and increasing ethnic and cultural diversity in the region (Silvius and Annis, 2007). Describing immigration recruitment initiatives in Winkler from 1997-2006, Silvius and Annis (2007) note how the community drew upon its German-Russian and Mennonite linguistic, religious, and cultural assets to recruit and support Russian-German, German, and Kanadier[35] immigrants. Collaborative initiatives among communities, churches, and grassroots organisations to sponsor refugees to come to Canada and settle also contribute to building local diversity.

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[35] The Kanadier are Mennonites who left Manitoba beginning in the 1920s and settled in Mexico, Latin or South American and returned to Manitoba (Silvius and Annis, 2007).

Currently, in Altona, the community-based organisation Build-a-Village is sponsoring five Syrian refugee families. The influx of these forty-five people represents a one percent population increase for the town (CBC News, 2015). The employment opportunities, lower cost-of-living, and low-unemployment rate of some economically prosperous rural communities can also attract Manitobans and Canadians to move into the area. As some communities experience record population and economic growth, other communities struggle to survive. Communities may also be noticing cultural shifts due to in- and out-migration influenced by cost-of-living, housing prices, employment, and access to services.

Considering the ethnic, cultural and religious make up of rural communities, it is fair to consider questions of tension and conflict between groups. James Giffen (2004) notes that in the late 1940s, the tension between the Métis and the British in Carman was "part of the accustomed pattern of daily life" (p. 205). Generally speaking, discussions of tensions and conflict were not found in the reviewed literature[36].

Economy

The Canadian rural economy is based on commodity production (Reimer, 2007) notably in regards to natural resources, agriculture, and manufacturing. Rural areas are seeing a decline in primary commodity production and an increase in manufacturing (Reimer, 2007). In regards to the rural labour market, Bill Reimer (2007) notes there is typically "a higher proportion of primary-sector workers, limited demand for high-skilled jobs, and low demands for professional employment" (p. 5). Manitoba's diverse economy includes agri-industry, natural resources

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[36] As resident and researcher in this area, I note that the absence of discussion of conflict and tension between groups in the research area in the literature does not reflect everyday practices and discourses. For example, tensions exist between some settlers and indigenous communities, as well as Canadian and immigrant communities.

(timber, pulp, oil, and gas), mining, manufacturing, technology, transportation, hydro-electricity, culture, and tourism (Government of Manitoba, 2015). Specific to the research area, agriculture and agri-industries continue to be a strong economic driver, along with manufacturing, retail, and services.

With the birth of the province came a shift in agriculture practices from village agriculture or sustainable/self-sufficient agriculture to feed families and villages/settlements, to agriculture on a farming scale (Peters, 1988). Larger communities with a growing manufacturing economy in the western portion of the research setting have seen substantial population growth, due in part to labour immigration and the successful use of the Provincial Nominee Program to recruit qualified international labour (Bollman, Belshiri, and Clemenson, 2007; Silvius and Annis, 2007).

Class homogeneity of rural areas ignores the everyday reality of poverty for rural residents. Manitoba has the highest child poverty rate in Canada, where one in three children across family structures lives in poverty (Campaign 2000, 2015; Canada without Poverty, 2015). Frankel, as noted by CBC News (2015), pointed out that poverty is generally higher in rural areas. Poverty reports and statistics typically speak to poverty rates within a province or region, such as urban, rural and northern, making it difficult to identify specific realities for the research context. The daily challenges and realities of poverty manifest across multiple factors including income, housing, cost-of-living, and accessible childcare, transportation, health and food, support programs, to name a few. Poverty affects the everyday of rural children, families, elderly, and single individuals (Campaign, 2000; Canada without Poverty, 2015).

The economies of rural communities and areas are diverse and dynamic. While some areas may be experiencing economic growth others find their economies declining or stagnant. Poverty in all communities is a reality in rural areas.

Religion

Church and religion can be a significant aspect in the lives of rural people. Historically, the churches represented a significant centre for many people, providing support, encouragement, and guidance during settlement and pioneer life, and for some this continues into the present. Central to many of the early cultural settlements were their churches—indicating the significance of religion to the lives of these pioneers (Epp, 1974, 1984; Giffen, 2004; Lehr, 1996). Historically, churches were a legitimate space in which women could be involved outside of the home (Redekopp, 1996). For some communities and women this remains true today.

The lower population density can make the influence of religion feel more acute in rural communities. Identity is often based on which church one attends, or which church one's parents attend or attended. From east to west, religious diversity expands across the research setting. Some communities reflect a religious majority, for example, the predominantly ethno-religious Mennonite communities or the French Catholic communities. The majority of religions are Christian-based, including the Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, United Church, Hutterite, Holdeman[37], and Mennonite churches (Giffen, 2004). Mennonites are not a homogeneous ethno-religious group (Friesen, J.J., 2007; Winland, 1993). Other religions include Hindu, Islam, and Midewiwin[38]. The growing Muslim community appointed an Imam

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[37] Holdeman is a branch of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith founded by John Holdeman in 1859 in the United States, and has spread to Canada and other countries around the world (Church of God in Christ Mennonite, n.d.).
[38] Also spelled Medewiwin or Mediwin.

and recently opened a mosque (Knutt, 2016). They are supported by the Manitoba Islamic

Association Pembina Valley (Manitoba Islamic Association, 2015). Midewiwin is an indigenous

spirituality practiced by some Ojibway people in the area (Child, 2012). Religious beliefs, values

and practices continue to be a significant influence for everyday life informing how people live,

work, play, and are involved in their communities.

Community engagement

Community engagement accounts for sense of belonging, involvement with community

organisations and donations (Government of Manitoba, 2009). "Manitobans have a strong

community spirit and a long tradition of helping others—our friends and neighbours—as well as

other residents of our global village," noted the Government of Manitoba (2009). Over two-

thirds (69.5 percent) of Manitobans reported having a sense of community belonging (Statistics

Canada, 2014). For women in Manitoba, the rate of a sense of community belonging was 68.7

percent (Statistics Canada, 2014).

Volunteer rates with charitable and other non-profit organisations reveal that in 2010[39],

fifty-three percent of Manitobans over fifteen years old volunteered seventy-four million hours

annually (Statistics Canada, 2012). Just over half of the women in Manitoba put in 34.7 million

volunteer hours. The volunteer rate (not broken down by gender) for the South-Central

Economic Region of Manitoba, which includes the western portion of the research setting, is 69

percent (Winkler Community Foundation, 2012). Another factor of community engagement is

voting behaviour, which was described above in the section on Politics.

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[39] The 2010 Statistics Canada survey, 'Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians,' on donations and volunteering is at
the time of writing the most recent survey.

Canadian community development history is ripe with examples of rural men and women's involvement including volunteering, organising, advocating, and activism (Welton, 1995). The same can be said for the research setting. Exploring the history of community engagement initiatives and service organisations paints a picture of what citizens have done before. History books provide glimmers of people's past community involvement through formal volunteering within organisations, or organised groups. Many of these organisations have a focus on at least one aspect of community development.

As soon as the roads were laid in Emerson in the 1870s, "fundraising events, church activities and the formation of agricultural associations began" wrote Enns (1987). The Morris Agricultural Society was formed in the spring of 1880, and held its first exhibition that fall, as an opportunity for local farmers and residents to show their livestock, produce, and handiwork (Enns, 1987). Soon other Agricultural Societies were formed across the province to provide opportunities for farmers to discuss ways to increase their mutual benefit through study circles, advocacy, and community events (Giffen, 2004; Petkau and Petkau, 1982). As well, it was here, in Roland, that 4-H Canada started in 1913 as a boys and girls clubs for rural youth, taking on the name 4-H in 1952 (4-H Manitoba, 2013). The four H's stand for 'head,' 'heart,' 'hands,' and 'health' (4-H Manitoba, 2013).

In 1910 the Manitoba Women's Institutes[40] began in Morris (Manitoba Women's Institute, 2000). By 1919 there were 118 Women's Institute locals across the province, including numerous ones in the research area (Dobrovolny, 2007). The WI ran public maternal health

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[40] The village of Stoney Creek Ontario was the site of the first Women's Institutes (WI) in Canada, started in 1897. The Federated Women's Institutes of Canada formed in 1919. Around the same time the WI was forming in Canada, similar organisations were being organized in Finland and Germany. Canadian Women's Institute members help plant the ideas, advocate for and educate women who started the first women's institutes in Great Britain, from there the idea was taken to Australia and New Zealand (Chapman, 1950). Today the Associated Country Women of the World represents rural women from over 70 countries (ACWW, n.d.).

classes across rural Manitoba in the 1920s.. During the 1930s WIs ran courses on mental health and saving money (Dobrovolny, 2007). As well, this organisation lobbied for standardized children's clothing styles, garment and textile care labelling and instructions on all garments, coloured and painted lines on highways, and mandatory flashing lights on school buses, as well as help set up over 100 rural libraries—to name a few of their accomplishments (Dobrovolny, 2007; Manitoba Women's Institute, n.d.).

In 1972 four women in Altona started a thrift store movement (Epp, 2013). People are involved in their communities in various diverse endeavours. Rural communities depend on volunteer firefighters in times of emergency, these mostly men and a few women dedicate time and energy to training, as well as the willingness to leave what they are doing and risk their lives at a moment's notice to help others. Community festivals and fairs are significant annual, often multi-day, events organized and run by volunteers. Non-profit organisations are overseen by volunteer boards.

Most rural households would have had gardens, particularly kitchen gardens, which would have provided produce to nourish families year round—as many women would preserve or store fresh produce to last until next spring. Gardens also provided emotional and cultural significance to settlers and continue as a space of leisure and sustenance for many (Peters, 1988). Considering the significance of gardens and vegetation it is not surprising that Horticultural Societies formed in many communities. Many citizens are actively involved in gardening clubs and other informal community beautification initiatives. The first Horticultural Society in the research area was formed in Morden in 1916—not surprising given that the horticultural research station in Morden opened in 1915 (Peters, 1988). Others followed in Carmen (1929), Manitou (1935), Dominion City (1958), and Morris (1959) (Peters, 1988). These formal organisations are

complimented by many informal organisations and initiatives of community garden clubs, community gardens, and garden enthusiasts in the area. In 2014 two women in Gretna, Manitoba successfully petitioned for a plot of land in town that could be planted as a tall-grass prairie sample garden. Through fundraising they were able to collect sufficient funds to purchase plugs of native tall-grass prairie plants which would have grown wild for hundreds of years where the town is now situated (Penner and Reimer, 2014). The garden is now a community attraction.

Similarly, volunteers in many communities are actively involved in establishing and maintaining parks, nature reserves, and natural spaces for recreation, leisure, and conservation. Often these spaces have historical significance. For example, the Sinkew Swinging Bridge over the Roseau River was restored and is maintained by local volunteers (Ledohoski, 2011). The bridge was first built in 1930 and rebuild in 1947 by local residents so that children from the south side of the Roseau River would have a direct route to school on the north side of the river (Ledohoski, 20011). Now the bridge is an attraction along a section of the Crow-Wing portion of the Trans-Canada trail (Trails Manitoba, n.d.).

Community engagement through volunteering provides opportunities for residents to connect with neighbours, build social ties and capital, and contribute to the greater good. Recollecting the sentiments of community and connecting with neighbours at local functions Benno Loewen and Mary Loewen write:

> Every time we gather for any function, we become acutely aware of how very much we miss the men and women that have passed away. They have all left a legacy and have passed a torch to those of us who are left. Are we willing to catch a vision and follow it? The Silberfeld and Schoenhorst community over the course of its many years have developed into many lasting friendships. There have been numerous celebrations where we have gotten together as a community. (nd, p. 105)

The seeds planted by community members who blazed the early trails of community building to fulfil their vision of community need to be nurtured by present and future generations.

Women's involvement in their communities pre-dates the arrival of the first European

Settlers to this area in the late 1870s. Early European women settlers often transplanted their own

ways of involvement and organising from their homelands into Canada (Redekopp, 1996; Weir,

2007). These groups provided a significant space for women to gather together, fellowship,

discuss issues of the day, and engage in community service—often by organizing and holding

fundraisers (Loewen and Loewen, nd; Petkau and Petkau, 1981; Redekopp, 1996). Funds raised

help support people and organisations in need locally, regionally, and internationally (Loewen

and Loewen, nd; Petkau and Petkau, 1981; Redekopp, 1996). Many pioneer women initially

formed women's groups through their churches as churches were a legitimate and sanctioned

space in which women could gather (Giffen, 2004; Redekopp, 1996; Wier, 2007). In some

communities non-church women's groups were frowned upon and participation in these groups

was discouraged.[41] As socio-cultural dynamics changed, particularly in regards to gender and

leadership, so too did the landscape of women's community involvement. For example, while

several service organisations had at one time separate male and female branches eventually these

merged into one group (M. Epp, 2007; Redekopp, 1996).

Rural women living within a village or school district often formed local groups (Giffen,

2004). *Nähvereins* (sewing circles) were once common in Mennonite communities as spaces

where women organised to meet with other women to socialize, discuss relevant topics of the

day, and support local causes under the auspices of sewing (Loewen and Loewen, 2008; Petkau

and Petkau, 1981). Many sewing circles included prayers, Bible readings, and devotions

(Loewen and Loewen, n.d.). Loewen's translation of the minutes from the inaugural meeting in

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[41] While official record of this discouragement could not be located, local knowledge and lore suggested that churches, in particular more conservative churches, discouraged women from involvement with non-church organisations.

1953 of the Silberfeld Sewing Circle illustrates the integration of faith, fellowship, and service in

Mennonite women's everyday involvement—"On January 21, a sewing circle was established in

Silberfeld. May God's blessing rest upon this work and be useful in honouring God" (p. 101).

Such groups typically met on a regular basis during the winter months—when there was

no outside work to be done. Often a collection would be taken, and there would be fabric

available for women to take home to sew into different articles such as clothing, aprons, quilts,

pillowcases, towels, etc. (Loewen and Loewen, n.d.). Some groups met in each other's homes

while other groups met in a community space such as a school. When women met in each other's

homes it was an opportunity to bring out the pretty dishes and prepare special treats (Loewen and

Loewen, n.d.). Petkau and Petkau (1981) note that sometimes hostesses could get competitive

with their *faspa*[42] and groups would have to establish rules or, in some cases, move their

meetings into the school (Petkau and Petkau, 1981). Many of these groups organized fundraisers

such as quilt and blanket auctions, bake sales, and soup and pie suppers to raise money for local

and foreign causes (Loewen and Loewen, 2008; Petkau and Petkau, 1981). Mary Loewen (n.d.)

recalls how women in Silberfeld stitched all winter long for their June auction and called on the

men in the community to help.

> The group had stitched all winter long, and everything was to be auctioned
> and the funds raised were donated to different missions and charities. The
> men were also involved in different ways, they were called upon to help set
> up tables and chairs. A number of them were auctioneers. (p. 101).

Petkau and Petkau (1981) report blankets could be auctioned off for as much as $1,000 with all

funds going to charity. These women could often also be seen preparing and serving food at

community events such as auctions, funerals, and weddings (Loewen and Loewen, n.d.; Petkau

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[42] *Faspa* is a Low-German word for a light late lunch or early light supper served typically on Sundays or special
occasions between three and four o'clock and typically consists of coffee, cheese, pickles, zwieback (homemade
buns with a smaller bun pinched on top of a larger bottom bun), jam, butter, cold-cuts, and dainties (Choronoboy,
2007; Voth, 1994).

and Petkau, 1981). They could also be seen visiting, singing and volunteering in local hospitals and care-homes, as well as organising community events such as picnics, barbeques, and centennial celebrations (Loewen and Loewen, nd; Petkau and Petkau, 1981).

Sewing circles were a significant social space for women in rural communities. In 1954 single young women in Blumenfeld, a village south of Winkler, organized a *nähverein* for the purpose of providing "an opportunity for young women working in their parents' homes to visit" (Petkau and Petkau, 1981, p. 89); they met in the village school and did handwork. In 1955, the adult women in Blumenfeld organized their own *nähverein*. This group disbanded in 1961 and reorganized in 1965. Writing about the significance of sewing circles in Blumenfeld, similar observations could be made about the circles in other local communities, Petkau and Petkau (1981) state:

> The emphasis of the group continues to be on friendship and mission. Mothers of young children consider *Nähvereins* as a 'night off.' Older members are more conscious of the charitable work that is being done for Mennonite Central Committee and for local needs. For newcomers to the village, attendance at the *Nähvereins* is a way of feeling that one belongs to the community. (p. 89)

Various service organisations and initiatives by and for women continue to provide opportunities for women to socialize with other women, connect to the community and develop a feeling of belonging (Giffen, 2004). Many woman also formed local chapters of provincial or national service organisations such as the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (Giffen, 2004), Kinettes (KinCanada, n.d.); and the Women's Institute (Manitoba Women's Institute, 2000)—the latter is still active in the research area.

Women's informal community involvement of helping neighbours and community members thrives. However, tracking this form of active caring in the literature is much more difficult as its informal nature relegates it to the margins of unrecorded. Some exceptions exist.

For example, the book *Town of Altona: Millennium Diary* (1999) recorded that in 1943, 172 quarts of fruit and 562 quarts of vegetables were canned for the Bethania (Altona) Hospital. While this notation does not specify who did the canning, the fact that canning is typically women's domain (especially in 1943), it can be understood that it was women who laboured over this preservation of fruit and vegetables, which they most likely also grew in their own gardens. Another example comes from Anne Reimer, quoted in F. Epp (cited in Petkau and Petkau, 1981) who describes how women in the village of Blumenfeld help each other:

> If there was sickness in a house, neighbours looked in on each other and brought baking. If the cream-separator broke down, we picked up the milk and went to the neighbours (p. 88)

 Reimer's observations identify how women helped, cared for, and looked out for one another. By helping and caring for neighbours and community members, women's informal community involvement created a sense of community and belonging significant to the wellbeing of women in rural communities.

Diving into a historical exploration of women's community engagement in the research area provides an appreciation for the continuity of rural women seeking to build better communities in which to live. Women's current community engagement is a continuation of what women have been doing for over 150 years in the research area—making their communities better, improving living situations, and building their social and support networks for life on the prairies— on farms and in towns. This study is a continuation of the historical excerpts presented here.

CONCLUSION

Rural communities are constantly being shaped by global, national, regional, and local forces. At the local level, women's efforts continue to have a significant impact on building

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communities. This research study looks at women's community-building in rural South-Central Manitoba in the area between the Red and Pembina River valleys. The concept of the homeplace has a contextual significance for women's social, cultural and political everyday knowledge and practices that inform their community-building. The theoretical field of rural and gender theory highlights the gendered nature of the rural idyll and the socialization of women within a patriarchal rural structure. Negotiating their own rural and gendered identities within their respective communities, rural women continue to forge ahead to build improved communities.

By examining the historical, economic, political, cultural, and religious aspects of the research area we gain a better understanding of the nuances of the ordinary and extraordinary life in South-Central Manitoba. Current community engagement represents an active tradition of community engagement and involvement, volunteering, service organisations, and community development that has existed for over a hundred years in the research area, contributed to the wellbeing of residents and community. Women's community involvement today is a manifestation of the tradition of women's formal and informal involvement in their communities, while building crucial social and support networks for women's ongoing peacebuilding on the prairies.

4 Women + 1 Idea = Thrift Shop Movement

It is 1972. Four women sit around a kitchen table drinking tea in the southern Manitoba community of Altona, the Sunflower Capital of Canada. The host, Selma Loewen, invited three of her friends over that day to present to them an idea she came up with after recently attending the Manitoba Mennonite Central Committee Annual Meeting as a representative of her church. At the time many women and families in the area donated their "still good" used clothing to the Mennonite Central Committee to be bundled and shipped overseas. At that annual meeting it was announced that MCC was going to cut back on its shipments of used clothing. John Hostetler, material resources program director, put forward that the organisation needed "a machine that would turn clothing into cash" (Terichow, 2012).

> Recalling the story to Al Friesen for a local radio program, Selma shared her experience:

> > The special speaker from the States said, made this comment "how can we change our clothes into cash?" And literally, this is a literally, a light bulb went off, that's true, just literally. And I came back and I called these lovely ladies here and the next day I had a tea. (CFAM blog, 2015)

In her kitchen among friends and cups of tea, Selma proposed her idea of a local thrift store that would sell the clothing that they would normally donate, as well as other household items and donate the money to MCC. Her friends, Linie Friesen, Susie Stoezs, and Susan Giesbrecht were on board. Local women's groups contributed $125 to cover the first month's rent (Terichow, 2012), and the doors to the Altona store opened on March 17, 1972. Originally the store was called the Altona Community Self-Help Centre (Terichow, 2012). Later that year three more stores opened in Manitoba, in Steinbach and Winnipeg, which donated $3,700 to MCC in 1972 (Terichow, 2012). The stores were staffed by volunteers.

Linie Friesen, now in her nineties, recalled "in the early years, most shops were started and administered by women but it didn't take too long before the men became involved too" (Terichow, 2012). The thrift shops have become an integral part of the communities they are in (Terichow, 2012). The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Thrift Stores now includes over one hundred shops across Canada and the United States (A. Epp, 2013). In 2011, MCC thrift stores in Canada raised CD$7.2 million (Terichow, 2012) for MCC's development, peacebuilding, emergency response, and humanitarian aid work. In 2015 total sales for the Altona MCC thrift store totalled $607,836 (Penner, 2016). Every week roughly 110 volunteers work at the Altona store, and on Mondays 80 volunteers restock shelves and racks for opening a new week on Tuesday (Penner, 2016). Reflecting on what became of Selma's light bulb, Linie Friesen shared, "This is unbelievable! Our mustard seed has turned into a big tree and it is still growing."

CHAPTER THREE

"The Stuff of Life"[43]: Everyday and Learning

During a visit to Regina in 2014, I was delighted to happen upon an exhibit of Canadian realist artist Mary Pratt's mesmerizing paintings of the everyday. The following quote greeted viewers into the exhibit: "Mary Pratt has chosen to emphasize a woman's world with the mundane, in what she describes as 'the stuff of life, that stuff that everyone touches every day, the stuff that a woman understands.'" Pratt's work features light transcending through jars of jam, a partially eaten dinner on the table, a baby's first bath, a silvery fish on Saran-Wrap, and other glimpses into the homeplace. Artists like Mary Pratt invite viewers to intently linger to see what we normally disregard, rush past or clean-up and consider the extraordinary beauty of sunlight streaming through crimson crab-apple jelly onto a white and red checkered tablecloth. Similarly, research of the everyday requires researchers to linger, be attentive to the everyday routines to see and understand the ordinary in new ways.

This study is grounded in the theoretical literature of the everyday, adult learning, women in development, and women's peacebuilding, which metaphorically and fluidly represent the when, how, and what of women's community involvement. I begin by building the literature foundation on the everyday, the 'stuff of life' as Mary Pratt called it, to delve into constructions and ideas of the quotidian, particularly in regards to gender and caring. I carry the everyday into an examination of learning, in particular adult learning, women's learning and social movement learning in order to build our understandings of learning processes and experiences percolating at the grassroots in the quotidian praxis of community involvement. Then, in the next chapter we

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[43] Mary Pratt.

consider the two intersecting fields of gender and development and women's peacebuilding in particular at the levels of the everyday and grassroots, with specific attention on volunteering. In reading and analyzing the literature for this study what surprised me is that for the most part there are limited, if any, existing bridges between and among these disciplines, despite their commonalities, and despite their intersection within the lives of many people. This particular blend of literature comes together as a patchwork quilt covering the diverse and unique considerations of theory and practice in regards to women's peacebuilding and learning on the prairie.

<div align="center">THE EVERYDAY</div>

> Behind the media headlamps there is a course of life that envelops both the harmony and the chaos intertwined within human experience. This course of life is the everyday life of yours and mine, and it is not announced to the world through the headlines. However, it is real, and it is what counts when your and my quality of life and wellbeing are measured. (Heinia, 2009, p. 158)

Rather than 'hiding' behind the headlines, everyday life is now in the spotlight. This examination of the everyday explores the significance of the ordinary of the everyday, the routines that form the 'connective tissue' of the quotidian, and the gendered nature of the everyday.

The ordinary

The everyday being the ordinary and mundane is akin to what in the field of art is referred to as negative space (Brekhus, 1998; Frow, 2002)—the space that "exists at the margins or in the interstices of socially marked phenomena" (Gardiner, 2004, p. 230) that would equate to positive space—also known as the extraordinary. However, in real life the distinctions are typically not so drastic or dramatic. Michael Gardiner (2004) warns "to focus exclusively on memorable, highly visible, or extraordinary events of the sociocultural world is something akin

to a category mistake, because to do so universalizes the atypical and ignores the overlooked norm" (p. 229). In actuality, it is against the habits and routines of the everyday that we determine the extraordinary and highly visible (Brekhus, 1998; Felski, 2000; Frow, 2002; Gardiner, 2004; McGregor, 2012). According to Sue McGregor (2012) the everyday is a significant way people experience the world; it "sustains humanity" (n.p.); is "anything but mundane or ordinary" (n.p.): "although characterized as commonsensical, taken-for-granted, routine, and invisible, *everydayness,* at the same time, the everyday is also rich with authentic experiences, bodily and emotional rhythms, and creative innovations" (McGregor, 2012, n.p. emphasis in the original). It is the 'connective tissue' that holds everything together (Burkitt, 2004; Bennett, 2004 as cited by Scott, 2009; Gardiner, 2004).

The extraordinary and everyday do not exist as binaries. Rather in this dynamic, complex, and interconnected, intersubjective, and globalized world the everyday and extraordinary exist in a dialectic totality (Lefebrve as noted in Gardiner, 2004) between the mundane and the creative, the 'routine and innovative' (Gardiner, 2004), the 'trivial and momentous' (Gardiner, 2004); and—as a peace researcher and scholar I add—stability and chaos (change), peace and war. Change is often imposed upon people through economic crisis, environmental catastrophes, political turmoil, as well as violence, conflict and war. Henri Lefebrve states (as quoted in Gardiner, 2004, p. 242):

> Everyday life is profoundly related to *all* activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground. And it is in everyday life that the sum total of relations which make the human- and every human being—a whole takes its shape and its form. In it are expressed and fulfilled those relations which bring into the totality of the real. *[Emphasis in the original]*

As Gardiner (2004) summarizes Lefebrve: "the everyday is part and parcel of all human practices; it is the 'connective tissue' of the social world" (p. 242). The everyday is very much a

part of who we are; our individual and collective experiences, relations, activities, habits, routines, dispositions, and quirks which are acquired over time via first hand-experiences through which we create personal and collective meaning.

In the everyday we also create "affective and emotional support" (Gardiner, 2004, p. 234) to help us develop "a relatively stable sense of selfhood and an intersubjective sense of trust" (Gardiner, p. 234), what Anthony Gidden's termed "ontological security" (as referenced in Gardiner, 2004, p. 234) for living in a seemingly chaotic and unstable world (Burkitt, 2004; Felski, 2000; Gardiner, 2004; McGregor, 2012). The everyday is democratic notes Ruth Felski (2000) as everyone shares in the reality of the ordinariness of the everyday—sleeping, waking, eating, working, and playing. "Everyday life," writes Felski, "does not only describe the lives of ordinary people, but recognizes that every life contains an element of the ordinary" (p. 79). This element of ordinary provides a commonness among people, along with stability and security.

Routines

Discussions of the everyday typically explore routines, habits, and space (Burkitt, 2004; Felski, 2000; Gardiner, 2004; Highmore, 2004; McGregor, 2012; Scott, 2009). The habits and routines of everyday life suggest an arena marked by tenacity; routines and habits hold on to us and we hold on to them, both unwittingly and unwillingly (Felski, 2000). Not only are routines and habits hard to acquire and harder still to break, we are often not even aware that we are involved in them as they are so common-sensical and habitual (McGregor, 2012; Scott, 2009). In this sense, everyday life is often experienced as deeply ambiguous while simultaneously comforting and frustrating (Highmore, 2004, p. 311).

It is within the everyday, what Martin Heidegger referred to as the "eternal yesterday" (Frow, 2002, p. 631), that we find the familiar routines (Scott, 2009). Routine is associated with time, the rhythms, repetitions, and cycles of life (Felskli, 2000; McGregor, 2012). Daily routines may change over weekends, holidays, school semesters, and seasons; even so they are still cyclical (Felski, 2000; McGregor, 2012). Routines can be ritual, representing traditions and practices passed down through generations in communities, connecting the present and the past, and forming identity and culture (Felski, 2000). There is a benefit to the routines associated with mundane and subordinating repetition:

> Everyday rituals may help to safeguard a sense of personal autonomy and dignity, or to preserve distinctive qualities of a threatened way of life. In other words, repetition is not simply a sign of human subordination to external forces but is one of the ways that individuals engage with and respond to their environment. (Felski, 2000, p. 84)

These circadian rhythms have changed little over time, notes Felski (2000) drawing from Lefebvre, and stand in contrast to modernity's preference for the progress oriented and forward-moving concept of linear time. Cyclical time is often associated with women and the feminine, notes Felski (2000), while linear time is masculine. However, such a gendered binary dismisses the reality that men and women both live within everyday routines and rhythms (Felski, 2000).

Ian Burkitt (2004) emphasizes "everyday life must relate to *all* daily activities because it is here that our social relations are produced and reproduced" (p. 212, emphasis in the original). The everyday continually produces and reproduces itself:

> The reality of everyday life - the sum total of all our relations - is built on the ground, in daily activities and transactions. This happens in our working relations but also in our friendships, comradeship, love, the need to communicate and to play. (Burkitt, 2004, p. 212)

Routines imbedded within the everyday inform our relations with others, our social practice.

Examining the production and relations of the everyday exposes dynamics between the official and unofficial forms of social practice, particularly in regards to power and relations. Burkitt (2004) distinguishes between the "established or official systems of ideas to be found in the social fields of science, art, religion and ethics" (p. 214) some of which have backing from the official system of the State and its institutions, as well as the unofficial systems:

> Unofficial forms of social practice and articulation could be seen as the living tissue of everyday relations and activities that are less systematized and explicitly codified. The relations of love, intimacy and friendship, for example, are social practices of a less codified, explicitly rule bound nature. The social rules that bind such relations are more implicit and, as such, these daily activities feel as though they have a less fixed quality to them: rather, they feel to be more open, fluid, and emergent. (Burkitt, 2004, p. 214)

The relations between the official and the unofficial are "open, permeable and interdependent" argues Burkitt (2004, p. 214) noting "official ideas and ethics are often a crystallization of unofficial ideas and practices … official codification exerts a powerful influence on the unofficial aspects of daily life" (2004, p. 215). Focusing on the official discourses of institutions within all social fields risks diminishing or outright ignoring the influence and potential of the unofficial discourses within the everyday (Burkitt, 2004). The everyday meanings, habits, relations, and routines need to be considered within their intertwined connections to political and economic forces (Gardiner, 2004) and all social fields (Burkitt, 2004).

Gender and the everyday

Feminist studies and considerations often highlight and speak of the everyday and its gendered-nature. Reviewing discourses of everyday life in regards to gender, Felski (2000) notes that woman are regarded as the "quintessential representatives and victims of the quotidian [everyday]" adding:

> Women like everyday life are defined by their negation. Their realm has not been that of war, philosophy, art, scientific endeavor, high office. What else is left to the woman - everyday life, the realm of the insignificant, invisible yet indispensable. (p. 80)

Through examination and critical analysis, feminist theorists identify and name the gendered natures of the unofficial and official systems which manifest in latent, covert, and overt ways in the everyday (Fuller, 2004; Smith, 1987; Wood, 2007).

The social, cultural, and political constructions of the very identities we claim, such as gender, have a significant impact on how we negotiate and experience the cultural, religious, economic, and political systems in which we live our daily lives. The intersectionality (Collins, 1998) of these constructed identities makes it difficult to make categorical separations, imbedded as they are into the layers upon layers of experiences we carry.

Within the dynamic, complex space of the everyday, women negotiate meanings and take action based on their meaning-making (Gouthro, 2000, 2009b; Senehi, 2009). For many women, particularly mothers, these acts are centred in their mother role reflecting their motherwork within families and communities (DeVault, 1994, 1999; Gouthro, 2009a; Hart, 2002; Naples, 1998b) and rooted in an ethic of care (Eisler, 1987, 2004; Naples, 1998c; Noddings, 2003; Staeheli, 2003) as community mothers and othermothers (Hart, 2002; Naples, 1992, 1998b).

Often the everyday work, culture, and knowledge of women are dismissed or minimalized, despite the importance of women's work to families, communities, and society (Boulding, 1992, 1995; DeVault, 1999; Dominelli, 2006; Epp, 2008; Sacks, 1993; Smith, 1987). As Elise Boulding (1995, p. 410) poignantly writes:

> What tends to be ignored is the historical reality that women's work of feeding, rearing, and healing humans and of building and rebuilding households and communities under conditions of constant change—including war, environmental catastrophe, and continual push-pull migrations—produced resources and skills within women's cultures that

have been critical not only to human *survival* but to human *development*. *[Emphasis in the original]*

Through their effort and time in creating households and communities, a homeplace, women have developed knowledge, skills, cultures, and resources foundational to our survival and development.

The "eternal yesterday" (Heidegger, as quoted in Frow, 2002, p. 631) is the ambiguous connective tissue of our lives informed by the comforting, dynamic, and complex habits, routines, time, and space forming our everyday. Despite being overlooked in favour of the extraordinary, the ordinary and mundane of the quotidian "sustains humanity" (McGregor, 2012, n.p.). It is here that we build affective and emotional support—our "ontological security" (Giddens as cited in Gardiner, 2004, p. 234). The everyday represents a commonness among all people as we share similar circadian rhythms, of sleep, wake, work, study, eat, and volunteer/help out, for examples.

Identities such as gender, inform how we negotiate meaning and practice within the economic, political and socio-cultural systems which push into everyday life. The everyday is gendered (Felski, 2000). Despite women's work and acts of caring, sustaining, and nurturing individuals, families, communities, societies, and nations (Boulding, 1995; DeVault, 1999; Dominelli, 1995; Smith, 1987), it is relegated to the mundane and ordinary, in effect rendering it invisible (Felski, 2000). Through their private and public caring, women engage in informal learning through which they negotiate knowledge and develop skills and resources that sustain and develop communities and humanity. The following section examines adult learning in greater detail, specifically women's learning and social movement learning.

For the purposes of this study attention is given to learning—specifically, adult learning, informal learning, and women's learning. In consideration of community involvement, attention is given to social movement learning and peace education as a space for considering learning in community development and peacebuilding, which is, as to date, an under-explored area of adult learning. The historical and current connections, more so in practice than in theory, among adult education and learning, community development, and social justice highlight the significance of learning at both the personal and community levels for political, economic, and social transformation (Brookfield, 1984; Butterwick, 1998; English, 2005; Freire, 1999; Hall and Turray, 2006; Preskill and Brookfield, 2009; Welton, 1991, 1995, 2005). Stephen Brookfield and John Holst (2011) in writing about radical adult learning present the following explanation of adult learning, community and social justice:

> Adult learning is inextricably tied to creating and extending political and economic democracy—to equalizing control of and access to wealth, education, health care, and creative work, and to promoting collective and cooperative forms of decision-making and labor. This is perhaps seen most clearly in community movements. (p. 17)

While studies have examined learning within social movements, there are only a few studies found to date that connect in depth this theory to volunteering which could fall under its umbrella due to the broad definition of social movement learning (Duguid, Mundel and Schurugensky, 2007; 2013; Hall and Turray, 2006). While Fiona Duguid, Karsten Mundel and Daniel Schurugensky's (2013) studies on learning and volunteer work focuses on learning in formal volunteering, specific to organisations, this study focuses on the lifelong and life-wide learning of individuals through-out their volunteering careers. This study represents a rare example connecting social movement learning and learning in volunteering explicitly to community

involvement at the individual level and, in doing so, identifies the limitations and challenges of examining this specific practice of community involvement learning under the umbrella of social movement learning.

Learning

In adult education learning is typically descriptively categorised as formal, non-formal, and informal—terms that refer to the contexts of learning (Plumb and Gouthro, 2003). Formal learning takes place in educational institutions such as primary, secondary, and tertiary school systems. These categorical labels are informed by a value system "that obscures and diminishes learning that occurs within certain realms, while it supports and reifies learning that occurs in other realms" (Gouthro and Plumb, 2003, n.p.). Formal learning, with its credentials, typically holds greater value and legitimacy than non-formal and informal learning (Gouthro and Plumb, 2003; MacKerarcher, 2010). However, formal learning only makes up a small percentage of the total learning Canadian adults engage in over their lifespan.

Some adults do not participate in formal learning, yet the majority of adults engage in informal learning projects throughout their adult lives (Gouthro and Plumb, 2003; Livingstone, 1998, 1999; Tough, 1979). Malcolm Knowles (1950), a grandfather of the study of adult education, and many others argued the importance of informal learning in adulthood and in fact across our entire lifespans (Brookfield, 1987; Finger, 1989; Livingstone, 1998, 1999). In his study of adult Canadians' informal learning practices, David Livingstone (1999) found that on average Canadians spend fifteen hours a week learning informally, defined as "any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs outside the curricula of educational institutions, or the courses or workshops offered by educational or social agencies"

(p. 51). Within informal learning, there exists a porous spectrum of learning experiences, from

explicit to tacit learning, Livingstone (1999) clarifies:

> Explicit informal learning is distinguished from everyday perceptions, general socialization, and other tacit learning by peoples' conscious identification of the activity as significant learning. The important criteria that distinguish explicit informal learning are the retrospective recognition of both a new significant form of knowledge, understanding, or skill acquired on one's own initiative and also recognition of the process of acquisition. This guideline distinguishes explicit informal learning from all of the other tacit forms of learning through everyday activities. Examples of tacit learning include experiences of young people or adults when their elders or peers engage with them in many forms of socialization that are not recognized as learning because they are so incorporated in other activities, such as ceremonial occasions or the various ad hoc day-to-day interrelationships through which people are inducted into the cultural life of their society. In basic socialization, learning and acting constitute a seamless web in which it is impossible to distinguish informal learning activities in any discrete way. (p. 51)

Bruce Spencer (1998) describes informal learning simply as "the learning that goes on all the

time, individually and in groups" (p. 23). Phoenix de Carteret (2008) distinguishes it as learning

that "takes place in leisure time" (503). Unfortunately, learning that takes place outside of

education institutions is often dismissed or goes unrecognized by society and the learners

themselves (de Carteret, 2008; Foley, 1993; Gouthro and Plumb, 2003; Hayes and Flannery,

2000).

Significant learning, both explicit and tacit, continuously takes place through initiatives

outside institutional settings and not primarily focused on learning itself, for example, in

families, relationships, community-based groups, leisure, and generally in real-life, everyday

contexts and situations (Brookfield, 1984; de Carteret, 2008; Foley, 1993; Knowles, 1950;

Livingstone, 1998; MacKerarcher, 2010; Plumb, 2005). Livingstone's (1998, 1999) research on

informal learning in Canada provides a rare examination of community volunteering and

learning. On average volunteers spend seven hours a week volunteering (Stowe, 2013) of this on

average four hours are volunteer related informal learning (Livingstone, 1998, 1999; Stowe, 2013). Furthermore, Susan Stowe points out "those who volunteer spend more time per week in informal learning activities than any other sphere" (2013, pg. 52). This learning may focus on interpersonal and communication skills, as well as learning about social issues and managerial/organisation skills. Learning situated within these everyday contexts is negotiated within socio-cultural settings, such as the homeplace, neighbourhood, dances, markets, church, grassroots-organisations, or workplace, and results in the development of an unfolding, dialectical indigenous knowledge (Brookfield, 1984; de Carteret, 2008; Foley, 1993, 1999; Gouthro, 2000; Gouthro and Plumb, 2003; Knowles, 1950; Lave and Wenger, 2006; Livingstone, 1999; Plumb, 2008). Patricia Gouthro and Donovan Plumb (2003) refer to this developing dialectical indigenous knowledge as 'indigenous learning' —"a deeply important and pervasive learning process that lies at the very crux of human uniqueness" (n.p.). Thus, it is to learning itself where our attention must go.

Learning is a natural, dialectical, interactive, constructive and transformative process of making sense and meaning of our life experiences (MacKerarcher, 2010). Dorothy MacKerarcher (2010) describes learning as:

> A process of making sense of life's experiences and giving meaning to whatever 'sense' is made; using these meanings in thinking, solving problems, and making choices and decisions; and acting in ways that are congruent with these choices and decisions as a means of obtaining feedback to confirm or disconfirm meanings and choices. Learning results in relatively permanent changes not only in meanings and behaviours but also in the ways one goes about making sense, making meaning and thinking, making choices, and acting. (p. 8)

Learning is dialectical as we make meaning with our environment or context and other persons and are influenced "through the ways in which power and control are distributed among the persons who are interacting" (Mackeracher, 2010, p. 8). Learning is constructive as we construct

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meaning of our world as we experience it (Mackeracher, 2010; Mezirow, 1991, 1993). MacKerarcher (2010) writes "the meanings that we make of our world assist us in explaining the past, predicting the future, and managing the present. In other words, we are all theorists developing our own ontologies based on our own experiences and meanings to understand how the world works" (p. 9). In learning we create new or modified meanings which validate, recreate or challenge existing meanings (MacKerarcher, 2010; Mezirow, 1991, 1993). Learning is contextual and situated, as adults "live in contexts where they must apply what they have learned in practical situations" (MacKerarcher, 2010, p. 14). Furthermore, what is learned is unique to each individual, although individuals live in communities of practice.

Drawing from the field of cultural psychology, Plumb (2005) explores the concept of cultural learning as an act of social participation in which the daily negotiation and renegotiation of meaning within communities of practice create "new understandings that become the basis for coordinated action (practices), senses of self (identities), and senses of belonging (community)" (p. 5). Plumb goes on to write, "all these unfolding attributes of intersubjectivity (meaning, practice, identity, and community) become the basis for subsequent moments of learning" (p. 5). As communities of practice learn by negotiating and renegotiating meaning they develop knowledge specific to their group (Plumb, 2005; Lave and Wenger, 2006; Wenger, 1998).

Within their own communities rural women negotiate meaning based on the existing and changing meanings within their communities of practice. Often people, and, here, rural women, are engaged in several communities of practice simultaneously, for example, family, work, church, school, neighbourhood, and farm. Participating in multiple communities of practices creates a "meshwork of interconnected communities of practice" (Plumb, 2005, p. 6) that leads to knowledge and meanings moving across the boundaries:

> Meaning can flow in this meshwork only through learning processes that create and recreate common understandings. Knowledge, in this view, is not an object that can be transmitted from one human brain to the next. Rather, knowledge is a state of knowing that is culturally learned in an intersubjective process of negotiating meaning. (Plumb, 2005, p. 6)

Communities of practice are dynamic and in constant contact with other communities of practice, as people and ideas move among communities of practice throughout their days and lives (Plumb, 2005; Wenger, 1998). At the same time, they are influenced by greater socio-economic and political events and forces, such as globalization, conservatism, and the women's movement, to name some examples, as participants negotiate meaning from these events within their communities of practice.

A second consideration of learning examined by Plumb (2008) potentially relevant to women's community involvement and focuses on situated learning is 'learning as dwelling' (Heidegger as cited in Plumb, 2008):

> Rather than positing humans as isolated subjects who can conceive of the world prior to acting upon it, the dwelling perspective suggests that, from the outset, humans are inextricably entwined in the processes of reality. Learning for dwellers is not a process of incorporating external knowledge into their minds. Rather, learning is best conceived as a process through which learners forever weave themselves into the fabric of their natural, social and cultural worlds. (p. 62).

Learning as dwelling sees learning as much more than a cognitive process; it is a sensual and intimate learning, connected to our being-in, dwelling intersubjectively in our natural world, from which grows a sense of social agency. From this learning "our capacities for social agency arise from, extend, but never abandon our more pervasive human power for learning as dwelling" (Plumb, 2008, p. 63).

In regards to learning and societal issues, Plumb argues that learning as dwelling is a frame upon which to perceive how by connecting our experiences with those with similar

experiences we can develop capabilities to develop social structures to address our common

concerns:

> The great advantage of drawing on the notion of learning as dwelling, however, is that it enables us to understand how, through interlacing our embodied practices with those of other people, we acquire capacities for intersubjective agency that enable us to weave broad social structures capable of addressing even the most terrible of circumstances. (Plumb, 2008, p. 77)

Considering learning not only as a cognitive experience yet also as an embodied experience like

dwelling within the socio-cultural, political, and natural world in which we live provides an

opportunity to examine how dwelling conjures nuanced ways of making meaning and learning

about the world as we enter into it - in particular through community involvement and

volunteering.

Learning is a natural, dialectical, constructive, and transformative process of making

meaning and understanding of the everyday and the world in order to give meaning to our

experiences (Gouthro and Plumb, 2003; MacKerarcher, 2010; Mezirow, 1991). Learning creates

and recreates our understandings that inform our decision-making. Learning is situated within

the contexts of the learners—their lives. While learning is unique to each individual, learners

exist and participate in communities of practice in which learners negotiate meaning and give

meaning to ordinary and extraordinary events, questions and concerns (Plumb, 2005; Wenger,

1998). Learning is more than a cognitive process; it is an embodied and sensuous experience of

weaving ourselves into the world, building intersubjectivity and agency to address problems

(Plumb, 2008).

Women's learning

Women's learning theorists acknowledge and explore how socio-cultural beliefs and practices in our everyday lives inform women's learning, and how gender factors into women's lifelong learning biographies and the knowledge women pass on and create (Gouthro, 2000, 2005, 2009; Hayes and Flannery, 2000; Tisdell, 1998). The intention is "to understand and value women's learning in its own right" (Hayes and Flannery, 2000, p. 9) recognizing the diversity and similarities across ethnicity, class, age, and race in women's lives and learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Golderger, and Tarule, 1986). Critical analysis of the patriarchal system and power that continue to silence and marginalize women's voices contributes to building understanding of gendered learning cultures and knowledges (English and Irving, 2007; Gouthro, 2000; Hart, 1990, 2002; Hayes and Flannery, 2000; hooks, 1994, 2003; Martin, 2000; Sachs, 1996). As well, women's learning research analyzes some of the challenges women might face to access and participate in learning (Gouthro, 2002, 2004, 2005; Martin, 2000), such as domestic violence (Horsman, 2005) and obligations in the homeplace and workplace (Gouthro, 2004; Hart, 2002).

For many women the homeplace is a significant space for learning community-building and activism (Bookman and Morgen, 1988; Bays, 1998; Chovenac, 2006; Dominelli, 2006; Feldman, et al., 1998; Gouthro, 2000, 2009b; Krauss, 1998; Naples, 1991, 1992; Seitz, 1998). The homeplace is the first site of learning and negotiating values, morals, identity, and beliefs (Gouthro, 2000) and alternative values, such as "life-over-profit" (Hart, as cited in Gouthro, 2000). Learning that takes place in the homeplace has an important effect on empowering and silencing women (Belenky, et al. 1986; Gouthro, 2000; Hayes and Flannery, 2000).

Women's learning is often discredited despite its importance for women, families, and communities (Andruske, 2000; Foley, 1993; Gouthro, 2000; Gouthro and Plumb, 2003; Hart,

2002; Hayes and Flannery, 2000). What is often dismissed as everyday routines, challenges, and responses can be significant critical learning and political acts (Dominelli, 2006). By collectively and individually analyzing and reflecting on their everyday lives, being nosy, noticing things and asking questions, women raise issues and connect their personal circumstances to collective experiences and negotiate shared critical knowledge (Bookman and Morgen, 1988; Jetter *et al.*, 1997; Krauss, 1993, 1998; Naples, 1998; Orleck, 1997a, 1997b; Seitz, 1998). Using their own subjective and situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Sachs, 1996), women involved in their communities often challenge the public-private dichotomy and push various environmental, social, economic, gender, cultural and political issues to the fore while exposing the limits of the dominant patriarchal paradigm (Dominelli, 2006; Jetter, et al., 1997; Krauss, 1993, 1998; Naples, 1998a, 1998b; Reinharz, 1983; Rodrigues, 1998; Sachs, 1996; Sacks, 1988, 1993; Taylor, 1997; Wine and Ristock, 1991). Thus, they challenge preconceived ideas of legitimate knowledge and learning to include learning within the homeplace and personal experiences (Gouthro, 2009a; Hayes and Flannery, 2000; Hart, 2002; Naples, 1998b).

Adult education, community development, and social movement learning

> Ideas have hands and feet. They'll do work for you. You have to give the
> people ideas. Then they'll blow the roof off!
> —*Father Jimmy Tompkins (Lotz and Welton, 1997, p. 11)*

Adult education has a long historical connection to social, political, and economic transformation, community development, social and political movements, democracy, and peacebuilding in Canada and around the world (Corbett, 1950; English, 2009; Friesen, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 1999; Gustavsson, n.d.; Kidd, 1950; Lotz and Welton, 1997; Nesbitt, 2011; Tøsse, 2009; Welton, 1991, 1993, 2005). As Canadian adult educator J. Roby Kidd (1950) noted at the

1949 UNESCO gathering on Adult Education in Elsinore, Denmark, all representatives were there "to consider the part adult education can play in awakening in the consciousness of adults an awareness of personal responsibility and of intellectual and moral fellowship with the whole of [hu]mankind" (p. XI). Looking specifically at Canada, Leona English (2009) points out, "the roots of adult education in Canada are socialist oriented and specifically grounded in community development concerns" (p. 83). The Antigonish Movement (English, 2009; Lotz and Welton, 1997; Welton, 2005), Women's Institutes (English, 2009; Welton, 2005), Workers Education Associations (English, 2009), National Farm Radio Forum (English, 2009; McKenzie, 1950), the Citizens Forum (English, 2009; Manitoba Royal Commission on Adult Education, 1947; Wilson, 1950) and Agricultural Societies (Giffen, 2004; Petkau and Petkau, 1982) are only a few of many examples of the many early Canadian adult education initiatives and organisations focused on community development through social change that emphasized engaging with ideas and change through learning and teaching. As Michael Welton (1995) argues, grassroots organisations such as farm movements and women's organisations can be considered significant sites of community development. For many within adult education community development is practically synonymous with social movements - sometimes referred to as collective action (Nesbitt, 2011).

In 1945, when James Giffen embarked on the task of conducting The Royal Commission on Adult Education in Manitoba commissioned by Premier Garson his mandate was to "consider how adults in Manitoba developed their skills and understanding of the world" (Giffen, 2004, p. 201). The Commission's findings highlight significant initiatives in rural Manitoba, ranging from formal - the work of University extension programs (in particular the University of Manitoba) and Agricultural Colleges, to informal - agricultural societies, cooperative movements, Women's

Institutes, music and drama clubs, ladies mission-aid societies, and other community service

organisations (Giffen, 2004). What these historical examples have in common is that someone

recognized a need in their community and saw a way to address that need that involved adult

community education and learning.

Social movement learning

Social movements are significant learning sites (Brookfield, 1987; Chovenac, 2006;

Drew, 2014; Foley, 1999; Grayson, 2011; Holford, 1995; Welton, 1993). Writing within the field

of adult education Budd Hall and Thomas Turray (2006) put forward the following definition of

social movements:

> Social movements are universally understood by political scientists,
> sociologists and specific social movement scholars as powerful instruments
> of social, institutional and political change. Social movements, we are told,
> are engines of change. Social movements, in all their diversity, all their
> range of political intention and all their locations, are about women and men
> and sometimes girls and boys working together to make a change in the
> communities, the regions, the nations or the worlds they inhabit. (p. 5)

Notably, Hall, and Turray's (2006) description does not limit social movements to nonviolent

action movements or any particular political intention, but rather recognizes the diversity among

social movements. Similar in conception to the term social movements is social action (Duguid,

Mundel and Schurugensky, 2013). Their emphasis is on collective change-making which can

happen anywhere from the local to the global level.

Eyerman and Jamison (1991, as cited in Holford, 1995) identify a social movement as "a

socially constructive force, as a fundamental determinant of human knowledge" (p. 101), in

essence a "cognitive praxis" (p. 101), in which people develop new knowledge through the

practice of being and interacting with social movements. Social movement learning is a concept

and process referring to the learning by those who are involved in a movement (internal dimension) and the learning by those not in the movement, yet that happens as a result of the movement (external dimension) (Duguid, Mundel, and Schrugurensky, 2007; Hall and Clover, 2005; Hall and Turray, 2006). To begin with the latter, the external dimension of social movement learning is the learning by those not involved, directly or otherwise, in the movement—as "social movements impact learning in broader society" (Hall and Turray, 2006, p. 7). Hall and Turray (2006) give the example of how Canadian men learned about gender and power as a result of the women's movement, "Our mothers, partners, daughters and friends created a learning environment where we *learned* in experiential ways as we negotiate/d our daily lives" (emphasis in the original, p. 7). Many social movements engage in raising awareness of their cause among the general public, specific communities - target groups, and potential allies.

The internal learning dimension is often informal, incidental, and rooted in action (Duguid, Mundel, and Schugurensky, 2007, 2013; Foley, 1999; Hall and Turray, 2006). As well, intentional learning takes place within social movements as a result of their educational activities—for example, in order for members of a social movement to inform and educate others—including the public, stakeholders, potential allies, and adversaries about their issue, purpose, or goals, they must first learn about these issues and best practices themselves— statistics, data, and arguments for and against, for example. The need to inform others is a catalyst for learning (Hall and Turray, 2006). Members of social movements, in particular active members, must learn the organisational and educational processes of the particular social movement in which they are involved (Hall and Turray, 2006). Through their experiences activists learn how to plan and implement successful actions or movements (Foley, 1993), as

well as potential transformative experiences, including conscientization (Freire, 1999) and politicization (Bookman and Morgen, 1988; Krauss, 1998; Naples, 1998a).

Writing about social action and learning, Griff Foley (1999) notes, "some of the most powerful learning occurs as people struggle against oppression, as they struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it" (p. 1-2). Fiona Duguid, Karsten Mundel, and Daniel Schurugensky (2007) concur with Foley, "the learning that takes place in social action is more effective and relevant than the learning that occurs in schools" (p. 169). The learning that takes place in social action is mostly informal and tacit, rooted in action and seldom identified as learning (Duguid, Mundel and Schurugensky, 2007, 2013; Foley, 1999; Hall and Turray, 2006). Social movement participants "learn as they act" writes Lara Drew (2014, p. 84) "inherently making social movements sites of learning that mobilize change" (p. 84). Stating the findings of her research on women's social movement learning and adult education in Chile Donna Chovenac (2006) writes.

> Learning and education are *organically* integrated into social movements. In other words, learning and education are occurring continuously and spontaneously within the social movement. Adult educators (whether identified as such or not) are an *inherent* part of social movements and they are embedded *naturally* within the movement. (p. 42)

Expanding on Chovenac's (2006) description of learning imbedded in social movements, Drew (2014) points out that activists' learning in activism "underpin activists' practices" (p. 84). Activism in social movements engages a process of learning-by-doing (Chovenac, 2006; Drew, 2014; Foley, 1999).

Social movements can lead to significant and often transformative learning experiences for organizers, volunteers, and communities (Clover and Hall, 2000; Drew, 2014; Duguid, Marsten, and Schurgurensky, 2007; Foley, 1993, 1999; Gouthro, 2009; Grayson, 2011; Hall and Turray, 2006; Hart, 1990; Holford, 1995; Kilgore, 1999; Kovan and Dirkx, 2003; Krauss, 1998;

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Naples, 1998a, 1998b; Rodrigues, 1998; Seitz, 1998). The processes of making change—whether social, political, or economic—requires significant learning on the part of those involved to develop new skills and knowledge on activism, advocacy, organizing, education, facilitation, conflict management and resolution, economic and political processes and systems, their communities, others individuals, and themselves (Brookfield, 1984; Drew, 2014; Duguid, et al., 2007; Foley, 1993; Gouthro, 2009; Hall and Turray, 2006; Holford, 1995; Kovan and Dirkx, 2003). Transformative learning more broadly considered draws on experience, critical reflection, and the dialogical processes of learning in order to create and recreate meaning of personal and social experiences within our socio-economic, political, and cultural systems (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 1991, 1993; Preskill and Brookfield, 2009).

The homeplace is a significant site of social movement learning, in particular acquiring consciousness of the philosophies, values, and ideals that inform individual and collective knowledge of fairness, justice, rights, and responsibilities, as well as skills and possibilities for action (Chovenac, 2006). This is particularly true for early learning as children observe the parents, family members, and other significant adults in their lives, and are socialized into a culture of political and social activism (Chovenac, 2006; King and Merleman, 1986). Writing about her research on women's activism in northern Chile during the dictatorship, Chovenac (2006) provides the following example:

> Most women were raised in families and communities that espoused leftist philosophies and were exposed early to socialist or communist political parties. For other women, there was early faith-based learning of values related to fairness, dignity, and community. The idea of 'acquiring' critical consciousness suggests a process of passively absorbing elements (e.g., values, philosophies) from the external social structures in which one is embedded (e.g., family, community). While not wholly conscious at the time, these early experiences establish the predisposition for developing a more robust critical consciousness in the future. (p. 39)

Lifelong learning, in particular early learning, in the homeplace is a major factor in social movement learning.

Chovenac (2006) distinguishes between acquiring critical consciousness and taking critical consciousness, of which the former is described in the example above. As agents making an 'intentional commitment' (Chovenac, 2006, p. 39) to act upon their acquired critical consciousness, these activists, volunteers, participants—take their consciousness into themselves—"Once engaged, this consciousness becomes internalized and subjectified—it is taken into oneself" (Chovenac, 2006, p. 39). Over time, activists learn to nurture and develop their critical consciousness—which is dynamic, not static, in response to new knowledge and experiences (Chovenac, 2006). In other words, they engage in a critical transformative learning (Chovenanc, 2006).

Reflection, in particular critical reflection and praxis, appear repeatedly in the discourse of social movement learning. While numerous writers point out that typically activists do not have time to reflect on their action (Duguid, Mundel, and Schurugensky, 2007; Foley, 1993, 1999; Hall and Turray, 2006), reflective praxis is paramount to sustain effective social movements (Chovenac, 2006) informed by the reflection-action dialectic (Chovenac, 2006; Freire, 2000). Critical reflection is crucial for the formation of ideologies proposes Chovenac (2006). Participants in social movements must be able to analyze the conditions of their lives and the systems that spurn their motivations for social action. At the same time, they must be able to imagine alternatives and act on their ideas. Chovenac (2006) compares her analysis to Lange's (as cited in Chovenac, 2006) distinction in critical transformative learning between 'pedagogy of critique' and 'pedagogy of hope.' The former being a critical pedagogy of what is, the latter a critical pedagogy of what could be.

Social movement learning theory examines the dialectical, transformative, and practical learning and teaching knowledge and practices of those involved in and affected by social movements, broadly defined. Social movement learning happens both internal and external to the social movement. While much of the internal dimension of learning is tacit and experiential, intentional learning also takes place. Learning in social movements is significant for developing ideas and values, as well as knowledge of structures and systems of power and agency, as well as hope to imagine that a better way is possible. The literature did not explicitly examine how social movement learning may be gendered, despite acknowledging how gender roles—and, in particular, women's roles—inform and motivate involvement. In relation to peace studies and peacebuilding, social movement learning can provide insights into peace movements, yet also more broadly within peace-building—though this is not significantly examined in the literature.

Peace Education

Within the field of adult education, more theorists and practitioners are connecting adult education's connections to social justice and community development, particularly in Canada, with peacebuilding and peace education (English and Turray, 2008; English, 2009; Neustaeter, 2007; O'Sullivan, 1999; Spencer, 2007). Peace education, although perhaps not always identified as such, has been in practice in academic and community spaces for a long time. Peace education broadly defined is the peace knowledge and practices, cultures of teaching and learning, inherent in our everyday lives through our on-going problem-solving, conflict resolution and social justice knowledge, and our analysis of conflict, power, gender, race, class, violence, and war in regards to peace (Boulding, 1988, 2000; Fisk and Schellenberg, 2000; Reardon, 1988). Leonisa Ardizonne (2001) adds as a "multi-disciplinary, international field, peace education calls for

long-term responses to conflict on the national, international and interpersonal levels in order to create more just and sustainable futures" (p. 18). Peace education also includes human rights, development, international, environmental, and conflict resolution education (Harris and Morrison, 2003). While much has been written about peace education within the school setting and curriculum, from primary to tertiary levels (Bar-Tal, 2002; English and Turray, 2008; Fisk, 2000; Harris and Howlett, 2011; Harris and Morrison, 2003), peace education at the grassroots represents a less explored significant community-based learning and teaching culture (for example see Call-Cummings and Abrikian, 2013; Otero, 2013), which manifests a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding through learning and teaching (Harris, 2013).

Larry Fisk's (2000) three categories of peace education for formal learning—education about peace, education for peace, and peace through education apply more broadly to learning peace no matter what context (Harris and Morrison, 2003; Harris, 2013). Peace education is both general and specific (Bar-Tal, 2002). Daniel Bar-Tal (2002) observed the common goal and focus of peace education is to "make the world a better, more humane place" (p. 28). Concurrently, peace education manifests itself specifically to the local context, issues, emphasis, cultures, and practice were it is happening, as Bar-Tal (2002) explains "the nature of peace education is dictated by the issues that preoccupy a specific society, because it has to be perceived as relevant, functional and reliable to societal needs, goals and concerns" (29).

Peace education is also inherently about engaging in critical analysis, visioning and problem-solving to identify problems, develop and achieve more peaceful solutions and possibilities (Ardizonne, 2001; Reardon, 1988). A relevant component of peace education for this particular study is the informal learning for peace growing out of relationships encouraging moral, humanist, and critical learning, as well as caring and empathy (Eisler, 2004; Eisler and

Miller, 2004; Fisk, 2000; Harris and Morrsion, 2003; Neustaeter, 2013; Noddings, 2003; Szalivitz and Perry, 2010). This tangent draws from the Culture of Peace literature (Eisler, 2004; Groff and Smoker, n.d.), which explores the learning and teaching which enhance our abilities to live together peacefully in healthy relationships supporting individual and collective wellbeing (Neustaeter, 2013).

Peace knowledge, learning, and teaching already exist and are present and active in our relationships and societies. However, these are not always recognized as such; "it is important to validate and teach the peace knowledge that exists" (Neustaeter, 2013, p. 189). As Ian Harris and Mary Lee Morrison (2003) put it:

> Peace education draws from people their instincts to live peacefully with others and emphasizes peaceful values upon which society should be based. Peace education attempts to help people understand the root causes of violent events in their lives. (p. 29)

Nuanced to its locality, peace education seeks to reflect the concerns, issues, practices, values, and cultures of where it is taking place, it is situated learning (Bar-Tal, 2002). As well, it can be considered embodied learning as dwelling (Plumb, 2008) within communities of practice (Plumb, 2005). Examinations of learning peace at the grassroots within social movements has yet to be explicitly told and examined from a culture of peace learning and teaching perspective.

CONCLUSION

Beginning with the connective tissue of the everyday, this chapter examined how time, routines and habits, and their gendered nature, are imbedded in and inform our 'eternal yesterday'. Within the everyday humans develop their sense of ontological security and affective relationships which sustain their humanity against the ordinary and extraordinary, the calm and the chaos. Everyone lives the ordinary; it is a shared commonness across humanity (Felski,

2000). Embedded within the everyday are the rituals and traditions which sustain and mark the cycles and seasons of life through which we negotiate meaning, culture, and identity (McGregor, 2012).

The ordinary and informal nature of learning consigns the learning that happens within the everyday and outside the distinctions of formal and non-formal learning contexts as less valuable. Informal learning is inclusive (practiced by the majority of adults) and significant to how adults negotiate meaning and make sense of their lives in the world. MacKerarcher (2010) defines learning as "a process of making sense" (p. 8) of our experiences, information, and giving meaning to that around us. Learning is dialectical. Learning is also gendered and women's learning theory explores how women's learning experiences and 'making sense' is informed by their gendered experiences within the structures and systems influencing their lives, such as patriarchy and militarism. A significant site of learning for women is in the homeplace.

Historically and presently (though some argue it is currently less relevant) adult education in Canada and around the globe has been significant in community development, social movements, and social change. Many peace building and community development initiatives have cultures and practices of learning and teaching. What is common among many these initiatives is that at some point a person or people in a community identified a need and their response involved learning and teaching.

The more focused theory of social movement learning explores learning by those within social movements and affected by social movements. This particular analysis focused on learning within social movements, which when considering Hall and Turray's (2006) definition of social movement could include community development and peacebuilding. Social movement learning by those in social movements includes critical reflection, and the reflection/action

dialectic. Drawing attention to the peace knowledges and practices that already exists along with

moral, humanist, and critical thinking opens possibilities for considering links between social

movement learning and peace education—or peace learning in grassroots peacebuilding.

The next chapter looks at the commonalities of development and peacebuilding to assist

in theoretically grounding this study within the delta of the tributaries of the everyday, adult

learning, community development and women's peacebuilding.

CHAPTER 4

Community Development and Peacebuilding

The numerous times women who participated in this study asked how this research connected to the field of Peace and Conflict Studies and peacebuilding in general highlights the need for greater discussion on how women's grassroots, community involvement can be considered peacebuilding. While peacebuilding itself is often linked to contexts and people who are experiencing or have experienced physical violence or war or both, peace, as defined in this study, broadens this discussion to address conflict and cultural and structural violence through holistic and collaborative processes, nonviolence, and building social justice for all in all communities, every day.

Since much of the peace and women in peacebuilding literature focuses on conflict, violence and war settings—contexts not explicitly relevant to this study, community development literature, specifically women and gender and development, was incorporated. This partnering of women's peacebuilding and community development literature highlighted five commonalities. First, both fields began with strong western masculine voices and ideals; however, over time, women across the globe have challenged this hegemony in defining and determining development and peace ideas, assumptions and practices. Second, women are active agents of community development and peacebuilding at all levels, yet their numbers are fewest at the top (Gierycz, 1999). Third, situated understandings of development and peace are negotiated locally and historically within the everyday lives of individuals, communities, and societies, yet are also influenced by global forces such as globalization. Fourth, community development and peacebuilding are relational-dependent. Finally, volunteers are crucial to

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community development and peacebuilding, in particular at the grassroots level (United Nations Volunteers, 2011), yet recognition of the significance of volunteering to building communities and peace is sorely lacking in the literature of both fields. The boundaries between these categorical commonalities are porous and inter-related—for example, feminist critiques and analysis of development and peacebuilding highlight the constraints, opportunities, and challenges for women at all levels.

ALWAYS BEEN HERE

Despite the fact that women have always been a part of communities and societies, often representing around half of the population, their experiences, knowledges, and practices of development and peacebuilding were ignored by development and peace theorists and researchers (Mazurana and McKay, 1999). Feminist theorists and researchers of development and peace challenge male-dominated, patriarchal ideologies that essentially write women out and fight to recreate discourses to account for women and gender. Feminist analysis and discourses of development and peacebuilding focus on the effects of these ideologies and activities on women as well as women's contributions to and challenges in development and peacebuilding (Boulding, 2000; Enloe, 2000b; Mazurana and McKay, 1999; McKay and Mazurana, 2001; Reardon, 1985, 1993; Rowan-Campbell, 1999; Snyder, 2009; Taylor, 2003; Visvanathan et al., 1997), including: structural (Galtung, 1969; Reardon, 1985) and cultural violence (Confortini, 2006; Galtung, 1990), as well as organized and unorganized violence (Brock-Utne, 1989). A feminist concept of peace requires the absence of all violence and the presence of caring, interdependence and social justice. Peace, as a dynamic and transformative process, is responding to conflict in holistic, collaborative and nonviolent ways in order to foster

relationships and understanding (Brock-Utne, 1989; Galtung, 1969; Harris and Morrison, 2003; Noddings, 2008; Reardon, 1990, 1993, 1996; Snyder, 2008; Vellacott, 2000). Applying a feminist concept of peace to women's community involvement expands the scope of peacebuilding to consider women's community work in non-war contexts, for example the community involvement of the rural women who participated in this study.

A critical feminist analysis of development, including the gendered effects of modernization and globalization, highlights the importance of understanding how economic and political development affects women (Cornwall, Harrison, Whitehead, 2007; Saunders, 2002; Visvanathan, Duggan, Nisonoff, and Wiegersma, 1997). The gendered nature of economic and caring labour; informal and formal economies; modernization and globalization; poverty; and political participation are all significant issues addressed in the field of women and development (Antrobus, 2004; Rai, 2008; Taylor, 2009). While much of this analysis is dedicated to the developing or third world, these same issues are also persistent in and pertinent to countries such as Canada (Burns, Bruce and Marlin, 2009; Lochhead and Scott, 2000). Women's poverty cannot be considered a gender or race only issue, but also considered within a bigger picture of economic, political and socio-cultural structures (Antrobus, 1995; Henry-Lee, 2005; LaFont, 2000; Lochhead and Scott, 2000; Mullings, 1999, 2009) grounded in "a gender ideology which is deeply and fundamentally exploitative of women's time, labour, and sexuality" (Antrobus, 1989, pp. 19).

Women's lives have been implicated by violences and challenges of development in ways that are unique to their gendered experiences within their everyday lives through war, political, cultural, racial, and economic discrimination and injustice at the local to global levels.

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Research, analysis, literature, and practice in peacebuilding and development now give greater attention (than before) to women's experiences, and how peace and development are gendered.

WOMEN AGENTS

The patriarchal status quo that focuses on the political 'hard issues' like job creation and economic bolstering rather than the 'soft issues' associated with women renders women's community activism invisible (Dominelli, 1995). Women's work for change at the community level represents women's "politics by another means" (Rankin, 2002). Women continue to take on tremendous challenges by fighting issues relevant to creating a better living for their children, communities, and themselves (Naples, 1998b). Community participation writes Naomi Abrahams (1996) "is one avenue through which women engage in political and service work for the betterment of themselves, their families, and their communities" (p. 768). Women often perform personal acts of activism not out of political motivation, yet out of their firmly held belief that they were the right thing to do (Childers, 1997).

Women's community participation spans across a diverse array of politics and ideologies including from rightist to leftist political ideologies, to social justice and equality to racist activism. Women do not represent a unified voice on socio-cultural, economic or political issues, rather their positions can be diverse and divisive as highlighted by the women involved with the feminist and anti-feminist movements, and pro-life or pro-choice movements. Kathleen Blee's (1996, 2004; 2005) research on women in racism movements identifies women's roles in racist movements, including neo-Nazis, anti-Semitic and white supremacist groups, and racial terrorism. This study on women in South-Central Manitoba focuses on women's community participation for peace.

Considering the spectrum of political involvement that spans from unofficial local politics to international official politics (Ranking and Vickers, 1998), many women are involved in unofficial politics and the majority of women prefer non-formal political participation (Vickers, 1988; Rankin, 2002). The dominant state-centric citizenship discourse that favours formal political participation completely misses and systematically ignores women's political culture (Flammang, 1997; Jagger, 2005). Expanding the concept of citizenship to also include non-formal and unofficial political activities would rewrite critical democratic concepts, such as citizenship and participation, to include women's political culture that predates women's right to vote and participate in formal politics (Vickers, 1988).

Women continue to actively build peace and contribute to the development of humanity and communities at the local, regional, national, and international levels (Anderlini, 2000, 2007; Antrobus, 2004; Boulding, 1995, 2000; Vellacott, 1993). Women's efforts are often "personal, interpersonal, creative and political" (McKay and Mazurana, 2001, p. 6). Although many women identify and are active in local, national, or international peace initiatives, women active in grassroots community development and peacebuilding may not identify their activities with peace although their work reflects a feminist definition of peace (Boulding, 1995), for example the definition given above.

Nancy Chodorow (1978), Betty Reardon (1985), Linda Forcey (1994), and Christine Sylvester (1995) note how the dominant gender system of patriarchy typically contrives women's identity as passive mother. This image of woman de-legitimizes the multiplicity of diverse agentic roles women take on including primary income earner, mother, daughter, teacher, nurturer, caregivers, nurse/doctor, factory worker, solider/combatant, military supporter, grieving mother, human rights, community development worker, and peace activist (Snyder, 2009).

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Women's roles as homemakers and caregivers and, in particular, mothers not only motivate women to take risks to defend their families, but it can give them an advantage as they appropriate their caregiver role into a position of power and authority, particularly in the face of social, economic, political, or environmental injustice (Abrahams, 1996; Bookman and Morgan, 1988; Krauss, 1998; Naples, 1998a).

Women's peacebuilding and community activism is often identified as an extension of women's roles as mothers (Collins, 2000; Forcey, 1991, 1994; Gouthro, 2009Hart, 2002; Krauss, 1993, 1998; Naples, 1998b; Pankhurst, 2006; Reardon, 1993; Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). Women activists often self-identify as "women, mothers, sisters, daughters, and grandmothers" (Anderlini, 2007, p. 20). For many women it is their roles as mothers that led them to participate in peacebuilding and community development, which in turn forced them to redefine their ideas of mother beyond their families to include their communities (Krauss, 1998). The activism by these mothers-in-communities highlights the significant yet unrecognized work of women as community mothers ensuring the betterment of their communities (Dominelli, 2006; Naples, 1998a, 1998b).

Women's involvement in peacebuilding is often associated with the maternal and caring attributes socially and culturally ascribed to women, particularly mothers, and ideals of who a mother is and what she should do in families and society (Chodorow, 1978; Forcey, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Ruddick, 1989; Sylvester, 1995). Dominelli (2006) writes "women continue to mobilize and be mobilized around caring responsibilities" (p. 82), including affordable and accessible housing, childcare and healthcare, as well as schools, recreation, and jobs. Krauss (1998) suggests that women's roles as homemakers and caregivers can give them an advantage in that they could appropriate their role as caregivers into a position of power through activism

by using their authority as mothers. The women involved in community toxic waste issues

Krauss studied (1993, 1998), redefined the traditional role of mother to validate their activism:

> The traditional role of mother, of protector of the family and community,
> served to empower these activists on a number of levels. From the
> beginning, their view of this role provided the motivation for women to take
> risks in defense of their families and overcome their fear of participating in
> the public sphere. (p. 140)

By redefining their concept of mothers, and to find motivation within their idea of mothers, these

women demonstrate the empowering potential of women's roles, knowledge, and expertise.

This act of renaming signifies a taking-back and reclaiming a concept that has been used

to dismiss or dominate into a concept to empower and give authority to one's identity, reasoning,

and actions. This internal renaming within and among the women themselves parallels an

external shift within society as women's public actions challenge religious, social, and cultural

beliefs about women's traditional roles in family and society. "In the process, women have

subverted their images as wives and mothers and shifted them towards becoming iconic

community builders" (Dominelli, 206). For many women, conflict provides an opportunity to

empower women to create new meanings and ways of being regarding gender relations (Bop,

2001; Snyder, 2009) and challenge deeply held gendered systems (Kraus, 1993; Snyder, 2011).

Using "their informal powers to express their political will" (Forcey, 1991, p. 344) women

engage in unofficial and official politics in situations of injustice, conflict, violence and war

(Anderlini, 2007; Cockburn, 1998, 2007; Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002).

Writing on women's peacebuilding often reflects the work of women in war zones and

intractable conflicts (Afshar and Eade, 2004; Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen, 2001; Rehn and

Sirleaf, 2002; Snyder, 2008). Women's community-building and activism in non-war contexts

focuses on structural and cultural violence, such as poverty, sexism, and racism (Bookman and

Morgan, 1988; Jetter, et al., 1997; Naples, 1998a; Wine and Ristock, 1991), and are typically not included in the field of women's peacebuilding, despite the reality that their work contributes to building peace.

Canada's "long, strong tradition of community action and local initiative" (Lotz, 1997; p. 15) includes many significant early Indigenous women's initiatives. Community-building through community involvement and volunteering was a tradition women carried over from their homelands when they settled in their new land (Epp, 2008; Redekopp, 1996; Weir, 2007; Welton, 1995). Women's community-building comes from an experienced or perceived need and the desire to do something about it (Dominelli, 2006; Naples, 1992, 1998). Dominelli (1995) aptly writes "without women's work in the community, life as we know it could not exist" (p. 133).

Across and within disciplines, such as Sociology, Political Science, Peace and Conflict Studies, and Adult Education, the phenomenon of women engaged in community activism and advocacy has different names. These names include grassroots activism (Bookman and Morgen, 1988; Naples, 1998b), community-based activism (Dominelli, 2006; Howe, 1998; Ibrahim and Jenner, 1998; Naples, 1998a; Vickers, 1988), activist mothering (Hart, 2002; Naples, 1992, 1998a), neighbourhood activism (Susser, 1988), community participation (Abrahams, 1996), women's political culture and practice (Flammang, 1997; Jaggar, 2005; Kaplan, 1990; Rankin, 2002; Rankin and Vickers, 1998), women's peacebuilding (Cockburn, 1998, 2007; El-Bushra, 2007; Mazurana and McKay, 1999; McKay and Mazurana, 2001; Snyder, 2008, 2009), and, active citizenship (Gouthro, 2009a). Settee (2011) uses the term 'persistence' to describe Indigenous women's strength that "drives women to survive, flourish and work for change within their communities" (p. 3). She goes on to write that "women are the unsung heroes of

their communities, often using minimal resources to challenge oppressive structures and to create powerful alternatives in the arts, in education, and in the workplace" (p. 3).

Naples' (1992, 1998b) term 'activist mothering' challenges the separation of motherwork and activism to consider organizing and activism as a component of mothering and community caregiving. Activist mothering is applied to all women whose activism comes from their being community caregivers, community mothers, and othermothers (Hart, 2002; Naples, 1992, 1998b) and expands the influence of the concept of mother to include the community and women's organizing and activism culture, knowledge, and practices.

Reflecting both the complications of naming everyday practices and the dismissal of women's work, Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997) referred to women's community leadership, advocacy, and activism as "a tradition that has no name" (p. 176). The plethora of synonyms diffuses the significance of women's community work, and hinders the potential of bringing women's action into a critical, powerful fulcrum for positive and transformative social and political change.

Names given to these actors support, perpetuate and maintain a collective identity, yet they also are heavy with social and cultural value (Bobel, 2007). For example, as a label 'activist' can be political, confrontational and exclusive. Examinations of women's peacebuilding, in particular peace movements, use the term activist which for various reasons may not be how some women self-identify as they do not associate themselves with the image of activist in society (Bobel, 2007). Although it was not identified in the reviewed literature, certain labels may be isolating, such as activist, and could harm women's cause and threaten relations with valued stakeholders. As well, many people involved in peacebuilding or community development may not associate themselves with these activities because, for various reasons,

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they do not identify with the labels placed on the practitioners. It is important to consider how naming and identifying with these labels is gendered within the contexts in which people are actively pursuing community development and peacebuilding. When their stories are told to a broader audience, the storyteller (researcher, etc.) must be cognizant of the implications of the title they are giving the 'activists.'

Women continue to be active agents of community development and peacebuilding at the local level, driven by their roles as mothers, caregivers, as well as their sense of responsibility as active citizens to address the needs they identified in the communities and pursue change for individual, familial, and community wellbeing. Women's agency within community development and peacebuilding, broadly conceived, reflects many different names ranging from advocacy, peacebuilding, activist mothering, and community activism. Women involved in these activities may or may not self-identify with a label for various reasons. For example they may not identify with the label, such as activist, because they do not perceive their involvement representing the culturally defined image of activist or activist is politically isolating and threatening.

THE EVERYDAY EVERY DAY

Daily we hear about the high-level diplomacy, peace-treaty negotiations and support involving State leaders, the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and other elite institutions to build democracies and economies through western liberal peace processes (Mac Ginty, 2008; Mac Ginty and Williams, 2009). Focusing on these elite macro-level peace players and processes dismisses the everyday and local initiatives creating and recreating peace, including the knowledge and practice for peacemaking and peacebuilding (Mac Ginty, 2014).

Understanding and valuing everyday peacebuilding is significant to sustainable peacebuilding (Lederach, 1996; Mac Ginty, 2008; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2014; Senehi, 2002). However, what happens at the local everyday subaltern level of peacebuilding is much less understood (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2014). In his work on everyday peace in divided societies Roger Mac Ginty utilizes the following definition of everyday peace:

> Everyday peace refers to the routinized practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life in a deeply divided society that may suffer from ethnic or religious cleavages and be prone to episodic direct violence in addition to chronic or structural violence. It involves coping mechanisms such as the avoidance of contentious subjects in religiously or ethnically mixed company, or a constructive ambiguity whereby people conceal their identity or opinion lest they draw attention to themselves. (p. 549)

These routine practices not only include coping mechanisms which help people navigate through direct and structural violence, within the everyday there are also possibilities for community and peace building.

Women's community-building knowledge and practice is rooted in their everyday experiences and negotiated within their cultural and gendered contexts. Their efforts have a significant impact on the women, other women, their families, and communities. Women's community building experiences and knowledge highlights capacities, skills, and knowledge, what are referred to as assets or strengths (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993; Mathie and Cunningham, 2002, 2005) that are often overlooked and undervalued, such as volunteer work, mother work, and networking (MacLean, 2012, Mathie and Puntenney, 2009). The gendered nature of community-building highlights the importance of understanding the gendered nature of the dominant neo-liberal development ideologies informing economic and political development and globalization (Antrobus, 2004; Chowdry, 1995; Momsen, 2004; Taylor, 2009). The empowering and challenging experiences of the everyday are often catalysts for many women to

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become community activists in order to create fair and just change (Feldman, Stall, and Wright, 1998, p. 261) and to defend, promote, and develop their homeplace (Bookman and Morgan, 1988; Jetter, Orleck, and Taylor, 1997; Kraus, 1993; 1998; Naples, 1998a, 1998b; Seitz, 1998).

DOING IT TOGETHER

Community development and peacebuilding are both inherently collective and social phenomena, particularly at the grassroots level—they involve and, in fact, depend upon people taking action together. The following examination of community building highlights the social factors manifested within community development and peacebuilding. Community-building is the activities, practices, efforts, and policies that strengthen communities by fostering "positive connections among individuals, groups, organizations, neighborhoods, and geographic and functional communities" (Weil, 1996, p. 482) (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993; Matthie and Cunningham, 2002, 2005). Community-building can take on many different forms through many different channels (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993; McKnight and Block, 2010; Weil, 1996). These initiatives may be unique to a particular community or they may be local chapters of regional, national or international organizations (Weil, 1996). Emphasis is typically on social action, associations, locality development, and empowerment (Kretzman and McKnight, 2010; McKay and Mazurana, 2001; McKnight and Block, 2010; Pilisuk, Mcallister and Rothman, 1996; Weil, 1996). Its participatory nature highlights local people defining and analyzing community assets and problems in order to implement positive change in their communities; build relationships and mutually supportive networks; shift power; and, build a sense of belonging to a caring and abundance community (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993; McKay and Mazurana, 2001; McKnight and Block, 2010; Pilisuk et al, 1996; Weil, 1996). Community-

building involves local people seeking and implementing positive changes in policies and practices in their own communities, while nurturing empowerment, relationships, and caring communities.

Critiquing dependency on the institutions and materialism, in building individual and community wellbeing, John McKnight and Peter Block (2010) argue that the ability of individuals, neighbourhoods, and communities to create abundance, as an avenue of potential, does not come from corporations, institutions, or systems. Rather "people are discovering that satisfying possibilities for their lives are in their neighbourhood" (p. 1). Corporations, institutions, and systems are limited in what they are able to do in regards to building community wellbeing (McKnight and Block, 2010). Rather, it is up to the people to forge their own homemade ways as "there are things that only we can do as a family and a neighborhood are vital to a decent, good, satisfied life" (McKnight and Block, 2010, p. 2). Such a take on community development and peacebuilding focuses on building the social fabric and capital of a community in order to build community culture and resilience that will address community needs and resolve conflicts. Creating abundant communities involves identifying and honouring everyone's gifts, developing inclusive cultures of care, hospitality and association, and building community competence (McKnight and Block, 2010). Identifying the potential of all citizens and communities nurtures abundant communities.

Friendship, kinship, and community networks are an important resource for women in negotiating the balance of family, household, career, and personal wellbeing (Jarvis, 1999; Russell, 1999). In many instances women's networks and social relationships are an important catalyst, motivation, and support for women involved in community activism (Dominelli, 2006; Krauss, 1993, 1998; Sacks, 1993). Women's grassroots work is often carried out through

coalitions and networking (Dominelli, 2006). Networks are vital to women for contacting and connecting with other women to address their concerns, facilitate change and support them in balancing their responsibilities (Bays, 1998; Dominelli, 2006; Krauss, 1993, 1998; Reinharz, 1983; Sacks, 1993; Susser, 1988). Networking is conceptualized as a skilled process by which relationships and contacts between people or organisations are established, nurtured, and utilised for mutual benefit (Dominelli, 2006; Gilchrist, 2000).

The interdependence among women and the relationships that grow through community involvement, including volunteering and activism, play a significant role sustaining and giving meaning to the women (Connolly, 2002; Naples, 1991, 1992, Tastsoglou and Welton, 2003). Georgina Taylor (1987) and Michael Welton (1995) note that historically women's organisations played a significant role in the lives of early rural prairie women by breaking the despair of isolation that came with pioneering. As well, Helen Russell (1999), notes the importance women's networks have in supporting women through life changes and crisis. Networks, notes Russell, "moderate the psychological effects of disruptive life events" (p. 206) and create stronger supportive relationships within women's local communities. Also, Russell identifies three key elements of social support women receive through their networks: emotional, instrumental, and informational. According to Russell "women's continued responsibility for caring and domestic work tends to restrict the range of social activity they are involved in, but it does provide an opportunity to build up supportive social networks in the community" (p. 219). Women's networks provide emotional, instrumental, and informational support (Russell, 1999) for their community involvement over their lifespan.

Women create community involvement spaces which support the reality of women as mothers, labourers, wives, caregivers, and community members, for example by arranging

childcare for organizing or committee meetings and timing meetings appropriately to women's schedules such as with school hours (Dominelli, 2006; Vickers, 1988). In her study of Canadian women's political community organizing processes, Vickers writes, "they created structures and processes which made participation possible because they took into account the realities of women's lives" (p. 49). Dominelli notes how these practices highlight a feminist process and consideration for organizing that respects and responds to the everyday realities of the people involved, and seeks to create processes which value women's knowledge, build skills and relationships, and establish collaborative decision-making processes. However, Howe (1998) highlights the tendency for women to "develop networks within their own communities" (p. 239) or "racial-ethnic comfort zone" (p. 245) and only traversing boundaries of race, class, and culture "when racial-ethnic differences and power differentials are acknowledged and consciously addressed" (p. 239).

Community development and peacebuilding at the grassroots are dependent upon people coming together to collaboratively address local issues and concerns. Building community is dependent upon community development and peacebuilding, which are inherently social activities dependent upon people coming together to address issues at the grassroots. The emphasis is on fostering positive relationships among people to build positive sustainable communities. Women's networks provide another perspective on the importance of relationships to community development and peacebuilding as these networks provide significant emotional and instrumental support and information for women involved in their communities.

VOLUNTEERS: UNSUNG HEROES

Discussions of volunteers and volunteering in community development and peacebuilding literature are rare. Searching databases for literature on peace and volunteering, I was surprised by the lack of relevant results. This realization and discovery startled me as the vast majority of people I know who are involved in community development and peace work (including myself) do so as volunteers. The movements and initiatives that I have been a part of would not exist without volunteers. When volunteer was mentioned in the above mentioned searches it was in regards to volunteers of the US Peace Corps or only briefly mentioning a role. Any thorough or significant consideration of the phenomenon of volunteering is absent. This absence is startling, especially considering the dependence both community development and peacebuilding have on volunteers in order to meet their goals and fulfill their missions.

Volunteering is significant and valuable to societies, communities, and individuals, as well as to initiatives addressing reducing or eliminating poverty, conflict resolution, food security, disaster and crisis management and response, health, sustainable development, and eliminating discrimination (United Nations, 2002):

> Volunteerism is not only the backbone of civil society organizations and social and political movements, but also of many health, education, housing and environmental programmes and a range of other civil society, public and private sector programmes worldwide. It is an integral part of every society. (United Nations Volunteers, 2011, p. 2)

Volunteers are "an enormous reservoir of skills, energy and local knowledge for peace and development" (United Nations Volunteers, 2012, p. 3). Many peace and development organisations depend upon "volunteers to build awareness about peace and conflict issues and policies, advocate communities, leaders and governments for decisions, actions and policies that

promote peace, and deliver education and programs in local communities" (Neustaeter, 2015).

The importance of volunteers to peace and development is not just within self-identified peace and development organisations; many volunteers are involved with organisations and initiatives espousing goals and ideals of peace, peacebuilding and improving communities (Neustaeter, 2015). In regards to peace and development an examination of volunteers and volunteerism is crucial for grasping these actors and actions which sustains grassroots peace and development around the globe. To clarify, our attention here is focused on people volunteering in their own communities at the local level.

The terms volunteer and volunteering are generic terms encompassing diverse activities (Wilson, 2000). While volunteering has different names in different languages they are all inspired by local traditions and "describe the principle ways by which people collectively apply their energy, talents, knowledge and other resources for mutual benefit" (United Nations Volunteers, 2011, p. 2). It is about relationships, social cohesion, mutual trust, as well as individual and community wellbeing, as expressed by the United Nations Volunteer Organisation (2011):

> A basic expression of human relationships. It is about people's need to participate in their societies and to feel that they matter to others. We strongly believe that the social relationships intrinsic to volunteer work are critical to individual and community well-being. The ethos of volunteerism is infused with values including solidarity, reciprocity, mutual trust, belonging and empowerment, all of which contribute significantly to quality of life. (p. 2)

Volunteering is a pro-social behaviour (Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Penner, 2004; Wilson, 2000) done by choice for the public good; money is not a motivation; and, it can be done through an organisation or directly between individuals not in the same household (International Labour Organisation, 2011; United Nations Volunteers, 2011). To clarify, volunteering is not mandated through the courts (such as community service) or done for academic credit (such as service

learning or a practicum) (United Nations Volunteers, 2011). Volunteering is a choice. Volunteers weigh pros and cons to volunteering, as well this choice may be influenced by peer pressure or social or cultural norms and expectations (Penner, 2004; United Nations Volunteers, 2011). The decision to volunteer may also be informed by significant historical events, such as the 9-11 attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. (Penner, 2004). As a 'planned action' volunteering is different from bystander interventions such as when an individual stops to help a stranger (Penner, 2004). Volunteering benefits other people and, often, the volunteer as well (United Nations Volunteers, 2011; Wilson and Janoski, 1995; Wilson and Musick, 1997; Wilson, 2000). Volunteering contributes to individual and community wellbeing, as well as fosters feelings of solidary, trust, belonging, and empowerment.

Volunteering associated with an organisation is referred to as formal volunteering (Finklestein and Brannick, 2007; United Nations Volunteers, 2011). Volunteering outside of any formal organisation is considered informal volunteering (Finklestein and Brannick, 2007; United Nations Volunteers, 2011). However, there is on-going debate within the academic field of Volunteer Studies on whether informal volunteering should be considered volunteering at all as it represents more caring behaviours typically associated with the private realm (Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Penner, 2004) and may often be referred to as 'helping' (Penner, 2004). Although not explored at length in the literature, this argument raises concerns regarding the recognition of work in the public and private spheres, as well as the gendered division of labour.

Allen Omoto and Mark Snyder (2002) identify two types of community organisations associated with volunteers: first, organisations started and mandated to meet a particular need by providing a service and, second, organisations focused on transforming community culture and behaviour. Many organisations provide a service and advocate for change:

> What these organisations have in common is that they were developed with a specific target of community change in mind. That is the organisations were conceived, developed, and continue to exist for purposes of community change. (Omoto and Snyder, 2002, p. 854)

Communities are often changed directly, indirectly or both by the efforts, time and energy of volunteers (Omoto and Snyder, 2002).

Volunteering may be practiced by people motivated by their religion, spirituality, as well as individual and communal ethics and values in most societies around the world (Finklestein and Brannick, 2007; Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Penner, 2004; United Nations Volunteers, 2011; Vezina and Crompton, 2012; Wilson and Janoski, 1995; Wilson and Musiak, 1997; Wilson, 2000). Volunteering is not a spontaneous act; rather people decide when, where and how they volunteer based on their motives and intentions (Omotto and Snyder, 2002; Penner, 2004; Wilson, 2000). People may volunteer to express a personal value or need, satisfy a need to help others, build understanding by learning about the world or using a skill, build social networks and relationships, gain career experience, empower themselves, or address a community concern or need (Finklestein and Brannick, 2007; Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Penner, 2004; Wilson, 2000).

Motives and intentions inform how we organise everyday life (Felski, 2000; Wilson, 2000) and public thinking about volunteerism (Wilson, 2000). Motives also inform the discourse on how people negotiate meaning to volunteer behaviour (Wilson, 2000). Personal attributes that contribute to the chances of people volunteering include "beliefs and attitudes, needs and attitudes and personality characteristics" (Penner, 2004, p. 650). In regards to personality characteristics, Louis Penner (2004) discusses prosocial behaviour as an indicator of volunteerism. Another area of consideration of why people volunteer are volunteer activators which are "a broad class of stimuli that for various reasons, would activate the desire to volunteer" (Penner, 2004, p. 651). For example, a personal circumstance such as illness or

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parenthood would activate a person's desire to volunteer. Volunteering is a means through which people make sense of significant historical events, such as the 9-11 terrorist attacks in the United States (Penner, 2004).

Comparisons of volunteering in rural and urban areas show, that in urban areas, volunteering is more likely motivated by personal development, while in rural areas volunteering is typically associated with "solidarity benefits and norms of reciprocity" (Wilson, 2000, p. 230). However, these are generalizations and any conclusions must consider the volunteers themselves. People in urban and rural areas volunteer yet their motivations may differ (Wilson, 2000).

Volunteering is often sustained over long periods and requires considerable time and effort (Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Penner, 2004; United Nations Volunteers, 2011). How long a person volunteers depends on several factors including satisfaction of their motives, support, and volunteer role identity (Finklestein and Brannick, 2007; Omoto and Snyder, 2002). As individuals become associated with a particular role, such as volunteer, the more people will associate them with volunteering and, in turn, inform their self-concept, and they will act in ways congruent with this role: "volunteering becomes, not just what one does, but who one is" (Finklestein and Brannick, 2007, p. 102).

While Finklestein and Brannick's (2007) volunteer role identity argument focuses on the individual, socio-cultural contexts and affiliations are also significant factors on volunteering behaviour. Volunteering happens within geographical, psychological, and social communities, and is informed by the standards, norms, values, resources, institutions, and opportunities in these communities (Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Penner, 2004; Wilson and Musick, 1997; Wilson, 2000). For example, Statistics Canada (2012) reports that of the forty-seven percent of the

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Canadians who volunteered in 2010, 64.6 percent report weekly religious attendance. John Wilson and Thomas Janoski (1995) point out that religion is in fact a complex determinant of people's volunteering, noting differences between and within religious denominations such as Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. Religious affiliations and values, such as liberal, moderate, or conservative values inform when during their lifespan and where (within a religious community or secular organisation) people volunteer (Wilson and Janoski, 1995). Also, values may inform where people do not volunteer, for example pro-life or pro-choice organisations.

The psycho-social context of volunteering can make volunteering for "some causes more acceptable and likely than volunteering for other causes" (Omoto and Snyder, 2002, p. 854). For volunteers who are involved with organisations, issues, causes, or initiatives that are stigmatized or lack support from influential community institutions, such as religious institutions, the longevity of their volunteerism can be determined by the support they receive from their social networks and their motivation satisfaction (Omoto and Snyder, 2002). Volunteering is located within dynamic and complex contexts that can influence volunteering efforts, including where and how people volunteer (Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Penner, 2004; Wilson and Janoski, 1995; Wilson and Musick, 1997; Wilson, 2000).

The social aspect of volunteering is significant as a means for learning about volunteering and volunteer opportunities, as well as developing relationships through volunteer work (Neustaeter, 2015; Wilson, 2000). People learn about volunteering and volunteer opportunities through their social networks at home, work and in the community (Vezina and Crompton, 2012; Wilson and Janoski, 1995; Wilson, 2000). Through volunteering people develop relationships and networks which contribute to a psychological sense of community with volunteers and the community in general, in-other words volunteering builds social-ties, social networks and social

capital (Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Neustaeter, 2015; Vezina and Crompton, 2012; Wilson, 2000), as summarized by United Nations Volunteers:

> Above all, volunteerism is about the relationships that it can create and sustain among the citizens of a country. It generates a sense of social cohesion and helps to create resilience in confronting the issues, […] this cohesion and resilience are often the mainstay of a decent life for which all people strive. Volunteerism is an act of human solidarity, of empowerment and of active citizenship. (2011, p. 92)

These acts of kindness, caring, helping, and supporting are vital to creating and sustaining cohesive supportive and trusting communities. Another way to look at volunteering is that it supports and sustains local cultures of peace, as defined in the previous chapter.

A gendered analysis of volunteering highlights differences between where men and women volunteer, noting that men typically volunteer more in the public domain and women within caring roles and initiatives focused on the private domain of the home (United Nations Volunteers, 2011). Thus volunteering can perpetuate gender roles although it can also challenge gender roles and push conventional boundaries as women take on leadership roles within volunteer organisations, groups, and communities (United Nations Volunteers, 2011). Similar to the earlier discussion on women as agents, women volunteers take inspiration from their roles as mothers and caregivers to volunteer in their communities—in a sense becoming community-mothers.

Volunteers and volunteering are crucial to community development and peacebuilding though the theoretical links between these areas of analysis are rare. However, everyday action demonstrates the significance to volunteers in ensuring activities in both these fields happens. Volunteering itself can be considered an act of peace building as it fosters social cohesion, solidarity, trust, mutuality, and norms of reciprocity—all factors vital to ensure the civil resolution of conflict.

CONCLUSION

Peacebuilding and community development represent unique yet related fields of theory and practice focusing on the improvement of communities in order to support and sustain the wellbeing of humanity. Although women make up half of the human population, their experiences have not always been considered in regards to peacebuilding and community development thought and practice. Women are active agents of both community development and peacebuilding. The routines, rituals, knowledges, skills, and practices of the everyday represent potential assets, skills, and knowledges for building peace and community at the grassroots. Collaboration and positive relationships are vital to sustaining peacebuilding and community development. For women, their networks provide significant support for their continued participation in community development and peacebuilding. Community development and peacebuilding at the grassroots are dependent on volunteers to get the work done. As a prosocial behaviour, volunteering contributes to social cohesion, trust-building, mutuality, and reciprocity—all factors relevant to a culture of peace.

Cooking Community

The pages of the white and black coil-bound *Look and Cook* cookbook are faintly

yellowing. My mother pulled it out of her kitchen drawer one day when we were talking about

women's community organising and cookbooks. "It was a gift from your grandma Neustaeter,"

she said. My mother's pencil scribbles next to certain recipes call out our family favourites.

When my father's family moved back to Canada from Mexico in the early 1950s among

a returning wave of Mexican-Mennonites, they first settled near Lowe Farm, Manitoba, and

attended church in Kronswiede. Organized and printed as a fundraiser for the Kronswiede

Mission Group, the *Look and Cook* resembles hundreds of cookbooks put together by

community groups as local fundraisers—full of local favourite recipes. This particular artefact

includes a history of the Kronswiede Mission Group:

> In 1967 a group of ladies met at one of the homes for the purpose of
> forming a Mission Group. We are only a small group but close in
> fellowship, especially singing. We meet once a month to have fellowship
> and plan projects. When called on, we serve at funerals and weddings in our
> church. One of our projects is to have a Borscht supper and bake sale
> annually. Some of our other projects are quilting, rolling bandages and
> serving at our M.C.C. store. We have occasionally brought programmes
> to various old folks' homes. We also support a foster child in Bangladesh
> and various other foreign missions. Hopefully you will enjoy our book. The
> recipes are family favourites of past and present residents of the Kronswiede
> School District. The Kronswiede Mission Group

These initiatives are typically spearheaded and organised by women.

The origins of community cookbooks as fundraisers trace back to the American Civil

war, notes Christensen (2013) "when women in the North published recipes to raise money for

field hospitals" (footnote 7). As a genre their Canadian history can be traced back to 1877 when

the first community cookbook was published as a fundraiser for the Hospital for Sick Kids in

Toronto (Christensen, 2013). Community cookbooks on the Prairies reveal stories of settlement, survival, collaboration, and integration.

Observing women's community involvement through women's cookbook collections was a fortunate happenstance I stumbled upon while researching the Altona Women's Institute, a group long defunct. A Google search for the Altona Women's Institute brought up numerous links for the *Canadian Mennonite Cookbook.* Originally published in 1954 with the title Altona *Women's Institute Cookbook,* the first twelve editions put copies in the hands of 90,000 homemakers (Whitecap, 2003). By the fifteenth printing the book had changed its title to "Canadian Mennonite Cookbook" and it continues to be a staple reference of traditional Russian-Mennonite foods. My own cookbook collection contains every fundraiser cookbook put out in Gretna since the 1980s—every one a collaboration spearheaded by women to raise funds for a local cause.

The everyday, mundane assumptions of the community cookbook likely led to its late recognition as an artefact in this study of rural women's community involvement. Imagine my surprise and delight when I realized that during the time of this research a profound mundane artefact of women's community involvement was lingering in my own home—and many other homes.

CHAPTER FIVE

Researching Women's Community Involvement

The seeds of this study were planted when I was talking on the phone with a friend about examining women's grassroots peacebuilding for my doctoral research. I could not decide where to do my fieldwork while balancing motherhood and academic life. My friend advised, "Robin, look out your window. What do you see? What are the women doing?" The journey started. Herein lies the tale of this exploration of rural women's peacebuilding on the prairies.

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

As narrator of this story, the researcher, and data analyst, it is important to reveal my own subjectivities informing this study and this story. The socio-cultural and geographical space of the research area is where my ancestors, who were among the European settlers to this area, broke ground and cultivated the Red River valley and tall grass prairie in the late 1800s. My cultural roots are in the Russian-Mennonite and Ukrainian communities of southern Manitoba. Their stories of migration, pioneering, survival, faith, and hope informed my sense of who and where I came from and my potential.

This is where I grew up, left at eighteen, and returned to fifteen years later as a single mother on the verge of becoming a doctoral student. Just as my return was a coming home, it also required remaking it my own homeplace as an adult. During my time away I studied, worked, and played in spaces near and far from my familiar. I chose to see and experience the world and humanity broader and deeper, outside of the comfort zone of my heterosexual, Anglophone, white-privileged, able-bodied, Protestant, working-class upbringing. My own rural

location, past and present, is situated primarily in an area with an ethno-religious Mennonite majority.

While I grew up in the Mennonite (Bergthaler) church, I now identify as a Quaker, which along with Mennonites, is one of the three peace churches. The peace testaments of these faiths inform my beliefs in the necessity of peace and social justice and the value of human life and dignity. I consider myself both a feminist and an activist. My work, volunteering, and activism have taking me to First Nations communities in Canada and the United States, African-American and African-Canadian communities, as well as communities in Western and Eastern Europe, Singapore, Pakistan, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica. All my experiences and identities influence how I see and speak about the world and, therefore, this research study.

GATHERING STORIES:

FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHY AND NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The methodology of this study is grounded in feminist ethnography (Naples, 2003; Stacey, 1988) and narrative inquiry (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) combining life history interviews (Antikainen, 1998; Goodson, 2001; Gouthro, 2009; Haglund, 2004) and participant observation (Anderson, 1990; 2003; Clover, 2011; Cockburn, 1998; 2007; Jones, 2004) to document and tell the stories of rural women in order to understand their learning peacebuilding on the prairies. Rich description and interview excerpts give attention to rural women's knowledge and experiences (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003), and the richness of their speech (Reinharz, 1992) and to respect the intentions of their words (DeVault, 1990). This research is feminist in that it asserts that rural women continue to be major participants and, as such, they

have distinct stories to tell about the events and becoming of rural communities and society (Naples 2003; Sachs, 1996).

Susan Chase (2007) recounts how early feminist researchers challenging traditional androcentric assumptions saw "women as social actors in their own right and in the subjective meanings that women assigned to the events and conditions in their lives" (p. 654). The nuances and significances of these rural women's stories were discovered through understanding the women`s situated lives within their socio-cultural contexts. Rural women are not a homogenous group. While they share the common experience of being non-urban in the geographical area of South-Central Manitoba, their ruralities can be different. The women in this study are a heterogeneous representation of rural women in South-Central Manitoba.

Having grown up in the research area I was aware of rural life, and knew of the gender cultures as experienced, and understood through the body and mind of a child and then a teenager. The seeds of my feminism were planted here in my childhood, particularly as I noticed gender differences between and within the conservative and liberal Mennonites. The roots and shoots grew while living and travelling in other countries and another province, conducting peace research in post-war contexts and completing post-secondary education. As I have noted elsewhere (Neustaeter, 2015) my hybrid feminism is informed by materialist feminism (Naples, 2003) and feminist peace (Brock-Utne, 1985, 1989; Confortini, 2006, Reardon, 1985; Ruddick, 1995). For me moving 'home' meant locating my feminist self into the rural socio-cultural geographies of southern-Manitoba—a space I anxiously anticipated as unwelcoming or, at best, ambivalent to feminism. With time and my ear to the ground, I'm learning the beauty of the subtle waves of feminism flowing across these plains. It gives me great hope for a slow change.

Situated knowledge

The continuous currents of personal and collective meaning-making rippling and, at

times, roaring over the situated knowledges of rural women's everyday lives is the data, the data

gathering process, and the data analysis for this research study. Women's knowledges are

situated within the time and context of their lives, and thus influenced by the power and gender

relations at play over their lifetime (Dyck and Mclaren, 2004; Haraway, 1988; Naples, 2000,

2003; Naples and Sachs, 2000; Sachs, 1996; Smith, 1987; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002).

Feminist researchers challenge the idea of a universal woman's standpoint by highlighting the

complexity and diversity of women's lives, including their socio-cultural, political and economic

experiences, knowledge, and history (Collins, 1998; Haraway, 1988; Naples, 2003; Sachs, 1996).

By understanding the diversity of women's experiences as situated within the intersectionality of

the participant's own plethora of physical, social, cultural, economic, and political situations and

positions, it becomes possible to consider women's situated knowledge (Dyck and McLaren,

2004; Naples, 2003; Sachs, 1996; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002).

According to Carolyn Sachs (1996) the concept of situated knowledge is important for

research on rural women as it accounts for the particularities of their location and quotidian

activities:

> Rural women's knowledge is situated in their particular localities and daily activities. In
> most cultural settings, rural women's situated perspectives come from their connections
> to the environment, from their work in subsistence, reproductive, and productive realms,
> and from the patriarchal nature of rural families. These experiences provide particular
> angles of vision or partial perspectives that offer the possibility of seeing differently than
> from dominant perspectives. (p. 17)

Rural women's situated knowledges contribute a diversity of perspectives, each seeing

differently, which when combined create a mosaic of rural women's experiences and knowledge.

The women's stories are told from their own lived situated experiences and "must be considered within their own cultural context" (Flaherty, 2012, p. 173). Starting with women's situated knowledge we can explore the intersectionality of rurality, class, gender, race, age, religion, culture and other categories of difference in women's lives and how these interact with economic, political, social, religious and cultural institutions and ideologies in terms of power, including agency and empowerment (Collins, 1998; Davis, 2008). The intersection of these experiences are rich contexts for feminist ethnography, which as noted by Naples and Sachs (2000), highlight how the "dynamics of power influence how problems are defined; which knowers are identified and are given credibility; how interactions are interpreted and how ethnographic narratives are constructed" (p. 195). By not privileging a white-middle class, Anglo-phone, urban women's experience; by recognizing the multiple forms of oppression experienced by rural women; by identifying and naming the diverse ways in which women exert agency and empowerment; and, by locating women within their everyday situated practices I can identify and understand how rural women seek to transform their communities. Furthermore, accounting for situated knowledge assists in accounting for the diverse positionalities of the participants and researcher.

Ethnography and feminist ethnography

Ethnographic accounts, often recorded in narrative or story form, can offer rich descriptions of a dynamic and critical research context and process (Anderson, 1990; 2003; Hart, 2002; McLeod, 2009). Feminist ethnographers use women's everyday lives as the contexts of research (Naples and Sachs, 2000; Naples 2003; Stacey, 1988). Incorporating various texts can create a vibrant sensual description. Within feminist ethnography participant observation and

rich description, along with life history and bibliographical narrative (Naples, 1998a), are vital research methods for gathering data. Another technique used by feminist ethnographers and researchers, and not necessarily limited to feminists, to address power issues in interviews is to use interactive interviews or dialogue to encourage participants to shape and control the conversation as well as help build reciprocity and trust so that participants will speak more candidly (Clover, 2007; Hart, 2002; Naples 1998a).

By starting with women's own situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) feminist ethnographers can "explicate relations of domination embedded in communities and social institutions" (Naples and Sachs, p. 196), and highlight the intersectionality of the multiple perspectives and experiences of women within these communities and institutions (Naples, 1998b). Feminist ethnography highlights how the "dynamics of power influence how problems are defined which knowers are identified and are given credibility; how interactions are interpreted and how ethnographic narratives are constructed" (Naples and Sachs, 2000, p. 195). Reinharz (1992) points out that "much of feminist research is connected to social change and social policy questions" (p. 251), noting feminist researchers' efforts towards social change include consciousness raising work, contributing to the welfare and knowledge of women, examine problems in order to find solutions, policy recommendations and transform gender relations in societies. Similar sentiments can be attributed as a catalyst for my own feminist research, in particular raising consciousness around women's experiences and contributions to community development, peacebuilding, and wellbeing; and contributing to the welfare and knowledge of women in order to inform policy recommendations and transform problems and gender relations.

Narrative inquiry and storytelling

Patrick Lewis (2011) and Petra Hendry (2007) encourage narrative researchers to hold back on their methods and to trust the storytelling and the story: "We need to move the space to create a place for the storyteller to share her story without the interruption of the narrative researcher" (Lewis, 2011, p. 507). A significant focus of narrative research is to provide opportunities for the stories of the voiceless, and those traditionally marginalized, to be heard and incorporated into the picture and understanding of social life creating a more complex understanding of social life as we know it (Hendry, 2007; Lewis, 2011).

In narrative inquiry, Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin (1990) emphasize "the practitioner tells their story first" (p. 4). In this study, the women's sharing of their life histories provided a foundation from which they could explore their community involvement as well as how events and actions connect with and inform one another and are catalysts for learning (Daniels, 2002; Gouthro, 2009). Life histories also provide bridges between life experiences and social-political structures (Gouthro, 2009). Narrative inquiry connects the social and the personal through experiential stories which "give voice to tacitly held personal knowledge without abandoning the particular, the contextual, or the complex" (Conle, 2000, p. 51). Thus, the personally specific intentions, expectations, and meanings narrators have of their personal stories are significant data for narrative inquiry (Conle, 2000, Connolly and Clandinin, 1990; Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002; Smith and Sparkes, 2008; Taber, 2010).

Informed by narrative methodology (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), in this study, using a storytelling approach drawing upon women's experiential and personal knowledge, I encouraged women to share their life-story through the semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Our meetings often felt like a conversation although, in reality, the participant and myself most likely

would not have met and discussed the topics outside of a 'research agenda.' Conversation-based research is a bottom-up methodology grounded in the perspectives of those in the struggle or communities to form critical knowledge and practice (Hart, 2002; Stern, 1998). Using interactive interviews emphasizing storytelling and life-history (Antikainen, 1998; Goodson, 2001; Gouthro, 2009; Haglund, 2004) conversation-based research encourages participants to guide the research focus within the umbrella of women's community building/involvement. Each interaction was unique.

Locating the researcher

Considering the different positionalities and ideologies of the researcher and participants, feminist researchers note that it is significant that the researcher be open about her or his positionality and subjectivities within the project planning, data gathering, writing, and analysis. Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson (1997) highlight a significant conflict for feminist researchers is representing women's experiences when the data does not fit with their own feminist positions. Therefore it is important researchers be open to different experiences and interpretations, and respectfully challenge assumptions. Feminist ethnographers often identify their own positionalities to account for due diligence on the part of the researcher to adjust their bias to account for the actual subjective knowledges, standpoints and experiences of the people in the study and create transparency for the reader (Hart, 2002; Naples, 1998a, 2003). Ethnographers may also write about their own positionality in relation to their research experiences (Anderson, 2003; Flaherty, 2012; Hart, 2002). Naples and Sachs (2000) encourage researchers to engage in self-reflection in order to be aware of the ways they may reproduce

power through their research actions and process which will end up enriching their ethnographic work.

PARTICIPANTS

Recognizing the diversity of the rural women population, this study sought a diverse representation of rural women across South-Central Manitoba. To participate in this study women needed to be over the age of eighteen and involved in their communities for at least three years. The participants were recruited using snowballing via networks and friends (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Browne, 2005; Reay, 1995) and purposive sampling (Sandelowski, 2000) informed by participant observation.

As a community educator I met numerous women from across the research area through my facilitation practice. However, to respect confidentiality and separation of roles I did not invite women who were participating in a program I was facilitating at the time of interviewing to participate in the study. Initial connection was made with community-involved friends living in the research area. Here, I draw upon the definition of friends Browne (2005) used for her own research: "friends are understood as women I would meet regularly in social settings and we considered each other to be 'friends'" (p. 49).

In these early conversations I would speak with a friend about the research study, ask her if she would be interested in participating, and inquire if she knew of other potential participants. Some women preferred to contacted their friends directly and confirm their participation. Then they let me know the outcome, which usually affirmed another woman or two who would meet with me. Other women suggested women friends or co-volunteers and provided contact information. If this was the case I confirmed that I could use our common friend's name when

contacting a potential participant so that she knew how I got her contact information and confirmed a link in our web of association.

Most of my connections reached into the western and central sections of the research area. To access community-involved women in the eastern section I contacted a women's group in that area and attended their meetings. For transparency and accountability, prior to attending a meeting, I spoke with the group's President to explain my personal and academic intentions, which I also shared with the group at my initial meeting. For one year I participated in the groups' monthly meetings, Christmas party, and summer outing. However, due to meeting times and my daughter starting kindergarten, I could not continue attending these meetings after one year and withdrew from this local group.

Throughout, I kept track of where the women lived and their involvements in order to record women's geographical and cultural communities and spaces of involvement—for example faith, community, education, health, recreation, arts, and politics, as well as key life events such as parenthood, illness, moving, and retirement. I used media (Internet, newspapers and community bulletin boards) and participant observation to compile field notes on councils, organisations, activities, and initiatives to determine where women are locally involved. These formal and often high-visibility community-building spaces became the starting points for creating a picture of rural women's involvement. I compared participants' involvements with my own observations of where and how women are involved. As the research evolved the women themselves filled the informal and low-visibility involvement into the study.

When I identified gaps, such as municipal politics and school boards, as well as the French and First Nations communities, I targeted my recruitment to these particular areas. At one point a participant asked me how it was going and I told her I was looking for women in the local

French community. She talked it over with a few friends and told me she would call me later. That evening, true to her word, she called and gave me the name of one woman whom she had already spoken with and who had agreed to participate. When I called this woman to set up an interview she informed me that she had called her sister-in-law and that she too was interested in participating.

My hope was to interview around twenty-five women. In the end I met with thirty-eight. One woman decided not to continue after our interview. The youngest woman turned twenty-nine the day of our interview. The oldest woman was eighty-five. Most of the women who participated in this study live in towns and villages. Others live on farms or First Nations communities. Table 1 shows the women's pseudonyms, ages in regards to decade, and their geographical residence.

The majority of the women were married or living common-law (31). Other women were single, divorced, divorced and remarried, or widowed. Thirty-four of the women are mothers, twenty-three are grandmothers, and one is a great-grandmother. Thirty women have a post-secondary education. The women represent six different religious affiliations, including Mennonite, United Church, Catholic, Anglican, Ukrainian Orthodox, and Medeoin[44]. No specific question was asked in regards to religious affiliation, rather this data was volunteered. Some women may not affiliate with a religion or specific church, while others do attend religious services yet did not disclose this information. Over half of the women had moved to their current communities for work or family reasons (marriage, be closer to family members, especially parents, siblings). Three of the women were breast cancer survivors. Since our interview one woman's cancer returned and she passed away. Other women may have or have had cancer yet

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[44] Medeoin is an Indigenous spirituality.

did not disclose this information as it was not specifically requested. Three of the women have a disability. One third of the women had been or are involved with 4-H as children or adults. Collectively, these women are or have been involved in over eighty different local organisations and initiatives and twenty-three local chapters of provincial or national organisations. Their formal volunteering focused on the environment, politics, church, arts and culture, sports and recreation, agriculture, security, health, and family.

Table 1: Table of Participants

Name	Age	Residence	Name	Age	Residence
Barbara	60s	Town	Lena	60s	Town
Bea	60s	Town	Linda	50s	Reservation
Belinda	40s	Town	Lois	60s	Town
Carla	20s	Town	Louise	70s	Farm
Debra	50s	Town	Margaret	60s	Village
Denise	50s	Farm	Maria	60s	Town
Dot	60s	Town	Marjorie	50s	Farm
Elizabeth	40s	Farm	Mia	50s	Farm
Fiona	60s	Town	Pam	60s	Town
Gail	60s	Town	Pearl	70s	Farm
Georgia	30s	Town	Sadie	60s	Town
Gina	60s	Farm	Simone	30s	Farm
Helena	60s	Farm	Sonia	50s	Town
Hilary	70s	Farm	Stacey	40s	Town
Holly	50s	Reservation	Suzette	30s	Farm
Jackie	80s	Town	Tanya	60s	Farm
Joan	60s	Town	Wanda	60s	Town
Kathleen	60s	Town	Wendy	50s	Town
Kathy	60s	Town			

Most women were uncertain as to how they wished to be identified in this study. Some women clearly did not wish to be identified, while others were ambivalent. In consideration of this ambiguity and to be consistent in how they are identified, I opted to keep the women's identities confidential, giving each woman a pseudonym and trying to remove any significant identifiers. Considering their religious, cultural, or ideological beliefs, participants may have

been uncomfortable being named in this study. Participants often depend on the support of political, economic, and religious institutions in their community involvement. Therefore, statements critical of these institutions could be problematic. Some of the women have public profiles within and beyond their communities, making it difficult to completely conceal their identities.

Most of the women participated in one-on-one interviews. Four women organized a group interview in one of their homes. Interviews took place around women's kitchen tables or in their living-rooms, home-offices, workplaces, as well as libraries, restaurants, hospital cafeterias and my own home. My preference was to meet women in their communities as this gave me the opportunity to observe them in their homeplaces. Maria and I met in a hospital cafeteria while her husband underwent a chemotherapy treatment. Women agreed to meet for one to one and a half hours. Interviews ranged in length from under an hour to four hours. Tea, coffee, and typically some type of food accompanied our conversations. Often times we would take turns pouring another cup of tea or coffee. A few times, I was invited to stay for lunch, sometimes prepared by the women's partner. When possible I attended events put on by or involving the women in this study. In one instance, several of the women contributed personal stories to a book and I attended the book launch.

These women willingly shared their lives and time with me, sometimes exploring questions they had never asked themselves or remembering chapters of their lives long ago lived. All the women who participated thanked me for the opportunity to share since no one had ever asked them about their community involvement. For many it was the first time they had taken time to reflect on their involvement. When deemed necessary they took a stand on questions or statements to ensure that their values and beliefs were heard, often around ideas of gender. They

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made themselves vulnerable to me the researcher. Their generosity, vulnerability, courage, and hope continues to inspire me.

RESEARCHER IDENTITY AND REFLEXIVITY

As I was working on this project—recruiting, interviewing, analysis, and writing—I became increasingly cognizant of how the intersectionality of my own identities—rural, mother, Mennonite, Ukrainian, Canadian, researcher, educated, volunteer, feminist, heterosexual, woman, single, and middle-class—could interact and influence the research. I wondered how my identities were influencing my research and which identity, if any, was having a more significant impact than others. The truth is that I will never know. The embedded-ness of our intersectionality as manifested in 'who we are,' our personalities, and how we carry ourselves in interactions with others in different times and places is an intricate knitting of fine coloured threads. Sometimes the colours of these threads illuminate in contrast against the others, and other times the threads blend together. Our identities are fluid with each ebbing and flowing exerting greater influence in different situations. While we may be able to negotiate our identities, we are often unaware of their influence on others (Naples, 2003).

When I stepped furthest from my familiar, from the identities that tie me to the majority or normative experiences, I increased my scrutiny on the role my identities could have to the research. This was most noticeable when I interviewed Indigenous women and was directly positioned in an oppressor-oppressed relationship by socio-historic forces. I recognize that this is a position that I constantly hold, yet have the 'privilege' of not explicitly facing, in my every day. In these interviews concerns of race, genocide, and cultural assimilation were brought up. When speaking with women from the French community, the topics of culture and language

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raised. Women who fit the Anglo-Caucasian, settler majority never mentioned race, genocide, ethnicity, culture, language, or cultural assimilation in our conversations.

I observed the situated gendered experiences of women in these rural communities by listening to women, and drawing from my own experiences, knowledge, and curiosity. It was, and continues to be, important to be both a curious and surprised feminist in order to avoid dismissing gendered or feminist thought when it manifested itself differently than my own or mainstream feminist ideologies (Enloe, 2004). To be surprised, writes Enloe, "is to have one's current explanatory notions, and thus one's predictive assumptions thrown into confusion" (2004, pg. 1023). Enloe (2004) challenges researchers to explore surprizes for new possibilities for understanding what's going on rather than tinkering them into existing understandings.

With women whom I already knew were comfortable with gendered analysis and feminist language, I was more overt and curious about their gendered perspectives and analysis. I was comfortable in speaking my feminist language with these women because I already knew we shared common language around gendered knowledge, ideas, and analyses of power. The extent to which each interview focused on gender varied, depending on the participant's willingness to engage in the topic. Considering the situated experiences and knowledge of the women in this study helped me to understand and respect the range of perspectives on gender, specifically when these perspectives were different from or contradicted my own. It is important to learn how local women express questions and ideas of gender and feminism to listen for the situated feminism expressed by individuals.

Feminist ethnography opened the way to consider how the research is ongoing and that once the researcher holds the data it is their turn to reciprocate the generosity and vulnerability by putting herself out there to honestly clarify herself to readers and audiences. By this I mean

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that in being open about my own reflexivity around this research my intent is to highlight how my own positionalities, including how the intersections of my rural, white, settler, middle-class, mother, and academic identities tint my research's unique colours. Inspired by the words of Kim England (1994, p. 87):

> I believe we need to integrate ourselves into the research process which can be anxiety provoking in that it increases feelings of vulnerability. […] I believe it is important to be more open and honest about research and the limitations and partial nature of that research. We need to locate ourselves in our work and to reflect on how our location influences the questions we ask, how we conduct our research, and how we write our research. (1994, 251)

I hope to enrich this research while also highlighting that the understanding of this research is on-going to be taken on by the audiences who engage with it, and myself who likely will never truly leave it alone.

As researcher and writer, I recognize that how I interpret what I see, analyze and write comes from somewhere. This "view from somewhere" (Dyck and McLaren, 2004) is informed by my own positionality, which informs how I listen, read, and analyze the data (Naples, 2003; Taber, 2012). Isabel Dyck and Arlene McLaren (2004) write, "the positionality of the researcher is commonly recognized as critical to how and what stories are told" (p. 516). The stories and study of rural women's peacebuilding on the prairies are socially and historically connected to my own subjectivities, my own story.

Throughout this study I've engaged in critical reflection to consider any potential bias of the researcher due to being an insider researcher or other pertinent factors (Naples, 2003; Naples and Sachs, 2000). The perceived position of 'insider' possibly attributed to myself as researcher-as-local-resident had to be carefully considered in light women's situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Sachs, 1996); the continuous renegotiation of locally ascribed definitions of insider and outsider (Naples, 1996; 2003) and the cultural and community diversity in the research area.

Each rural community within the research site is unique with its own evolving definitions of insiders and outsiders. As Naples (1996) points out, even within research contexts, sub-groups within these communities can have different definitions of insiders and outsiders. Incorporating the concept and experience of situated knowledge challenges the idea and privileging of both an universal women's experience, and universal rural women's experience.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Selecting the space

The location of this study is a rural area in South-Central Manitoba. The boundaries of the research area were strategically determined by setting a maximum radius of approximately an hour's drive east, west, and north from my home community. Thus, all participants and communities would be accessible for interviews and participant observation. As well, it was intended and hoped that this rather short radius would keep the research local, although to travel from the eastern edge to western edge of the study area would take approximately two and a half hours. The southern border of the research area is the Canada-United States border. For practical reasons—mainly due to access and ease in crossing the border for research purposes—I decided not to interview American women. Future research could have an international focus bringing together Canadian and American women involved in their communities.

Calling on women

Identifying and inviting women to participate in this project happened through women's networks via snowballing and purposive sampling, with the majority contacted through networks. Incorporating women's networks into the research process as a recruitment strategy

seemed appropriate as women's networks are a manifestation of women's community

involvement in their own right (Brokin Sacks 1988; Naples, 1998). Naples (2003) reflects

"building relationships is, of course, a necessary part of gaining trust and access in ethnographic

encounters" (p. 63). Recruiting through women's networks provided a common denominator,

such as a common friend or co-volunteer, which could contribute to feelings of comfort, security,

and trust within the project. My friends and co-volunteers could vouch for my sincerity and

integrity as a person and researcher to their own friends.

At the same time, they were putting their credibility on the line, and their trust in me, not

to tarnish their reputation. Recognizing that community involved women take on various roles

with different levels of social visibility, it was important to ensure that this study included

women who are front and centre, women who work behind the scenes, and women who are busy

in all places in-between. Relying solely on public records such as newspaper articles or websites

to identify participants would favour women in more visible roles, as well as women in

communities and organisations with a media or web presence. Snow-ball sampling can be

effective for recruiting participants with low social visibility (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981) as it

provided entry-points into various women's community involvement networks increasing the

likelihood of potential participants who were involved in a variety of roles.

Community involvement is often undervalued by those actually doing it. Therefore

putting the responsibility of identifying the 'community involved' in the hands of a friend or co-

volunteer may be an advantage of the snowballing technique. Numerous times when I spoke with

women about community involvement they would dismiss their involvement with comments

such as "oh, I don't do *very* much" or "I haven't done *that* much" or "I haven't done anything

important." One woman suggested I instead ask someone else who has done more, but to keep

her in mind "just in case you need just one more person." The contradiction between women's perceptions of their practice and their actual practice was revealed when they shared their community involvement experiences, often reflecting that they had not realized they had done, and were doing so much, until they sat down and thought about it.

Interviewing friends presents unique challenges and possibilities for research. Knowing a participant raises expectations of what they could share in an interview. However, a participant determines what she will tell. When interviewing people that you know, you recognize when they omit information. One participant spoke elegantly, candidly, and at length about an informal community involvement experience that spanned many years. As someone who knows her, I knew that she also has been and is extensively involved in her community in many other formal and informal ways. I wanted to respect her decisions regarding what she shared, giving her power and agency within the research process. On the other hand, I wanted to recognize *all* her community involvement. Even when I asked her about some of her other involvements, she brought the conversation back to what she wanted to talk about. Had I not known her, I would not have realized how she was directing the interview by selecting what story to discuss in depth, what stories to mention in passing, and what stories to not to tell at all.

Research with friends risks uniformity among participants and researcher. Lisa Tillman-Healy (2005) points out we tend to develop friendships with people more similar to us than different, typically staying within gender, ethnicity, race, age, ideological, and class lines. Thus our friendship groups tend to be more homogeneous. An underlying goal of this study is to create a picture of the diversity of rural women to counter the pervasive concept of 'the rural woman.' After all, who is the rural woman I constantly read about in academic and policy literature? While noble in thought, this goal raises significant questions particularly around feminist

research recruiting and ethics. As the researcher, I realize that it is my perception of the demographic landscape that will inform the representation of rural women. Thus, I have the power to depict who are community involved rural women in the research area. While I strived to be inclusive, I recognize that my recruitment techniques are potentially inherently exclusive. Relying solely on my own networks risks uniformity, as noted by Tillmann-Healy. Moving beyond my own social networks, and into the networks of friends and acquaintances, ensures a larger pool of potential participants but does not guarantee more diversity.

At the same time, identifying demographic categories as I did and specifically targeting gaps to ensure that my research is representational of all community involved rural women risks insinuating 'ideal types' and 'tokenism' (Reay, 1995). With small numbers from each community, I acknowledge that this study is not exhaustive and that one or two people cannot speak for an entire sector or population such as French, Indigenous, Municipal Councillor, School Board Member, Board Chair, Environmentalist or Sports Coach. With a goal of re-imaging rural women and the beauty and complexity of women in rural areas it would be counter intuitive to concurrently ascribe "assumptions of homogeneity within predefined categories" (Browne, 2005, p. 51). As well, Diane Reay (1995) points out "by interviewing only the willing participants I could well have been introducing a degree of avoidable bias into my sample. Eager volunteers may constitute a very particular subset of the maternal population" (p. 210). Recognizing these conundrums of recruiting participants through networks and snowballing for this research allows me to name them and acknowledge that while this is an extensive study, it is not exhaustive.

Participant observation and insider status

As a resident of the research area, everyday life became my participant observation focus. Walking down the street, driving around, shopping at local stores, running errands, participating in local events, as well as taking my daughter to the library, playground or a children's program, picking her up from daycare and school were opportunities to gather data. Ernest Stringer (2008) writes "the purpose of observation is to familiarize researchers with the context in which issues and events are played out" (p. 70). Through careful and considered observation it is possible to build a clearer picture about the everyday life-world of the participants within the research context (Anderson, 2003; Jones, 2004).

My insider-outsider status was in constant flux (Epp, 2008; Heley, 2011; Naples, 1996, 2003). The perception of this status is to varying degrees in the eyes of the beholder (participant, community), and the beholden (researcher). Jesse Heley (2011) notes that insider/outsider identities are "ideal types" (p. 221) which in practice are both "fluid and dynamic" (p. 221). Researchers' identities may shift over their research. In her research on the history of Mennonite women, Marlene Epp (2008) identifies herself as a second generation Mennonite woman and notes how her position as a Mennonite studying Mennonites raises the issue of being an insider. Yet when considering the heterogeneity of Mennonites and the constantly changing social, economic, political and global circumstances in many ways she is also an outsider to Mennonite women from other Mennonite groups and historical times. In her study of two rural communities in Iowa, Naples (1996) noted how in general she considered herself an outsider, yet since she was also a newcomer to the community she was considered an insider within the newcomer community in these rural communities. The insider-outsider position is not binary, rather it is fluid (Naples, 1996).

Using participant observation within my everyday stomping grounds, I was critically curious and attentive of my socio-cultural, economic and political environment, willing to see my familiar as strange and be surprised. Making the familiar strange (Scott, 2009) raises my 'ethnographic sensitivity' (Reinharz, 1992) which is constantly 'ON' and transmitting into my temporal awareness the language, signs, headlines, practices, routines, and mannerisms manifested in the ordinary. My critical feminist lenses are keen to nuances around gender relations and practices within the everyday, providing ample data for unobtrusive data gathering (Reinharz, 1992).

In making the familiar strange by turning on my ethnographic sensitivity also means being open to and admitting surprise. Surprize notes Cynthia Enloe (2000) is "an undervalued feminist attribute" described as having "one's current explanatory notions, and thus one's predictive assumptions, thrown into confusion" (p. 1023). When surprised by an event or phenomenon, it may be easy to rationalize it into something familiar, yet we can make an effort to see it as strange and dig deeper. Shulamit Reinharz (1992) reflects that "everyday life thus becomes a rich source of data for developing hypotheses about social problems, social structure and social change" (p. 447). I noticed details of time, space and events; I also developed a larger picture by putting many mundane observations together, like a puzzle. I lingered. I returned at the same time on the same weekday, at different times, on different days and in different seasons, to notice routines of the everyday.

As a participant observer I attended numerous community events which provided opportunities to see what type of initiatives were going on, who was involved in these initiatives, where the women were and what they were doing. These were also opportunities to network and connect with potential participants. Being present and participating in these events were

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opportunities to make myself visible as a local community member. As well, my own community involvement raised my visibility, and created my reputation as a woman interested in community-building and local rural communities, which helped build credibility in my research.

Interviews

Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured using guiding questions in a conversation-based research method (Hart, 2002; Stern, 1998) emphasizing storytelling and life history (Antikainen, 1998; Goodson, 2001; Gouthro, 2009; Haglund, 2004). Conversation-based research is a bottom-up methodology grounded in the perspectives of those in the struggle or communities to form critical knowledge and practice (Stern, 1998). Using interactive interviews, conversation-based research encourages participants to shape and control the conversation, address power issues, as well as help build reciprocity and trust so that participants will speak more candidly (Clover, 2007, 2011; Hart, 2002; Naples 1998a; Stern, 1998). Questions were focused on life history, learning, successes and challenges, and the intersection of gender in regards to community involvement. The aim of the questions was to elicit rich descriptions of women's community work and how they learned their community involvement practice.

Our meetings were engaging and enriching. Many women commented that never before had they been asked about their community involvement; or taken the time to reflect on what they have been involved in and done in their communities. Often they were surprised to realize everything that they have been involved in over their lifetimes. Their community involvement stories focused on what they have done and are doing, learning community involvement, highlights, as well as challenges and strategies they used to address challenges. Informed by narrative inquiry the intent was to build bridges between the personal and social, to create

continuity between past and present and key events and experiences, and to make meaning of lived experiences (Conle, 2000; Connolly and Clandinin, 1990; Liamputtong, 2009; Taber, 2010). Women reflected on challenges they encountered in their community involvement, and strategies they incorporated individually and corporately, depending on the challenge to address these challenges. Working through challenges is a learning process in which knowledge and skills are acquired or affirmed.

I am acutely aware of the real and potential power dynamics at play between researcher and participant. Participants practice power and agency in research in various ways (Naples, 2003). As Naples states "research subjects have the power to influence the direction of the research, resist researchers' efforts and interpretations, and add their own interpretations and insights" (p. 4). My example of one participant directing the interview through focusing our conversation on particular stories highlights one way participants can claim agency and power in the research interaction. Second, people tell particular stories at particular times in particular circumstances for a reason. Their decisions are political and have meaning to them. As researchers we may not be aware of the meaning, significance and political intent of which stories are told to us in research interactions. Just as a researcher I have a particular motivation in the interviews I conduct, so too do participants have motivations for participating and sharing their stories. Their motivations, unconscious or conscious, influence which stories they tell and do not tell, and how they tell their stories. The decision-making process around determining which stories to tell can be determined by several factors including values, identity, and culture. Third, it is important to value the stories we are given as they can provide unexpected learning, ideas and understandings to the research that we, as researchers, may not have considered. When a participant skimmed over or omitted her involvement with numerous community organisations

and initiatives I remember walking away frustrated and thinking 'why didn't she talk about that?'

Later when I looked at all the data and put the women's stories together like a puzzle, I realized

that her story emphasized a particular aspect of women's community involvement in a way I had

not considered, provided new concepts and considerations to the research, and enriched the

research in unforeseen ways. I had initially planned on holding focus groups and including a

photovoice component to further examine and compliment the oral narratives of the interviews.

However, when approached to do either of these, women were reluctant. Considering the time

and depth of the interviews and, out of respect for participants' time, I abandoned these plans and

opted to conduct more individual interviews.

Data analysis

Once interviews had been transcribed, women had the opportunity to go over their

transcripts to check for accuracy. Women were assured that transcripts were kept in

confidentiality, transcripts would not be submitted as Appendix to the dissertation; and only

quotes would appear in the dissertation, publications or presentations. Understandably, some

women were uncomfortable reading their words verbatim off the page as they were not used to

hearing their speech directly mirrored back to them. I made a short presentation to a women's

group after my first round of analysis to check for accuracy and validity. Their responses

indicated that I had captured the essence of their own community involvement experiences.

Considering that I had interviewed friends and friends of friends, inquiries into my research were

common. These were informal opportunities to present my analysis and gain feedback. To

respect confidentiality I did not disclose any names or identifiable specifics in these

conversations.

Data from interviews and participant observation was coded using an inductive method incorporating thematic and narrative analysis. Preliminary data-analysis took place simultaneously with data-gathering. My leading question asked women to tell me how they have been and are involved in their community. Follow-up questions focused on: What roles of they had? How did they learn to do community involvement? Who were their role models and mentors? What have they learned? What challenges have they experienced? How did they address these challenges? What are their highlights? What motivates their involvement? And, how do they perceive the influence of gender, culture and faith?

Once all the interviews were complete, although transcription was ongoing, data was coded inductively by themes emerging from within the interviews. Coding focused on the rich descriptions identifying community involvement women had done and continue to do, learning to be community involved, their motivations, challenges and strategies to overcome obstacles. Supplementary sub-codes addressed the influences of gender, motherhood, religion, culture, and race. Repeatedly listening to the women's stories, first when we met and then repeatedly as I transcribed and checked transcriptions, afforded me time to become familiar with their stories and scruple over the data.

As a feminist researcher I was keen to the influences of power and agency in regards to gender within women's stories. Gender was often imbedded within women's stories. The everydayness of gender, and how our gendered experiences are normalized into our everyday lives, can make it challenging to implicate it as an isolated influence or catalyst of agency or oppression. This can make it difficult to discuss gender explicitly.

While some women discussed how they saw gender influencing their lives and community involvement specifically, others said they had not considered it a factor or considered

it a nominal factor, and a few dismissed it altogether. The diversity of gender consciousness challenged me to listen to the stories within the stories of women's lives for how they expressed the manifestation of gender. I needed to be curious and open to surprises while listening to what women might dismiss as unimportant. Understanding women's lives and the contexts of their experiences within socio-cultural and historical spaces helped me appreciate the nuances of their situated gendered consciousness.

For example, women often spoke about community involvement as 'just what you did.' Similarly, discussing managing multiple roles (for example household, family, career, community, and, for some, the farm or education), they would comment 'you just do it.' Listening to women tell their personal stories which often included memories of mothers and grandmothers, as well as balancing motherhood and career—which for many happened prior to maternity and parental leave as we know it today, helped to identified formative experiences which shaped how women perceive gender influencing their lives. The somewhat dismissive way women respond to their work as 'just do it' highlights a socialization of expectations of what women should do. This response could also be a strategy for self-protection to ensure that their work gets done—in other words, just do it (and don't think about it); as well as a mantra for the status quo. Imbedded in the layered meanings of this mantra are the assumptions that if you think about it, it won't get done and you may question it and demand change.

When questions about gender came up, it wasn't uncommon for there to be silence. "Silences are profoundly meaningful" clarify Blake Poland and Ann Pederson in regards to silence in qualitative research (1998, p. 294), adding "silence may mean withholding or resistance, or it may reflect a cultural mode of self-presentation; it may reflect what is taken for granted or what goes without saying, or it may represent that which cannot be said, the

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unthinkable" (pg. 294). Silence can signal attentive listening and mental processing (Poland and Pederson, 1998). The pause of silence can be used by participants and researcher to associate and reflect (Poland and Pederson, 1998). People have varying levels and lengths of comfortability with silence, as well there are different experiences of silence, including anxious, peaceful or calming shared silence experiences. When I asked a question about gender to a woman I did not know, and it was followed by silence, I noted my own discomfort attributed to anxiousness from my uncertainty and concern of the possible consequences of a gender question. Usually, the silence was broken by the woman sitting with me as she used the silence to reflect and formulate her response. A few women would begin to talk, then suggest that they were not answering the question and apologize, followed by a pause.

Humour was another common response to questions around gender. When asked how she thought being a woman influenced her involvement, Kathy initially laughed and said:

> Oh, if I was a man I would probably be driving a tractor and coming home
> at night and sitting down. Okay that wasn't nice.

In another interview, the question was followed by laughter, silence, and then, "Now I know this is from the university," and more laughter. The laughter seemed a startled response to the question, hinting at possible feelings of surprise and awkwardness. The comment surprised me because it suggested the perception that the university requires a question about women. Considering a rural gendered analysis, the comment suggests that women, in particular rural women, do not voluntarily ask gender specific questions, rather these questions are imposed or inserted into the research by an institutional authority. Noting how the comment was sandwiched by laughter it may have been an attempt to use humour to manage an awkward situation (Gouin, 2004).

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Reviewing women's responses to questions about gender I noted that often responses were associated with challenges, as if being a woman is assumed challenging. A few women explicitly commented that they have not experienced any challenges because they are women. I consciously tried to word gender questions in such a way as to be open to the women's interpretations in order to develop an understanding of women's community involvement. I was curious to how do they see their experiences through a gendered lens, and the gendered lens they see through.

To ensure the validity of this study I sought to incorporate a strong interdisciplinary theoretical base including Peace and Conflict Studies, Adult Education, Rural Geography, Community Development Studies, Women's Studies, and Volunteer Studies. Tracking participants and information was another means to ensure validity. The quest to create a realistic picture of rural women's community involvement across South-Central Manitoba required identifying and understanding the diversity across the research plain, and the gendered fields in which women live, work, and volunteer on the prairies. The women's stories shared common themes, yet unique nuances, within their lived lives, ensured no two stories were the same.

I recognize that more stories of rural women's community involvement abound. I set my scope within my own and the networks of other women (friends and co-volunteers) recognizing the significance of the linkages within women's networks. Other women within and beyond these networks also have stories to tell. Truth be told, interviewing women involved in their communities could be a lifelong endeavor, no doubt filled with inspiring stories of courage, challenges, and hope. However, time constraints meant that I had to stop, satisfied that the diverse representation of women who participated in this study would ensure a realistic picture of rural women's community involvement, and at the same time, ensure the doors and windows are

open for the telling of more women's stories. Considering the fluidity of women's community involvement I recognize that this study represents rural women's volunteering at a certain time and space.

CONCLUSION

As women heard about this research study, time and time again, I've been encouraged by their expressed interest and beliefs in the importance of telling rural women's life stories and identifying the significance of their work. When I began asking women to be a part of this study, I was overwhelmed by the affirmative responses and the willingness of women to recommend other women to participate. Each time I met with a participant I was asked if I needed more names and suggestions were given. While women often dismiss their community involvement, their volunteering and how they care for others in their communities within their everyday, they also recognize that they too have a story to tell. Set within the tradition of women's local community development women's volunteering, helping and "just doing what needs to be done," or whatever name they give their involvement, continues to make a difference in the lives of individuals, people and communities. Set within their everyday lives, rural women's community involvement represents a larger manifestation of women's peacebuilding on the prairies.

In Passing: Varvara 'Barb' Gifford (nee Perchaluk) (b. 1920 - 2013)[45]

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Barb (Varvara) Gifford. As Barb told it she was born as the sunrise transformed the dew into sparkles, and that's why she loved everything with sparkles. Born in 1920 to Ivan and Olga Perchaluk, Barb was the eldest of seven siblings, Ivan (Betty), Marina (Jake), Nellie (Alex), Nick (Trudy), Matt (Rachel), and Sophie (Chris). In 1939 she met Willy Gifford at a dance where he swept her off her feet and filled her "heart with sparkles." They married in 1940 and remained dance partners for 65 years. In 1940, when Willy joined the air force, Barb went back to her parents' farm. In 1945, Willy and Barb took over the farm. Barb delighted in her children Susana (Victor), Steve (Sally), and Sophie (Ross), and foster children. She felt blessed by her many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and a great-great grandchild.

Her knack for caring and healing others developed in childhood under the watchful eye of her father, a country vet whom she often accompanied on his vet visits. Becoming a nurse was a dream come true for her. Her nursing career began in Winnipeg. Back on the farm, Barb worked at the local hospital for thirty-five years.

Barb loved the farm and her community. She was involved in the Women's Institute local for 70 years at the local, regional, and provincial level—'my girls' she called them. She was a former member and president of the UCWLC[46], and a 4-H leader. She was the co-founder of the Horticultural Society and tall grass hiking trails club, as well as the homegrown 'Golden Glitter Girls' tea society. She curled in her 90s—to prove it could be done. She loved farming,

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[45] Obituaries, I discovered are significant historical records of people's community involvement as they often list individual's membership and involvement in associations, as well as any altruistic characteristics. Barb Gifford's obituary is a creative composite gleaned from the obituaries of numerous rural women as well as the research data.
[46] Ukrainian Catholic Women's League of Canada.

gardening, hosting, learning, laughing, knitting, walking, curling, reading and writing. She cherished all life— humans, animals and nature. She was a gifted storyteller who 'added sparkle' to all her stories. She wrote the community column in *The Post* for 40 years, and even learned to use a computer and that new-fangled internet thingy. She wrote, in her distinctive cursive longhand, thousands of letters to friends and family near and far. She always had a hug, piece of pie, and a cup of tea for anyone who came through the door.

The family would like to express their immense gratitude to friends and the community. As per Barb's wishes a 'Celebration of Life' service will be held Saturday January 20th at 2 pm on the farm. Donations may be made to the Women's Institute of Manitoba.

CHAPTER SIX

Women's Community Involvement

Community involvement often goes unnoticed and undervalued due to its quotidian nature. Yet in regards to the significance of women's community involvement in their communities, Belinda emphasized that "is not just the icing—it's the glue" (Neustaeter, 2015b, p. 195). While many women may consider their involvement as "not anything special,"—a repeated comment I heard from women in regards to their community volunteering—their efforts, time, and energy contribute to the quality of living which, Belinda described as 'the glue' of communities. To help paint a broader and deeper understanding of women's community involvement, this chapter draws from the women's stories to explore why they are involved and what they do.

MOTIVATION

As women share their involvements and accomplishments, many quietly proud of what they've done, they revealed how their volunteering is rooted in their ideas of care and responsibility as informed by their individual and group identities in order to improve their communities for their families, others and themselves. Volunteering was also an important space for many women to connect with others, in particular, other women to build networks and friendships. A few women found meaning and life purpose in being locally involved. As we shared a pot of tea in her living room, Bea described four decades of community involvement in three rural communities:

> I'm so proud of myself that I did it and do it […] that I didn't sit back and didn't care. It kept me going and still it's making me go. I love my community.

Bea's words epitomize the multiple motivations of care and meaning which carry many women into and through their involvement. Women's community involvement is informed by ideas of (1) care and responsibility; (2) identity; (3) connections; (4) making a difference, creating change, and, (5) meaning. Women typically hold multiple motivations, which may not fit clearly into one category.

Care and responsibility

Driven by their understandings of care and responsibility for their families, neighbours, communities, and themselves, many women become and continue to be community involved. While some women talked about care and nurturing, others talked about responsibility. To a degree these concepts are interdependent within the space of women's community involvement.

Earlier Bea expressed how her care for people motivates her to do something—to be involved. Maria traced her sense of responsibility to be community involved to a comment made by her husband during a conversation they had many years ago:

> I think I was talking about the church and I said, "Why don't they?" And he said, "There's no They."
> He said, "There's no they." And that was something that just stuck in my mind. He probably wouldn't ever remember having said it.
> But it's something people say all the time. Like, "Why don't they get these roads fixed up?" Or, "Why don't they—?"
> Well, you know there's a town council that you can run to, go on and get those roads fixed, and learn that there's not always money for it. But you know.
> But I think that's something that I've always thought about. […] I believe that […] it is my responsibility to do what I can to use the abilities I have to make things work.
> I really believe there is no "They." There is only "us."

Resonating with Maria's memory, Tanya believed everyone has a responsibility to do what they can.

Adding her own belief that we have to love and care for others, Sonya adds to Maria and

Tanya's understandings of responsibility to be community involved:

> I really believe that we have to love and care for others, and especially if I
> myself don't have a lot of heavy things in my life that are holding me back.
> I feel like if I've been given health and resources and many things to work
> with, I need to use those and share those. So there's a responsibility there,
> an expectation.

These women and others are driven by their sense of responsibility to do what they can to

improve their communities as well as helping others. For many women this is understood as 'an

expectation,' as Sonya stated. Women recognized that they have unique skills, knowledge,

experience, and resources, as Sonya noted, which they understood as their responsibility to share

with the community. It's expected.

Carla, a young professional mother of two, noted that, through her involvement on

various committees, she's realized that she has an important perspective to bring to the tables

which are often made up of a majority of older, retired committee members and community

leaders:

> I think that I bring a different perspective to tables like that because I'm
> young and I'm female. Most of my friends are young, female with young
> children so it is a very different set of concerns than a lot of our retired
> community leaders that we have.

Carla recognizes that she represents an important under-represented demographic to various

community decision-making boards and organizations, and thus has a responsibility to speak for

others like her who are not at these tables. Women's sense of care and responsibility informed

their drive to be and continue being actively involved in their communities. Women understood

that they have a responsibility to share what they can of their skills, resources (for example, time

and energy), and knowledge (including experience and perspectives) to build their communities.

Identity

For many women their community involvement was so deeply connected to their identity and informed by their social or religious values, or both, that they viewed it as natural to their way of being. Kathy surmised involvement is natural:

> Maybe it's a natural thing for some people or maybe a me-thing.

Carla's involvement is inherent to her being:

> It's natural, who I am, inherent, just something I did.

As she described her community work, Louise noted that her volunteering "just evolves naturally." For Lois it's who she is:

> It just seems to be who I am because I don't know where these ideas come from. They just pop into my head.

For these women and others, volunteering is who they are; it's a part of their identity—where their minds and hearts seem to go.

Exploring the idea of community involvement as natural or as a personal identity, Georgia suggested she had a volunteering chromosome:

> I just think it is something you have in you. I have an extra-chromosome for volunteering or the community involvement chromosome.

Carla questioned if there was a community involvement personality type stressing wanting more and using your talents to shape the world around you.

Suzette identified her skills in organizing and drive to do things for the community that motivate her:

> I'm an organized person and I had such drive to do stuff for my community.

Sonya saw community involvement as an extension of her personality, her self-image and how she generates her self-worth and pleasure:

I think part of it is comes from I'm going to say my personality which um is, it's a first-born kind of personality. I've fairly driven and fairly out there and so I also really like to do things for people. A lot of my self-worth, but my pleasure comes from serving others and making them happy.

Sonya, Suzette and Carla identified personality traits they connected to community involvement practice: visionary, dreamer, organized, driven, enjoys helping others, out-going, and sharing or giving of yourself for change. Being community involved for many women stems from their sense of who they are; it comes natural to them and represents their personalities.

Community involvement is a socio-cultural practice developed through socialization, cultural and religious values and beliefs. Growing up and living most of her life in small towns Carla recognized the inherent practice and expectation of helping your neighbour:

It started off just being an inherent thing you know, like you help your neighbour and you help your community. And this is what you do when you live in a small community. […] [It's the] small community mindset of helping one another and contributing.

She gave the example of a community's raising funds to help a family rebuild after their garage burnt down:

In a small community that is just what we did. If somebody's garage burnt down the community came together and had a social to raise money to build them a new garage.

Carla notes that helping out is expected. It's what you do.

Debra also talked about of the expectation to help out when living in a rural community:

'Cause that is just what you did. It was part of what, who you were, if you belonged to the community—even if you didn't want to necessarily.
    Like back when I was growing up, there was fall suppers all the time. Other events that— Maybe there was community dances. Everybody went in my family.
    Everybody contributed. You know, it was just that.
    And the women had their role, and the men had their role.
    So my grandfathers would have done more of what the men do. And the women would have done what the women do. […] A lot of the fundraising and the cooking at any of those events. And they brought food.

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> And it was just what you did. Whether it was a dance, a fall supper, a New Year's, whatever, you brought food or—. It was part of being community.
> If somebody died, then automatically you brought food to the house, and you brought food to the hall, you know, because they would need food for the funeral.
> It just—. It wasn't even questioned—should you do that? It was just what you did.

Drawing from her grandparents' examples, Debra identified that helping others and being involved was expected, and there were expected gender roles.

Faith informs some women's understanding of responsibility to their communities. Growing up in and being a part of the Mennonite church, which emphasized loving one's neighbours through serving others and communities, strongly influenced Wanda's volunteering:

> I think it's basically who I am. Like probably a lot has to do with, um, my faith, my reality that loving God means serving others.
> I want to—, I want to love my neighbour, and how do I do that? You know, what can I do to assist them in their life or to be a part of their life? Not just helping but to be a part of their life that can encourage them or help improve some part of their life.
> I think—, I think that is big.

Wanda's faith informs her motivation to serve others, actively love, help, and encourage her neighbours and others to help improve their lives.

Sonya also cited her faith as informing her involvement to serve and care for others in her communities:

> We are called to love and care, and that isn't just through our little church programs. In fact, it's probably less through our church programs.
> We need to be serving in our communities, and, you know, on our baseball teams and all our things going on in our communities. If we are really going to serve the people then we need to be in those places.
> And,, well—you are not asking this, but I feel like I just want to say it— as far as serving goes, like really serving the poor, um, I'm talking within the community, but there are all kinds of poor in our community as well. I just want to add that I mean the physically poor and emotionally poor and all of those as well.

> I think it is extremely important for me as a Christian to be rubbing shoulders with my neighbours—in my community, in whatever community that is, in whatever form that takes—is really, really important.

A woman's faith informs her perception of what it means to care for neighbours and serve in her communities.

Jackie's faith informs her understanding of caring for others in times of challenge and celebration:

> I think it is because of my faith and what goes with it that I see the need for our, for instance, our prayer shawl group.
> We knit prayer shawls and present them to anyone that we feel needs that, needs to know that there are people that are caring about them and loving them, and not just in sad times but also, say, moms with new babies and rejoice with them in their stage of life as well.
> And I think that all comes from your basic faith and what you feel is important.

Caring for others is a practice valued by several women's faiths, which informs their understanding and motivation to help neighbours and be involved in their communities.

Cultural identity does not automatically determine personal identity and motivation for community involvement. Rather, this can be a complex negotiated relationship. When she was a child, Kathy sold poppies around Remembrance Day to raise money for veterans like her friend's dad, an act that contradicts her pacifist ethno-religious identity:

> My friend's dad was a veteran, and every year they sold poppies. And I started helping her do that.
> We were quite young. It was always very cold. I remember that. And we would sometimes we would go house to house. Sometimes we would stand on the street in front of the store and sell poppies.
> And that was a worthy cause to me. I always felt it was. I'm not sure why that was, how that was ingrained in me because you know being basically from an Anabaptist background.
> I think it was more I just realized that if these people hadn't done what they did, I hadn't been able to walk the streets and sell poppies. There was something there that just made that important to me. It was just sort of where I started.

Kathy's Anabaptist background emphasizes a peace theology of nonviolence and conscientious objection to military service. Although she sees a contradiction between her faith and selling poppies, she also recognizes the significance of what the veterans did and how she benefitted from their sacrifices. Having a personal connection to a public issue or concern can influence women's sense of responsibility to help out even when their actions may challenge cultural or religious beliefs. Women's community involvement is often driven by their understandings of responsibility and caring informed by their personal identity, community, or faith.

Connecting

Women's volunteering was also motivated by women wishing to connect with others, often other women, and creating opportunities for connecting within communities. A significant motivator for women to be locally involved was women's need or desire, or both, to connect with neighbours, community members, and local or regional like-minded people, often with other women. Women's volunteer time doubles as social and leisure time. The connections women form through volunteer can become significant networks of support. For women on farms or small villages, community involvement breaks the isolation that can come with rural life. Half of the women moved to their current communities in adulthood and choose community involvement as a means to build relationships in their new communities.

Some women are involved simply because they love being with people. As Bea shared:

Gosh, I've had my fingers into every piece of pie, and I think, again
Robin—, I think my bottom line is that I love people. I love people!

Volunteering is a way to meet her neighbours and fellow community members. As Lois put it:

It's a great way to meet neighbours and people in the community.

Georgia and Elizabeth also observed involvement as a social outlet and a chance to create

relationships. Sonya loves the social aspect of volunteering. Knowing she'll make new friends in

the process, she's always amazed by what a diverse group of people can accomplish. Sonya's

incentive is that she:

> Loves people, loves to be involved, intrigued by people, likes the social aspect.

Being involved creates opportunities for Sonya in:

> Building new relationships because trusts she'll get new friends out of it.

Further, reflecting on these experiences, Sonya expressed her amazement:

> At what different personalities and unique gifts can do together.

Connecting and building relationships is a significant motivator for women, like Bea and Sonya,

for volunteering.

Noticing more women's volunteer groups than men's groups, Gail proposed that, as the

quintessential multi-taskers, women's volunteering is an opportunity to socialize, particularly

with other women, while helping others and their communities at the same time:

> I guess when I think about community involvement and groups, I would
> guess there are more female groups, groups that are female based, than
> male, in terms of volunteering, which gives lots of opportunities to help in
> many different ways, or be a part of many different things. […]
> > Because women are more social […]
> > And I think women find reasons to get together or develop reasons.

Gail surmises that women find ways through volunteering to get together, to connect with other

women and help out.

Similarly, Stacy loves to do things with others because it is more fun as a group and to

share the benefits:

> I love bringing people together. Whenever I have an idea of something that
> I would like to do, my next thought is always how to do it in a group.
> > Like aerobics. Oh, I led aerobics for many years in the community centre.

> My second thought is always how to do it, how to involve others,
> because it is more fun to do it in a group.
> But also because—this sounds hokey—but to bless others. That's not
> really quite the word. Because I don't want to be the only one to benefit.

Initiating community programs and activities with others, in particular with other women, is more enjoyable and ensures more people benefit from the initiative.

Community involvement can be a savoured 'me-time' for women to connect with other like-minded women with common interests. For women involved in formal women's groups, such as church, school, and community groups or informal groups, such as women's craft, hobby, or exercise groups getting out and meeting other women to exchanging ideas and good laughs, often over delicious food, is a regular highlight. Hilary simply stated. "I really enjoy getting out with the other women." Marjory noted the difference in female-only groups and women's desire to spend time with other women:

> I think a part of it is women wanting to spend time just with other women,
> and, you know, that sort of thing. Because it's very different when it's just
> women in the room as opposed to combination of men and women. So I
> think it's that desire to have that kind of bond with just other women.

Recognizing the uniqueness of connections among women, many women are involved in groups and organisations that are for women only.

The bonds that women form in their community involvement can become support systems for the women in rough times. Hilary recounted how her women's group supported her during health issues. When she became blind, the women arranged transportation so she could still attend meetings and events.

Gathering with like-minded women, through community involvement, can help women whose ideologies, values, and beliefs may be different than the local norm, particularly when it comes to gender ideologies such as feminism. Considering her own community involvement,

Tanya noted that connecting with other rural women who share her world view has increased her confidence to be herself in her community.

Women's community involvement is often about bringing people in the community together. Community festivals, suppers, gardens, famers' markets, and other community events as well as resource centres are significant spaces that help build and sustain social capital in communities. For example, while annual community suppers are touted as fundraising events, they are also regular opportunities for community members to connect, reconnect, and potentially build social capital within the community. As these events become annual they in essence become a part of the local routine, habit, and culture, and enrich a sense of social community and connection.

Connections and community are a significant essence of involvement for the women. After living overseas in Bangladesh, Margaret shared what she really wanted in life—friendships and community:

> To me that has always been the most important thing. And when you're, like, overseas and you see poverty and you realize, we went there each with a suitcase and we could survive quite well. We did not need all this stuff. Accumulating stuff or working for stuff that is not what we wanted. We want to develop friendships and community because in the end that is what you need.

The social connections, the relationships and sense of belonging and having a community, the experience of a community is significant for many women. For Wendy being involved means recognizing how we are all connected to each other as we give and receive from the world and the actions of others:

> Because everybody should do it. I'm connected to the world, receive from the world, give to the world. We are all in this circle.

This circle of connection, across time and space, with others in our lives and communities can create an appreciation of not only who we are in this world, but also what has been accomplished, is being accomplished, and is to be accomplished through people's involvement in their communities.

Connecting with others, often and in particular with other women, and building relationships are motivators for women to be involved in their communities. Many women incorporate their involvement with their leisure and social time. The connection with others, through friends and community, is important and valued in their lives for many women. The connecting motivation for women to be involved speaks to the desire of women to get together in groups to change their worlds, the world.

Making a difference, creating change

Numerous women wish to make positive differences in their communities for their kids, their families, their neighbours, and the marginalized. For some women their drive is viewed as a responsibility to fight against injustice and for recognition and social justice for individuals and marginalized groups. Recognizing gaps in local services, resources, or opportunities for their kids, community members, and themselves prompted many women, in particular mothers, to create or begin creating the missing pieces.

Joan, noted that like others in her community, she wants a good quality of life for herself and others:

> Because I live in my community and I love the people that are here. And it is important that we have a good quality of life. You want to improve it.

Through her own involvement, Kathleen is determined to make it difference:

> It's about making a difference.

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Making a difference, creating change, and improving their communities motivate women to be

involved.

Mothers, in particular, expressed a desire to create more opportunities for their children,

as well as other children and families in their communities. Mothers continuously talked about

making communities better for their kids. Considering all the groups she's involved with,

Simone reflected on the mothers she's involved with:

> They're not all—, well, on most of my committees, they are all mothers. So
> I was going to say maybe they are not all—, but, yes, they are all mothers.
>   And we always want more for our kids and the best for our kids. And I
> think, as mothers, or as parents, we would do anything for our kids. And so
> we're just trying to do what we can for them.

Mothers are often involved because they want the best for their kids in regards to opportunities

and resources.

For Sonya the responsibility of motherhood means making things better for her kids in

their community:

> I think, as a parent, to be involved in community things, which if we are
> going to assume the things generally that we choose to be involved in or a
> lot of the community needs are for the betterment of the community, we
> assume. And so, as a mother then to be a part of that and see that if I'm
> going to do this, if my kids, to have things made better for them, or
> something has to happen for them or my family, or even just the community
> generally, but sort of the mother aspect probably the responsibility that I
> have for my children to make things better for them.

Being a mother, for Sonya, Simone, and others means improving their community to make

things better for their children. Pearl poignantly summarized that women want a thriving

community for their children and families:

> Women always seem to be looking out for their family and community.
> They want a thriving community for their children to live in and their
> families to come home to.

Mothers are often motivated to improve their communities for their children and families, and organise resources and opportunities so that their children will participate, socialize, be active, develop, and thrive.

Women's volunteering work to benefit children wasn't isolated to mothers focusing on their own children. Linda, Wendy, and others, who can be considered community mothers, were involved for the sake of children in their communities. Wendy, who volunteers with and supports people with cognitive disabilities, proudly showed me a picture of a painting of a lake done by her autistic friend whom she has supported over many years. A few months earlier Wendy and her friend took a hike to a lake and took the picture which her friend painted:

> ROBIN: Oh wow! That's beautiful.
> WENDY: I know, and that's why you do that kind of stuff. You keep telling her she's got skills and gifts and so on. And I feel like deep down inside I know that I've contributed to her being able to do that. […]
> And so that's the kind of—. This is why I do it.
> I'm not sure exactly how to describe that, but look at that. Isn't that amazing?

Seeing the change that supporting and caring for others can have on the lives of others motivates many community mothers.

Once she realized the lack of opportunities for children in her community, Linda, a grandmother, got involved in creating local recreation opportunities for children:

> I enjoy it. I like to keep busy even though it's a lot of hard work. But just seeing—, like sitting down and watching little kids make a gingerbread house, it's—, um, it tugs at your heart, you know, things like that. I really enjoy it.
> I like to complain, too, sometimes. I say, "Ah, geez I'm so tired." But I'm still out there anyway. So that's how it makes me feel.

Watching children engage in activities motivates Linda to continue organising recreation opportunities for children in her community.

Also a grandmother, Wendy noticed a lack of recreation opportunities in her community

for special needs children and so, together with others, she revitalized the local Special Olympics

program:

> Special O was about to be non-existent in [her community] and yet in my
> work I was noticing more and more special needs kids. So what do they do?
>   So then, and if you—. If you are just going to sit and complain, that is not
> okay in my mind. Like shit or get off the pot. Really.
>   So I could sit and complain that there is nothing for kids with cognitive
> disabilities or intellectual disabilities to do or I could do something about it.

After recognizing a need in their communities, Wendy and Linda took action to create a

difference in their communities. Making communities better for families by providing

opportunities for their children and community children to be involved in various programs and

activities motivates many moms and community mothers to create the communities they want

their children to grow up in.

The desire to make a difference in their community can push women to be involved.

When Joan decided to run for town council she wanted to make change:

> I was smitten with the idea that I could make change and that I wanted to
> make change, which was more the crucial thing. That I wanted to do that.

Wanda was surprised by how much she wants to make a difference in people's lives:

> I'm really surprised by how much I am this person who wants to make a
> difference in people's lives because I want to serve God and because I know
> it will benefit those people and our community and my world, our world.

Identifying both their potential and desire to make change motivated women, like Joan and

Wanda, to be involved in their communities in order to create the change they want to see.

Through local involvement women can see the impact of their actions, often in a direct

way. When she sees a need or opportunity, Georgia asks herself what can she do that will benefit

her community. Georgia reasoned that her involvement is more significant to the community

than her vote:

> Yes, I can vote. But does my one vote really make a change? No.
> But if I can run a soccer program or volunteer in some different aspect that I—. You know, it's more significant. It seems to me that it's more significant than my vote.

Community involvement is a tangible accessible space where women can make a difference in their local communities.

Some women are motivated to advocate and educate around socio-cultural issues to fight injustice and create social justice. Tanya, an activist, is motivated by her understanding of social justice issues. Barbara grew up in a homeplace that emphasized social justice and advocacy. Fiona, a self-described problem-solver stated:

> I see a need and think there has to be a way of solving that problem.

Belinda believes through education and advocacy change is possible. Many people just are not aware of the problems others face:

> If you knew this or if it was your family you'd want things to be different.

She adds:

> It's about the underdog, it's about inequalities.

She sees herself as a bridge between those who are not aware of the problems and those who face the problems:

> [I'm] a bridge to that Robin Hood and Maid Marion. There is the rich, the people that don't even know the problems the have-not's are facing. They simply do not know so that the haves can understand what is happening for the others.

Recognizing the inequalities in their communities, women like Tanya, Barbara, and Belinda seek to address the issues and build social justice.

As an Indigenous woman, Holly's motivation is fuelled by the injustices committed against her people through colonization and to help her community progress:

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I always wanted to see people, I guess, progress in their life, especially when it comes to injustice and things like that. That has been very strong in me.

And so I never really knew what was the answer when I was a kid. You know, I just saw so much turmoil in our communities, in our family life. My family life was affected back—.

I wanted to find something that would help, you know, the families in First Nations and that sort of thing.

So a lot of what I try to look for was based on that fact. And culture was one of them—in fighting for who we are as persons.

You know, we don't need to be little European counterparts. But we can be who we are, and still—, still be, you know, productive.

And when I say that, I say that because Canadian society is trying to create us into little European counterparts and whatnot.

Personal and collective experiences of injustice or hardship, or both, can motivate women to pursue change.

Although women may be motivated to make a difference, it can be difficult to truly understand their potential and the impact they will have, as Belinda observed:

I don't know if any one person ever really knows that they can do that [make a difference] on a larger scale until you start.

Women are motivated to make a difference at the individual and community levels. Recognizing injustices or gaps in services and opportunities spur women to take action to support individuals, and address the challenges and the needs of their communities.

Creating meaning

Women's community involvement often reflects their own passions, concerns, and experiences. Community involvement is a means to do something meaningful or make meaning of an experience, interest, or concern in their own lives. As previously discussed, for many women, motherhood motivated their involvement on committees and with organisations connected to their children. Experiencing a critical illness, such as cancer, influenced Kathy and Gail to be involved in a women's support group of cancer survivors. After developing a

degenerative vision condition which left her legally blind, and learning about the supports and services available for vision-impaired people as well as how to advocate for herself, influenced Mia to consider volunteering for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. At the same time, as an immigrant Mia felt she had knowledge and insights to offer new immigrants and had also considered this as a volunteer option. However, she decided to focus her involvement close to home and the farm, and became involved in the local farm women's organisation.

Being active in her community is Tanya's reason to live:

> I believe we need to be active in our communities. It's a reason to live and to care about being alive.

After she got married, Wanda started being involved in her community as she wanted do something meaningful:

> It was an area of my life that I needed to fill, and it was important. I wanted to do something that was of meaning.

Sonia's involvement gives her a sense of self-worth and pleasure from serving others and making them happy. Mia reflected on her volunteering:

> All this is a good feeling.

Adding:

> We can help other people [live] here happily.

Like Linda who loved watching the children build gingerbread houses, Pearl shared seeing the results of her involvement gives her a "good feeling." Likewise, Carla expressed in regards to volunteering:

> Not a lot of things that I find more rewarding.

These women and others discussed the importance of being involved in activities that give them meaning and is rooted in one of their passions. Wendy shared that she:

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Doesn't stay on stuff that isn't meaningful because other people may find it meaningful: Not saying it's not meaningful for anybody, just not for me.

Being passionate about a need made being involved easy, noted Sadie:

Wherever there is a passion it is easy to give back and be involved.

Stacey is driven by passion:

It's just passion.

For many of the participants volunteering is about engaging in meaningful and rewarding activities informed by their passions, interests, and personal experiences.

Women's stories of community involvement revealed that their actions are informed by understandings and values of care and responsibility which are informed by their identities, and desire to connect with others, make a difference, and create meaning. Women held multiple motivations. Their understanding of their roles as mothers, active citizen, and their personal or cultural identities motivated women to connect with others and be involved in their communities.

ROLES

In their community involvement women take on formal roles within organisations and informal roles within organisations and their communities. Typically, women simultaneously hold a combination of formal and informal roles or responsibilities. Their roles often reflect their strengths or interests, such as arts or sports, or draw on professional or career training and knowledge. Simone, who loves volleyball, coaches junior-high volleyball. Sonja, who is an accountant, volunteers as a treasurer. These two women are also involved in numerous other associations and organisations that reflect other interests. A few of the women have received awards or formal public recognition, such as volunteer of the year awards or a Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal. This recognition typically emphasizes the formal roles the women have and had.

Being rural, several women noted, provided opportunities for roles they felt they would not have experienced otherwise. This section focuses on the formal and informal roles women take on throughout their community involvement practice, as well as women who have broken tradition by being the first women to hold formal leadership roles in organisations.

Formal roles

Formal roles refers to specified roles within organisations with formal structures such as boards of non-profit and non-governmental organisations, municipal councils, school boards, and churches. President, vice-president, chair, co-chair, treasurer, secretary, convenor, archivist, board member, committee member, committee head, facilitator, assistant director, canvasser, and leader were all roles listed by the women. Within an organisation women may have multiple roles such as board chair, committee member, or event volunteer. While some of these roles may have fixed terms or timelines, others such as event organiser or volunteer are done on an as-needed basis and are more informal roles within a formally structured organisation. All women noted changes in the roles, organisations, and associations they have been involved in. Some women have been involved in different capacities with the same organisation for over fifty years.

Women's formal roles often connect with their expertise. Sadie taught piano lessons was a church pianist and choir director:

> I also volunteered for I don't know how many years—I think it is probably twenty—as a pianist for our church. And I conducted the choir for quite a few years, probably five or six.
> So, a lot of my volunteer work probably was in the church family, but just because I had the music. We have a small church and not everyone is comfortable to do that. And so I guess there is an expectation that if you are a piano teacher that you must be comfortable to do that.
> And it was all good. I did that for a lot of years, a lot of years.

Belonging to a small community, such as a small church community, as Sadie points out, can translate into someone being called upon or encouraged to take on roles, especially if they have a matching skills set. Reflecting on her continuing church involvement, from youth leader to Sunday school teacher to worship leader and treasurer, Sonia observed:

> Almost everything that our church has had to offer I think I've done.
> Almost everything.

Churches can provide opportunities, including leadership roles, that women they may not have in the broader community. Jackie who was always involved in the local United Church Women group, became active in both the regional executive and national executive and held the position of president with both organisations. Reflecting on her experiences, Jackie shared:

> It is interesting to see how some of the women who came onto the executive at [the national level], with very little—just like myself—with very little experience on the broader field, have gone to be part of the Women's Inter-church Council of Canada. And, you know, they've just blossomed.

Through larger church structures women can find leadership opportunities at local, regional and national levels.

Many provincial organisations require rural representation on their boards. Rural residents, including women, have opportunities that they may not have if they lived in a city. Dot explains:

> When you are in a small town there is such, there are so much more opportunities for volunteer involvement in the community. And there is opportunity for involvement at a provincial level.
>   Because in Manitoba particularly they need rural representatives on a lot of committees because they are not just Winnipeg committees. They are supposed to represent the province. And so they need people who are willing to volunteer on some of these committees. If you are living—, if you are someone like me living in the city, you would never be asked to sit on [these boards] because there are so many more qualified people—people who have bigger names and are known in the city. I am a nobody there.
>   So in rural areas there is opportunity. (Neustaeter, 2015)

A few women have been involved with provincial committees or councils. These opportunities are often connected to their professional work, their churches, or community organizations.

The first

Women are opening doors for other women by breaking gender norms and being the first women to hold leadership roles in governmental and education organisations. Kathleen, Joan, and Lois were the first female councillors elected to their town councils. Sonia was the first woman worship leader in her church and first female chair of the board for a private school. These women admitted that they were not motivated to break gender barriers and traditions by taking these positions. Rather, they felt that they had something to contribute to the roles and the community.

When Kathleen initially considered running for council, she was told women couldn't get elected—which only convinced her to prove the speaker wrong:

> Somebody told me oh you can't get elected. Women can't get elected in this town. And that was the wrong thing to say to me. The same guy that said to me, "Oh, you'll never make it in this community," when I first arrived here.

Later she expanded:

> He took one look at me and told his wife, "She'll never make it here." And she told me that.
>   And I said, "Thank him because that's exactly what I needed to hear. Make me kick him, and say, "Well, watch me!"

Kathleen further clarified:

> I love people telling me I can't do something because then I have to go and do it.

Like Kathleen, Lois was the first woman elected to her town's council although she was not the first woman to run for a councillor seat:

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I was shocked to get elected to the town council. And I am very proud to say that I made history when I got elected because I am the first woman councillor that [town] has ever had.

I am very overwhelmed by the support from the people in our community, and I have worked very hard to gain their respect and support.

Lois, a retired business owner, suspected that her experience and success as a business woman in the community contributed to her successful run for town council. She noted that she was surprised the previous woman candidate had not been elected, considering all of the woman's community involvements and contributions, and the fact that she had lived in the community longer than Lois.

Joan's decision to run for the Local Urban District (LUD) committee was informed by her passion to create change. Joan and her husband moved from Winnipeg to their rural community for their retirement:

It was very funny. I guess when all of this started was just after we moved here, and there was a vacancy on council. And I wanted this fellow to really run. But he said, "neh, neh, yada yada." So anyways, I spent half of the summer trying to convince him.

And then we went to my daughter's just before nominations had to be in. And then, as I got more involved in trying to convince him, I thought, "Well, maybe I should do that because he is not going to. Maybe I should."

So at the 11th hour I phoned the [Chief Administrative Officer of the town] and I said, "Has [the man I've been trying to convince] thrown in his nomination?" And she says, "Yes."

And I say, "Well, I want to do as well."

So here I convinced this guy to run, and then I run against him. I thought, "What are you doing? Are you crazy?"

Once elected, Joan faced two challenges. As an outsider, she encountered the attitude:

Well you people from the city think that you can come out here and change everything.

Her response was to emphasize her choice to make this community her home and her commitment to serve the people. Gender was the second challenge, as she was the first voting female member of the committee, which was initially frowned upon:

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There had never been a female on committee other than the passive
secretary who was not allowed to vote because yada yada.

She added:

And then that was kind of frowned upon because why the hell is she making
decisions for us. But that was another interesting concept.

Of the two challenges, being from the city was more difficult to address than gender for Joan.

Joan pushes through with her ideas and, since being on the LUD committee, she has established

a farmers' market and community festival and has been involved in numerous housing and

environmental initiatives.

At work, church, and in her community, Sonia has been the first woman to hold several

leadership positions. Speaking honestly, Sonia acknowledged that there can be mixed emotions

tied with being the first female in a leadership position. She recounted the first time she led

worship at her church as the first female worship leader:

It is also scary because as the first woman worship leader I actually had the
experience of having a man walk out on me and that was kind of tough.
I was up at the front and I knew this person didn't like women in leadership,
especially in that kind of a role. And he came in. He came right to the front.
And, I don't know if he was making a point or if he really hadn't noticed
me at the front, but he came in, got to the front, looked at the bulletin, and
walked out.
And I know for a fact that it was because of me. I know for sure because
he was very vocal about not wanting a woman in that position.

When she was considering being the chair of a school board, Sonia felt:

Way more fear [about the position] than there was "oh I can be the first
[woman chair]" although it did cross my mind and it did intrigue me.

Sonia was the only woman to acknowledge any fear in being the first woman in a leadership role.

She suggested that being the first woman or hard work can require a strong personality, strength,

and hinted that gender maybe an underlying motivator:

So you know it's not really that gender motivation isn't always positively
motivating. It might motivate me in the other direction except that I am a

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strong person. I'm a strong enough personality that in some ways I would be willing to make a point if somebody thinks that because I am female, that maybe underlining, there is a little of that somewhere, I don't know.

Later she added:

The gender thing, it's not a motivator, but it is "Oh, okay." But the hard work that comes with maybe being the first woman or just taking on a role far outweighs any prestige that I might think comes with being the first woman.

Sonia's points about the fear and hard work that can come with being the first female in a traditionally male role highlighted the patriarchal gender culture in communities and organisations, which can discourage women from taking on male dominated roles.

Being the first woman in such a traditionally male role can be a lot of pressure, particularly as these roles are often very public and demand a lot of time and effort. Kathleen, Joan, and Sonya pursued these involvements because of their passions for their communities, with gender factoring as a supplementary motivator. All these women acknowledged the support they received and continue to receive from their communities—suggesting that gender change is in progress and supported. That women decide to take on these leadership roles while challenging gender norms demonstrates their tenacity, determination, courage, and strength. From President to Board Chair, from Secretary to Treasurer, from Committee member, to coach, women take on various formal roles within organisations and associations. For some women, their local involvement or professional work provides them with opportunities to be involved at a provincial level to support change. Driven by their belief in their ability to make change and improve their communities, some women challenge traditional gender roles and are the first woman to hold particular leadership positions.

Informal roles

Initially my research focus skewed towards women's formal roles within organisations, perhaps because these are the clearly identified and 'extraordinary' positions in our society. Glancing across the research field it was easy to find women in formal roles. They are visible at events, in the media, and acknowledged with awards. Wendy pushed me think beyond formal to rigorously consider informal involvement. Wendy, who is and was involved in numerous formal roles within various community organisations and advocacy initiatives, did not want to talk about her formal volunteering. She preferred to talk about her informal volunteering.

Wendy referred to her nurturing as happening at the ground and root levels, an apt description I felt for describing the unseen yet vital nurturing and caring work that happens in the soil which makes plants, and in this case individuals and communities grow and thrive:

> I'd say that I'm involved at the ground level, maybe below, maybe at the root level. I was thinking about that when I read this question. I thought I will never be a volunteer of the year because I'm not really volunteer as such. My involvement is with my neighbours.

Later, she added:

> I'd say more on the neighbour level or not formal. I work with [Special Olympics] but I'm not, I'm more just at the ground level.

Wendy located her involvement at the root, ground, and neighbour levels where she nurtures individuals. She distinguishes between volunteering at the root level with her neighbours to formal volunteering recognized by awards.

Nurturing was another concept Wendy used to describe her involvement:

> You nurture, *do what it takes.* But then, then, it's never mine to hold or keep. *[emphasis added]*

Without giving specifics, Wendy acknowledges that she does what it takes to nurture those in her community through informal community involvement.

Women listed numerous informal roles that they have held, including organiser, cook, baker, driver, listener, advocate, activist, mentor, friend, educator, networker, cashier, helper, and baby holder. Informal roles can be spontaneous or short-term responsibilities often for specific events such as fundraisers or connected to their work, such as farming. As noted earlier, 'help' was a common term given in reference to community involvement. Helper was a role some women assigned themselves.

Describing her involvement, Tanya stated:

> I would say mostly as a helper. I don't consider myself a leader. I think I'm good at networking and to help others to become aware of things that they might not otherwise be aware of.

Describing herself as a helper, Tanya expands on what her being a helper means, specifically networking and awareness-raising.

Many women discussed baking or cooking for community suppers. Bea spent hours making 'holypchy'[47] and perogies with her church ladies group for fundraisers. For several years Gina was in charge of the gravy at her community spring supper:

> It was my job to serve the gravy, combine it all in one pot and keep it going.

The prevalence of community suppers as fundraisers highlights the connections between traditional homemaker roles (cooking, serving, hosting, and cleaning) within public homeplaces for the benefit of communities.

The 'just helping-out' reality of informal community involvement roles can make these roles or actions harder to identify as they are often seen as everyday actions rather than a formal role in a community organisation. When discussing their informal involvement, several women

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[47] Ukrainian cabbage rolls.

emphasized neighbours, knowing your neighbours, and connecting with and helping neighbours.

Gina is also a chauffeur for several ladies in her community:

> I'm a chauffeur so what I do is there's a couple of ladies in the community who are not able to drive, and I take them to appointments or shopping or just whatever is needed to be done.

Wendy talked about being a community-mother to her neighbours. Helena shared the following story about a connection with a neighbour in his nineties who calls her each morning:

> Country living kind of makes you know your neighbours, makes you aware of your surroundings, and makes you just conscious of, "Okay, this person—."
>   Like we have an old neighbour down the road. He is 91. He phones us every morning just to tell us he is alive. Just simply because he needs to know that somebody knows that he is still kicking, that he woke up in the morning and he is still breathing, and that sort of thing.
>   So it's not—. It doesn't take any time. It doesn't take any effort. It's something that you do because you're neighbours.

Helena's rationale, "because you're neighbours" not only highlights an understanding of community and being a community, but also resonates with the motivation several woman give of "just because."

Exploring informal involvement expanded my perspective of women's community involvement to recognize the informal ways women contribute to improving their communities. While some informal work such as baking, cooking, or serving for fundraisers may be connected to an organisation or event, other informal roles such as driving people to appointments or on errands is less organized and more self-directed. Acts of nurture, care, and connection towards neighbours and others is a significant means through which women contribute to their communities at the ground and even at the root levels in effect creating abundance.

Leadership

Discussions of women's roles inevitably spark considerations of leadership although leadership was not an explicit focus of this study. Women in leadership roles is a significant consideration when we look at evaluations and assessments of gender equality. Most women in this study did not discuss leadership beyond identifying formal leadership positions they have held or are currently fulfilling, for example President, Board Chair or Co-Chair, and Treasurer. Women did acknowledge the leadership roles of other women in their communities. Some of the women acknowledged as leaders participated in this study.

As discussed above, Tanya did not consider herself a leader. Simone was the only woman to self-identify as a leader and having leadership skills and abilities. Women themselves did not self-identify as community leaders outside of formal roles. This study raises the question, what are the cultural and gender narratives of what and who a leader is, in particular, at the community level? Getting more specific, is it culturally appropriate for women to self-identify as leaders, especially community leaders outside of any formal positions? Considering the patriarchal culture prevalent in many rural communities, and the acknowledgement that men tend to make up the majority of leaders, particularly in churches and government, how do women influence leadership and decision-making in their communities?

Women's stories of community involvement highlighted a plethora of formal roles within organisations, as well as extensive informal roles of helping, caring, and nurturing performed every day to improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities. By filling in and stepping up as needed to ensure things get done, women perform multiple roles within formal and informal organisations that can blur the categories of formal and informal involvement. Women have opportunities to sit on provincial boards and committees representing local or rural

Manitobans. Several women have been the first women to hold leadership roles traditionally held by men, noting the significant support they have received from their communities. While they mention that there may be some prestige that comes with being the first woman in a role, they also talked about the fear and responsibility associated with that.

TRANS-GENERATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

By telling stories of their grandmothers', mothers' and mother-in-laws' community involvement, women revealed a vibrant and under-told story of community history—women's community development. In some cases, the storytellers were involved in the same organisations or groups as their foremothers signifying transgenerational involvement. This was most noticeable when women lived in the same communities as their foremothers.

When she was a child, Louise's mother started a ladies group and Louise is currently the President:

> After that, well all those years, I'm still involved in the same ladies' group and I am the president. And I would like somebody else to do it, but nobody else wants to do it. But, like I said, that is a third generation is involved now already in that group.

After she married and moved to a rural community, Hilary followed in the footsteps of her mother-in-law and joined the local women's group. Sonya and Barbara attend the churches their parents were involved in and continue the family involvement in their churches.

Women may also be involved in similar initiatives as their foremothers. Mia married and immigrated to a farm in southern Manitoba. Her mother was involved with a country women's organisation back home and informed Mia of what they were doing. After a while Mia discovered a local version of this organisation:

> I didn't make the connection at first that [the Women's Institute] is the Country Women's organisation.
>
> And my mother in [my home country], she is with the Country Women there for many years, over 30 years. And she was always sending me these programs and what they all are doing.
>
> And I thought, "Oh, this is amazing." I wish we would have something like that here. And it never appeared to me that the [Women's Institute] is actually the Country Women's organisation here.
>
> So when I figured that out, then I thought, "Oh wow! So there is something."

Trans-generational involvement highlights several considerations. First, when daughters are involved with similar or the same organisations as their parent(s) it suggests the importance of the modelling of community involvement and early learning discussed in the chapter on Women Learning Community Involvement. Second, in all cases identified in this study, trans-generational involvement occurred when either the women were in the same location or circumstances as their mothers or mother-in-laws, meaning that they had a common connection to a place (for example a community, organisation, or church) or situation (for example rural or motherhood).

ROUTINE

Women integrate their formal and informal roles in community involvement into their everyday routines. By setting priorities and with the support of family and friends, community involved women ensure they meet their responsibilities in regards to family, career, household, community, and, for some, education or the farm. Georgia, a university student at the time we met, shared what she wrote for an assignment about life balance:

> I had to do a writing piece this week or last week and the actually topic was the life of an [university] student. And what I wrote is that I basically have 4 ropes tied to my waist.
>
> One rope is family and friends. One rope is work. One rope is community involvement. And one rope is school.

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And at various times the ropes pull on me. So, for example, at times the
work rope pulls harder on me. Then school pulls harder. Then
community involvement pulls harder. And, right now, I feel that my family
doesn't want to pull on my rope thinking that it will add extra stress.
So, yeah, um, so that is how I feel, that I have ropes attached to me and
they are being pulled. And I gotta, yeah, keep myself upright and balance
that and finding that balance.

Georgia's image of the four ropes highlights the ebb and flow within women's lives as they

focus on maintaining balance with the different aspects of their lives.

Pam referred to intermeshing community work with other parts of her life:

I kind of intermesh everything. Yeah. I don't think I separate much. Yeah, I
intermesh is probably what I do best.
Because one feeds the next, which opens up the possibilities for family
involvement as well.

Like Pam, Louise sees everything as blended:

I think at times there was no difference, like no dividing line, like it was all
together. […] We'd just do that.

Stacey noted that all of it is who she is, which is similar to Gail's observation about everything

being connected:

Just part of my life. They are not separate. […] They just kinda, like, just
intermingle.

Several women jokingly described it as "total confusion." Women negotiate their time,

responsibilities, and energy within their everyday routine.

As previously noted women often "just do" community involvement. It comes natural

and is just who they are. These sentiments suggest that women are often so busy doing they don't

stop and think about how it will happen, how everything they need to do is going to happen.

Kathleen glanced at her list of all her involvements over the past thirty plus years, and reflected:

I'm not exactly sure how it happened when I look over all what it says. It's
just a mystery to me how it all happened.

Remembering both her own and her husband's community involvement while raising two children, advancing her career and his business, Maria commented:

> I don't know how we juggled it.

During especially busy periods she found it very hard and in regards to one particularly intense involvement she felt "handcuffed" to it for five years.

How women integrate community involvement into their routines, while making the rest happen involves making decisions about how they manage their responsibilities with the time they have. As Belinda stated:

> I think that for women it is about the time, the amount of free time that they have to make [their community involvement] happen, because the rest of the stuff still needs to happen. Like supper still needs to happen. And laundry still needs to happen. And homework has to happen.

As Belinda notes, community involvement and "the rest of the stuff" need to happen within the same day, week, or month.

As the women talked about how the manage to do everything, they shared several strategies for keeping up with all their responsibilities. Their strategies included: writing a to-do list; creating clear priorities; building strong time management skills; taking it one job at a time, taking it one day at a time; setting aside one day a week for community involvement; and separating and scheduling their time and concentration on home, work, and community tasks.

As women discussed how they intermesh family, home, work, and community as well as their strategies to manage doing what they love, I began to look for ways women engage in self-care. This includes developing awareness about who they are, what's important to them, and what they need to sustain their lives and themselves at specific stages of life. Women emphasized the importance of learning to say no which required developing awareness of what is manageable and what they are passionate about.

Georgia acknowledged that for her saying no is a recent practice:

> Saying "no" to stuff has only recently happened. You know, realizing that, "Yeah, you cannot do it all because you just cannot."

Other women noted that when they couldn't give one hundred percent to their involvement due to other matters going on in their lives, they would pull back on their volunteering. Sadie and Sonia each took a year off from community involvement due to feeling overextended. Regarding her sabbatical Sadie reflected:

> It gets to a point to where you are over-extended and there had been one year where I actually quit everything. Now I'm having a time for me, I need that. Because sometimes—, because you are involved in lots of things. You—and if you have capabilities, then you get asked. And I'm not a very good—, I couldn't say "no "very easily when I was younger. I'm a little bit better at that now.

Sadie's year off gave her some much needed time to focus on herself and figure out what was meaningful to her.

Similarly, Sonia, took a year off and noted how this break gave her a chance to rest and focus:

> Taking that break. Well, first of all, it allowed me to rest, to clear the brain, and then allowed me to choose fewer involvements where I thought I could do the best, do the best.
>
> Rather than saying "yes" to everything that interested me a little bit, because for the—. Well, like I said, some of it is my duty, but still there has to be some interest, some gift or something that keeps me there.
>
> I'm not going to go and paint, like be part of a painting club because that is not something that I'm going to do. That doesn't interest me. I'm never going to do that. You can ask me a thousand times, and I'm not going to do that.
>
> But there are many things that I would like to be involved in. So to limit myself, I came back saying, "I do not have to do everything." It's okay to say "no."
>
> And that is something that has to be learned too in community involvement 'cause once you get asked and do reasonable work, you'll probably get asked again. Yeah, so, um, I learned it's okay to say "no," do fewer things, and doing them better and choose what you really either really have gifts in or are most passionate about.

Sonya's reflection on her year off is an uncommon example of someone expressing significant conscious consideration about their community involvement. Like Sonya, Sadie and Georgia and others also learned to say no. I suspect women do give consideration to how, where and when they will be involved, where they will give their energy, knowledge, and time. Like many other everyday decisions regarding time-management, these are made and then likely forgotten in the bustle of the everyday.

What women integrate in their everyday changes over their lifetimes as they experience different phases of life including for example post-secondary education, marriage, parenting, career, and retirement. Also, some women are affected by health issues, either personally or as caregivers of loved ones. A few women experience a disability, short- or long-term. Mothers in particular noted that when their children were younger their community involvement revolved more around their children. Through it all, women integrate their community building practice into their everyday.

Support

In recounting the four ropes pulling on her, Georgia highlighted the significance of support from family and friends for her ongoing community practice. The support women receive from friends and family, in particular, in order to do their community involvement reveal that behind every community-involved woman is a team. Family and friends provide significant moral affirmation and support, including practical support such as childcare and helping out with household tasks and responsibilities. Carla identified how her husband's interests and community practice compliments her own and provides support for their young children:

> I have a husband who also thinks it's important, so, and he is one these
> people that would be sort of below the iceberg, under water. He's one of the

people that would be supporting in the background and that is what he does. Right? He understands these things are important and why they are important and why I need to go above and beyond in my job and in my community involvement. But he is quite content to be at home and look after our son while I am out changing the world.

Like Carla, other women talked about the necessity of family support for their involvement.

Margaret shared:

Well my family has to really sacrifice when I get involved with a big community event, and so does our place. I like to have or give it my all and I draw on the support of my family a lot.

For Kathy it's a give and take relationship, which requires sacrifices by herself and her family, as she noted:

Sometimes a family has to take the knocks or the volunteer thing has to take the knocks because you know one or the other is—. [...]
   And, you know, sometimes it's really hard to pull yourself away from one or the other because you have a vested interest in one thing, but your family is so important and you don't want to hurt anybody's feelings.
   No, sometimes it just doesn't work.

Kathy recognized that it's hard to pull yourself away from what it is important to you. Women recognize the sacrifices they and their families make in order for them to be involved. Family provides crucial emotional and ideological support to women community builders.

Several women were involved in the same initiatives as their spouses. Dot and her husband were both involved with community theatre, environmental issues, and their church. Gail and her husband advocated against development and in favour of ecological sustainability. Pamela and her husband advocated for environmental sustainability. Maria and her husband spearheaded several community development initiatives. Other women, like Maria and Bea were involved in their churches ladies groups while their husbands were involved in the men's groups.

To sustain their community involvement practice, women draw upon practical and emotional support from their families, in particular husbands. Families understood how women's

energies and focus are pulled in different directions depending on what is happening in their lives in the moment and support.

The farm

Six of the women who participated in this study live or lived on working farms. For their families, farming was the main household income. One woman lived on a grain and oil-seed farm; the others lived on livestock and grain farms. While on the farm, women often have farm-related responsibilities to help keep the farm functioning. Recalling her early involvement with a local women's organisation while running a dairy operation with her husband prior to the mechanisation of milking, Pearl shared the following anecdote:

> When we were dairy farmers it was hard for me to be actively involved at that time in the [women's organisation], because when they would have their meetings, I was in the barn.
> But I made sure that, well of course, if they had a skits night or anything like that, if they needed a jack-ass for the skit I would go. They would call me, I would come.
> And I always helped to prepare a banquet, and then I'd go home and milked the cows with [husband]. And after we were done, I'd go back and help wash up and clean up.

Pearl integrated her farm duties with the scheduling of community involvement. The cycles on the farm also influenced women's involvement. For example seeding, harvest, and calving times were busier for women. During calving season Suzette missed meetings because she needed to be on the farm. Mia noted that when women's time and energy are also required on the farm, they simply are not able to also be as involved in their communities.

Seasons of activity

　　Historically, the cycles of the farm significantly influenced farm and some rural women's involvement. Margaret noted how in the past women typically couldn't participate in organisations until after harvest:

> Fall season didn't start till after harvest like activities. Like even women, they couldn't participate in something until harvest was over. They were so involved in feeding the harvesters and stuff and so they never even thought of being involved in stuff until after that was done.

Margaret's reference to 'fall season' in regards to women's involvement sparked my curiosity into seasons and cycles of women's community involvement within their everyday routines. Through observing women's community involvement, rural communities, and gleaning the women's stories, I've noted various seasons of activity regarding women's involvement, notably as women's involvement is typically more demanding during certain months and almost on pause during other months. Margaret's recollection of how in the past women's community involvement started after harvest and Suzette's example of stepping back from her involvement during calving season illustrate how women's community involvement is influenced by the cycles of agriculture and the farm.

　　Community involvement can reflect cycles of activity. Many community organisations take a break over summer, typically July and August, when many people go away and are not as available, and start their activities and programming again in September. Numerous rural communities host local festivals in the summer, and so people involved with these festivals are busy in the spring and summer months and weeks leading up to the festival, and then they take a break after the festival and in the fall. Spring and fall are also often busy seasons for 'soup and pie,' 'spring supper,' or 'fall supper' fundraisers for local schools, organisations, and initiatives. These seasons of activity are informed by tradition and practice, as many organisations run their

annual events at the same time every year. Summer tends to be a calmer season for many

volunteers, except those who are involved with community festivals hosted during July and

August. Historically and currently, farm cycles inform farmwomen's involvement. In the fall

community involvement picks up again for many volunteers as they return to their routines after

their summers.

STAGES

Women's community involvement changes as their lives change. Putting the women

stories together, I began to see stages of involvement, particularly in regards to formal roles, as

women moved through over their lifespans. This was particularly noticeable in the lives of

mothers. To some degree women, in particular mothers, progressed through stages of community

involvement which corresponded to key stages of their lives in general. The stages identified in

the women's narratives are: Personal-interest I, Children's interest, Personal-interest II and

Retirement.

Table 2: *Stages of Involvement*

Stage	Description
Personal Interest I (no children)	Community involvement is focused more on the woman's interests.
Children (children at home)	Community involvement is typically connected to their children's activities and involvements, such being on the board of daycares, family centres, parent school groups, and involved with sports teams, and fundraising for children's activities.
Personal Interest II (children no longer at home)	Community involvement returns to being more focused on the interests and passions of the woman, often with a lingering over of interests from the Children's Interest stage.

Stage	Description
Retirement	Retirement presented two paths in being involved: (a) women maintained or increased their formal community involvement; (b) women reduced or completely dropped their formal community involvement opting to 'freelance' their volunteering on an as-requested/as-needed and convenience basis.

Looking over her thirty-five years of involvement Sadie recognized how her involvements changed:

> I've been involved in various aspects in the community. […]
>   The involvement sort of changes as your interests change, especially if you've got kids, and, I know, you do. So you are involved in things that they are involved in. And prior to that, your own things. And after that,—. […]
>   So you are always transitioning. And it's very cool to be able to try new things, you know. I haven't been involved in the same things for thirty-five years. I've done a few different things.

Sadie, a mother of two and now a grandmother, identified three stages of involvement: personal focus before children, children-focused, and personal focus after children. Looking back on her own involvement, Tanya identified similar stages:

> Well it seems to be stages of my life. And in the early stages when my children were just starting school, my involvement was mostly with their, in their lives in that community, in the school, on the advisory board.
>   And the next stage of my life I spent actually—and this was when we were away—I spent in total six years getting my degree. And at that time, I probably wasn't as involved in the community, but I was more involved in making sure that my children could be involved in their activities and still do my own studies.
>   And then, I'm probably in another stage right now. But the stage before the stage that I'm in right now, the stage when I was working off the farm and then, my community was made up of my, the classes that I taught and my colleagues at the learning centre where I worked. Again, I was not able to do active community work at that time because I just couldn't handle it because I was also doing the farming with my husband.

Later Tanya added her fourth stage:

> My fourth one: As I started out in this interview saying that the community that I live in, the tiny little community that I live in. there is no possibility to participate in that community any more.
>
> I'm doing things outside the community in Winnipeg where I am quite involved. […] And I've had the opportunity to be a part of the group [rural women's networking program], which allowed me to connect with other women who are leaders in their community and from whom I learned a lot.

Tanya started describing her involvement stages with children-focused involvement, then she notes while working on and off the farm she was less involved because of her work required more attention. Once she retired from working off the farm, while still working on the farm, Tanya became involved in a provincial women's network although she is also involved informally in local communities.

Motherhood proved a significant factor in women's community involvement in regards to motivation (why), focus of involvement (what), and routine (when). As noted, mothers are involved to create opportunities for their children and be involved in their children's lives at school, church, and in the community. Several moms, including Helena and Kathy, help start Parent Councils or Home and School Associations in their children's schools in the early 1980s. In the late 1980s, when French language issues were contentious in Canada, Wanda, whose children were in French Immersion, was involved with Canadian Parents for French and volunteered with her local French Language Advisory Committee.

Being involved with her children's activities was a highlight for Sonya:

> The things that I've enjoyed, probably the most that I've enjoyed over the years is anything where my children were also involved and I could watch them as part of that.

Considering the lack of recreation programs and opportunities in many rural communities, moms often talked about wanting opportunities for their children, or community children, and so they would create the opportunities. As Stacey recounted:

> My kids were getting older and there were just so few activities in our community for them to participate in. And so I went to an Athletic Association Committee meeting.

And from there she and a community committee started and organized numerous community events, some of which are still running.

Kathleen, Stacey, Wanda, Kathy, Joan, and other women noted that being a stay-at-home mom presented the time and flexibility to be involved. Joan started volunteering when her kids were in school because she had time. Kathy noted that having the choice to stay home when her children were young gave her flexibility to be involved:

> Choosing to be a stay-at-home mom gave me time to be involved.

Although she left her profession when she became a mother, Kathleen recognized new opportunities came her way, which determined her life course:

> Probably the pivotal decision was that I decided to be a stay-at-home mother. I had my daughter when I was 30 and the fact that I was a stay-at-home mom kind of opened the door to my encountering opportunities that became my life.

Kathleen observed how this opportunity to stay-at-home and be involved can be attributed to her gender:

> Being a woman presented the option of being the stay at home parent and the flexibility to be involved in school and politics.

While some men do choose to be a stay-at-home parent, this decision is not as common or culturally acceptable, particularly in some rural communities that have more strictly proscribed traditional gender roles—in particular, the male being the breadwinner.

When mothers do work, they must balance all their responsibilities into their routine. Some mothers work full-time or part-time out of the home; some work at home or on the farm. Working part-time while being the mom of three young children gave Stacey "the luxury of time to be involved." Mia, a mother and farmwoman who had recently started her own home

consulting business, reflected on her busy community involvement schedule and noted that if she

was working off the farm she wouldn't be able to be so involved. Of other farm women who

work off the farm, she observed:

> I see in the country here the [women] who are working and they have their
> own farm. They—, it's tricky already, and if they have kids, they are not
> able to volunteer anymore.

Working, full-time or part-time, mothers creatively balance community involvement into their

routines.

Arising from the mothers' narratives of motherhood and community involvement is the

potential of a community involvement parenting style in which parents consciously incorporate

community involvement through volunteering into their parenting practice. Mothers are

significant teachers and role models to their own children. Mothers like Carla, Georgia,

Elizabeth, and Simone spoke about their involvement as role modelling specific attitudes and

behaviours for their children. Several mothers intentionally involve their children in their

volunteering, as Georgia stated:

> To be a good mother, set a good example for my kids and also to involve
> my kids in some of the work that we do.

As mothers, these women see community involvement as a teaching-learning practice in their

parenting style. Georgia planned on taking her children to volunteer with her at the foodbank.

When Simone's son shared with her that he wanted a skate park, she said, "Okay, let's do it, and

you need to be involved." On involving her children Simone reflected:

> My kids are involved in everything that I'm involved in. And I just bring
> them, and I think it's a good way for them to learn that, you know, that you
> gotta give back to your community.
>   If you want something you got to work for it.
>   So, just like the tennis court and skate park my son really wanted. He
> wants a skate park and which I'm totally, "Okay, let's try to get one going,
> but you need to help out, too."

So they volunteer with fundraising and whatever needs to be done. Community involvement is a means for mothers to model values and behaviours for their children. As well, volunteering with their children is a teaching-learning process within their parenting emphasized by several mothers.

Considering that only three women in this study were not mothers, it is difficult to determine a specific pattern for potential stages of involvement from their stories. As well, one of these women was single, and so the influence of a life-partner would also need to be considered as a potential determining factor.

For many women retirement marked a shift in their involvement. Some women became more involved. I observed women describing and being involved both in taking on more roles and taking on more leadership and representational roles at a regional level. These type of roles could be challenging for working women or mothers with children at home to perform as they require a lot of time, travel, responsibility, and flexibility.

In retirement other women were no longer interested in formal roles demanding a lot of the time and energy organising and attending regular meetings. They prefer to 'freelance volunteer,' coming in when needed for a few hours to help out with specifically assigned tasks, such as event set up or clean-up, cook, bake, or sell tickets. On her shift from serious organiser to freelance volunteer, Gail reflected:

> Years ago, I would have no problem when they said who wants to be director or president and I would raise my hand and had fun kinda with organisation.
> But now I don't. I've done my years of organising so now I just, "Give me, tell me, 'I need you for two hours' and I'll come and do that."

Lena shared a similar perspective:

> Well it ended up that once I retired from paid work, I kind of retired from volunteering too. Like I was even—, like my job was working with

volunteer organisations too or like the staff of volunteer organisations so doing planning with them and so on.

And I'd hear about and did lots of reading on volunteerism and so on and seeing the trend that baby boomers when they were retiring were not continuing on and I was appalled.

And I'm sort of one of those people, I think, because now what I want to do is do stuff. I realize that I don't want to be on a board because that is too much like work.

Lena later clarified what she wants to do:

I do not want to be on a board anymore just doing routine stuff, sitting around a table talking about old stuff. I want to do something.

So if you ask me to be, to help, you know, promote the fundraiser or decorate the hall for the event or whatever, I would do that, but—. And then I'm over.

Like you can commit the weekend or whatever, but I don't want the ongoing responsibility stuff. So, um, you know for me, then, my volunteer time is not with an organisation anymore. It's doing. […]

My motivation is keeping the history of the community and so my volunteer work is on my own where I'm not working with any organisation.

The shift to these informal roles gave women more choice as to how they wish to use their time in the moment; relieves them of organisational responsibilities, duties, and stress; and allows them to remain connected to community causes they deem important.

Women's community involvement practice often progresses through four stages of involvement that reflect significant stages in their lives: Personal-focus I, Children-focus, Personal-focus II, and Retirement. These stages are particularly relevant to mothers whose community involvement focuses on their growing children. In retirement, women may become more involved with formal organisations and take on leadership roles at the local or regional levels. Or, they may retire from formal volunteering and become freelance volunteers. Some women are active with the same organisation for a long period of time, performing different roles throughout their involvement. Women may also perform different roles within different organisations and associations. Roles include formal roles within organisations as well as

informal roles in organisations and community helping where needed. Most women were active in more than one organisation at a time, often church and a community organisation. Several women left formal roles within organisations upon retirement opting to freelance volunteer where needed for organisations or events that they are passionate about. The development of a disability in adulthood led three women to shift their community involvement roles to reflect what they could so best in their new realities.

CONCLUSION

Women identified five different motivating factors for being community involved: care and responsibility, personal and cultural identity, connecting, community improvement, and, creating meaning. With passion, energy, and expertise, these women took on various formal roles contributing to local, regional, and provincial organisations and associations while at the same time informally helping out neighbours and others in need to help get things done. Through their community involvement some women challenged traditional gender roles. Women engaged in on-going nurturing and caring work as neighbours and active citizens, helping out as needed in their communities. As women integrated their formal and informal involvement into their everyday lives they develop routines and means through which to support responsibilities. Like the year, community involvement passes through seasons of busy and calm. Trans-generational community involvement highlights the tradition of women's community involvement in rural areas. Engaging in their communities throughout their lives, women's community involvement— in particular, for mothers—often moved through stages reflecting significant eras in the women's own lives.

Ladies Aid Society, Southtown, Manitoba, September 9, 1952

The ladies of the Lutheran Ladies Aid of Southtown met at the home of Mrs. Lindh, Sr., on the 9th of September.

Present were ten ladies and one guest.

We opened the meeting by singing the hymn "I Love to Tell the Story." For his devotion Rev. Tillman chose to read about Esther after which another hymn was sung.

The treasurer's report was $143.87 in the treasury.

The aid was glad to receive Mrs. Lindh, Jr., as a new member.

A motion was made by Mrs. Perry and seconded by Mrs. Klassen that we give Mrs. Trapp $5.00.

A motion was made by Mrs. Pankratz and seconded by Mrs. Perry that we give the Southtown Children's Aid Society $10.00.

Birthday hymns were sung for Mrs. A. Smith, Mrs. Pankratz, and Mrs. Lindh, Jr.

The members of our aid have sent a little gift and congratulations card to one of our former members, Mrs. David McKinley, upon the birth of a baby boy.

Discussions have been started on our fancy work and home baking sale, which is to take place in November.

A donation of print remnants, which we received from Simpsons-Sears[48], was distributed amongst the ladies. The material is to be made up into aprons, little dresses and other various articles for our annual fancy work sale. A letter of thanks is to be sent to the company.

The next meeting is to take place at the home of Mrs. J. Smith, on the farm.

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[48] Simpsons-Sears was a Canadian catalogue and department store company which sold fabric and material. Women's groups would write the company and request a donation of 'print remnants' or bolt ends and fabric scraps which they would sew into items to sell at fundraisers.

Adjournment was made and when our hostess had a delicious chicken supper ready, table prayer was sung.

Donations - $4.40.

Mrs. A. Smith (Secretary)

CHAPTER SEVEN

Community Involvement Learning

When she first became the treasurer of a local organisation, Gina tacitly began learning how to do this role:

> I took on the job as treasurer, and almost ran away. And, there again, you learn by doing. And you learn by asking questions. And, you know, Susie[49] was our president, and I relied on her a good deal of the time to make sure I would do things right.

To learn to be a treasurer Gina's engaged in experiential learning and learning through mentors.

Gail recounted organizing the triathlon with her husband, noting how through this annual experience, they continuously learned by experience and from each other:

> That was a big learning. It was just my husband and I who ran that and we had over 100 volunteers.
> And I don't know how many sponsors my husband would get every year that we'd all get.
> And this was like an every year thing. And we, I think together, taught each other. Is that—? Is that, you know, how to, um—. You know, we were volunteering ourselves, but, um, we needed all those people.
> So how to, all year long, really, keep a positive relationships with everybody and anybody. And it didn't matter if they had volunteered and didn't do a good job or whatever. You just learn to, just not—, um, to be positive, and not bad mouth anybody and not—.
> It's kinda like it's our work and whatever happens there between us, and—I don't know. You learn by doing, I guess. And plus he and I both, I think we are pretty good organisers. We are pretty—. […]
> So I've learned lots through him. […] He is very particular, and so I learned a lot from him.

Talking about their community involvement, Gina, Gail, and the women in this study revealed a plethora of learning experiences and practices that highlight complimentary and concurrent means of learning community involvement.

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[49] Name changed for confidentiality purposes.

Five main ways of learning were identified. First, children notice their parents'

community involvement practice. This early learning in the homeplace instills values and

awareness of the potential, possibility, and practice of community involvement in children,

which often informs their community action in adulthood. Second, doing community

involvement is a significant means to learn community involvement. This learning by doing, also

referred to as experiential learning, recognizes the learning inherent in the act of doing,

evaluating, and reflecting to improve practice and build knowledge. Third, interacting with other

individuals, colleagues, and co-volunteers provides women avenues for social learning through

connecting, networking, and interacting with others to exchange knowledge and collaboratively

negotiate knowledge and practice. Fourth, experienced practitioners, role models and mentors

demonstrate, encourage, and coach women's community involvement practices through situated

teaching-learning relationships. And, fifth, many women transfer knowledge from other spaces

of their lives, such as work, home, as well as education and training (both formal and informal

learning) into their community involvement practice, which often requires then to adapt and

apply knowledge and skills into new contexts. Notably, these learning spaces are the familiar

spaces synonymous with the everyday. Drawing from the women's stories, this chapter examines

how women engaged in these five learning processes.

EARLY LEARNING

Women recounted vivid childhood memories of their parents and grandparents' being

involved in their communities. These memories signify the importance of the homeplace to

women's early learning of the values, practice and potential of community involvement. Early

learning memories centred on physical spaces such as home, church and community, as well as

relational spaces including family, friends, and community members. As children, many women

developed a consciousness of community involvement informed by behaviour and values

practiced by their parents.

Responding to how she learned community involvement Debra replied:

Well some of it, it would have been that growing up at home.

Specifically she noted how both her mother and grandmother were active in the community

which set the expectation or modelling that to be community involved is "just what you did" and

its "who you were."

Stacey suggested she learned her community involvement from her parents via osmosis:

My parents were involved in their communities to some extent.
    Like I remember my mom teaching a Five-Day club. And they were just
always—, the door was always open. And they were involved in their
church in a big way.
    So I guess I learned it by osmosis.

Stacey's explanation identifies the significance of the homeplace as a space for early learning of

the values and practice for community involvement.

Early awareness of community involvement planted the seed of future community

involvement for many women. Recounting her mother's *nahverein,* Belinda describes a process

similar to Stacey's explanation of osmosis:

You know, when I think back to when I was a kid, my mom did stuff.
    She had her *nahverein*[50]. She wasn't hugely involved but she did stuff.
    I think you model what you see. So if that's the pattern I saw in my
family, I did the same.
    But, very specifically, how would you run a pajama party? I think that is
all. You make the best plan and you go with it.
    But really, what would even get you on that thought process would be
what you saw from home.

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[50] Nahverien is a High-German term referring to a sewing circle. See the context chapter for more information about nahveriens and their significance to women's community involvement.

Belinda and Stacey discuss how the values and practice of community involvement they

witnessed in their childhood homes contributed to their own understanding of community

involvement.

Margaret's memory of her mother's sewing circle reinforces the significance of early

learning in the homeplace:

> They would get together. And I know my mom. It would be like a tea.
>   She would, you know, house got an extra cleaning and organized. And
> she would bake extra special. And, you know, we would have to clear out as
> kids.
>   And they would just sit around and visit. And they would bring their
> embroidery and things like that.
>   And then they would talk about the next mission sale, and they would
> work towards that. Pillow cases, aprons, all kinds of things like that that
> would be sold for a mission.

Margaret's memory also identifies how her mother and the women would talk about and plan

their next mission sale.

Similarly, Louise identified how the ladies group her mother started in their district got

her involved in the community:

> My mom she started the ladies' group in the community. And it was a very
> important function for the ladies because we were all scattered throughout.
> We were twelve families, maybe. And we were scattered across one mile,
> half mile away.
>   And during the winter months, they would get together.
>   They would do some sewing. They would do some fundraising for some
> kind of need, needy family.
>   And that is how I got involved in community. And my eyes were open to
> past, just past our dinner table. And that is where it all started.

For Louise, watching her mother's example made her aware of the world beyond her household

and planted the seed that grew into her own community involvement.

Early learning of community involvement in the homeplace was not only about

participation in community groups, it was also about modelling values of hospitality, generosity,

and caring, often by welcoming and helping those in need—as Stacey earlier noted how the door

to her parents' home was always open. The hospitality and willingness to help others modelled

by Fiona's parents taught her to reach out to others:

> My parents were also very hospitable.
>   They, if anybody came onto our farmyard and said, "I need help doing this," my father would drop everything and go.
>   They didn't have anything. But what they had, they shared.
>   Even people now will talk to me about, "Well, you know, I could always come to your mother's place and have a cup of coffee and a piece of pie."

Hospitality, generosity, helping, and kindness as modelled in their childhood homeplaces were

significant to Fiona, Stacey, and others. Helena's parents also modelled these traits:

> My mom and dad were always willing to help anybody and everybody so it just sort of carried on. I mean, it didn't matter if they were, you know, if food was short. If somebody came over, they would always be invited to sit at the table. So it was sort of reflective of that.

By helping others, doing and sharing what you can, even when you have little, parents provide a

significant early learning experience for their children in regards to supporting and caring for

others—"beyond the dinner table."

Through the example of others, children become aware of and learn values and

behaviours which can inform their community involvement as adults. Joan, who grew up in a

predominantly pacifist Mennonite community with a mother involved in the church and a father

involved in the Legion, attributes their modelling of respecting others' differences and opinions

and doing what you need to do or believe is right for you:

> My mom was always very involved in the church and my dad was always involved in the Legion. Totally conflicting things in a Mennonite community. But I think part of that, because they were so on opposite spectrums you learned that you can still respect somebody else's opinion and do what you need to do or go where you have to go.

Early learning within the childhood homeplace can foster an awareness of respecting others

whose opinions are different, as in Joan's memory.

Holly's grandparents modelled the coming together of two spiritualties. Her grandfather

was a Catholic and her grandmother practiced her traditional Indigenous beliefs:

> I do believe in Creator. That is something that our grandfather instilled in us. […]
>   Even though Christianity has been not so good with regard to the downfall of our structures [within indigenous communities and cultures] and that sort of thing, there still was some aspects that was good for us and my grandfather had that through the Catholic Church.
>   He'd pray on his little prayer beads. You know, that sort of thing. One time I said, "Grandpa, what are you doing?" And he said "I'm praying for all of you." And he did that every day.
>   And my grandma, she was a traditional woman.

Holly later elaborated on her grandparents' teaching her the integration of cultures:

> [My grandmother] used to have these—,
>   Well, my grandpa used to have these pictures of European Jesus. You know, the white Jesus with the blonde hair and the heart outside the picture.
>   And she'd have the sweetgrass braid. She'd have the sweetgrass braid right on top of the picture [of Jesus].
>   And that, always—. I always think about that today because, in a way, it was the integration of both.

Holly recognizes that while the Catholic Church has had a negative impact on Indigenous

peoples there are still valuable aspects of the Christian faith which can co-exist with her

traditional spirituality. Observing parental and familial ways of being and community

involvement created awareness of connecting with others and community involvement which

women like Louise, Debra, Stacey, Belinda, Joan and Holly, informed their community

involvement in adulthood.

Community involvement is also learned through stories, the stories told in the home

about community involvement. For Suzette these stories were told through her grandmother's

scrapbooks:

> My grandma used to keep scrapbooks on everything that she used to do in the community. Like my grandpa helped build the hall in [their community]. And my grandma was a 4-H leader. […]

> My grandma would cut out all sorts of newspaper clippings and we
> would always look back at them and read what happened all these years ago.

Suzette learned of her grandparents' community involvement and community history through her

grandmother's scrapbooks.

The stories of community-building heard in childhood can have a lasting impact on a

person. For Barbara an important story was the beginning of the church her family attended:

> Probably being part of the church and the whole part that came about. You
> have a group of people and they want to have a place to worship. And they
> figure it out and work together and do it. […]
> We were early members. The story was there at home. So, it was unusual
> at that time.

Barbara illustrates how telling children stories of community action can have a lasting

impression of the potential of people to build communities. Family narratives of community

involvement can have a significant impact on children and later as adults.

Early learning for community involvement also occurred in spaces beyond the home, yet

still considered within the broader space of the homeplace, including the church and the

community. While women spoke more about their faith and community involvement in

adulthood, as noted previously, Sonya and Wanda connected their actions as an adult to growing

up in the Mennonite church. Religious spaces can be significant early learning spaces for

women's community involvement. Early learning in the community took place at school, in child

and youth programs such as 4-H, and observing others involved in the community.

While in 4-H, Elizabeth learned the importance of community:

> I took 4-H in the younger years and think that was a lot of—. They teach
> you that kind of stuff. And they teach you how important community is and
> that kind of stuff.

Several women, including Elizabeth, Louise, and Kathy, noted how their participation in 4-H

provided them with awareness of the significance and value of being involved, as well as

knowledge and skills that they have utilized throughout the involvement as adults.

Family beliefs, practices and values around community involvement can be diverse and

how they manifest as the children become adults can vary. Sonya compared her extended and

immediate families regarding community involvement:

> When I consider my mother's family, I shouldn't have been involved in
> anything because her great larger family was all about "Oh, don't get
> involved. It's too much work," and you know. Sort of that.
>   She came from that kind of a family.
> My dad, I think that would be different. He came from a family that was
> much more involved. Now my parents themselves have been quite involved.

Within her family Sonya identified different attitudes towards involvement and the example of

her own parents modelling on her life.

Early learning of community involvement in the homeplace is not a guarantee for

community involvement in adulthood. Helena noted her parents as generous and hospitable,

always helping neighbours in need, yet out of nine children, she identified herself as the only one

involved in their community:

> In my family of 11 there is just not—. *[pause]* There's only about—. Let's
> see. How many of us do volunteer work? Probably me. The rest are not in
> that in that same—. [...] Well my one sister probably would say that she
> does a little, like, she does as much as she can. But, like, the rest of them are
> really not that involved in community or so. I'm not sure why.

Early learning in the homeplace informs children about community involvement, but it does not

ensure children will apply this learning to future involvement.

Memories of collective action for community events and support were discussed by the

women in connection to learning community involvement. Sadie spoke about the legacy of a

barn-raising as the collective effort of a community coming together to help a family build a

barn. Sharing the example of raising money for a family whose garage burnt down, Carla recalled how her childhood community would support members in need or crisis. Noticing how community members helped her family, which she described as poor, Helena became aware of the significance of helping neighbours and being community involved. Learning community involvement can also be about observing the involvement of others in their community.

Sharing stories of community involvement, many women recounted childhood memories about family and community members who were community involved. These narratives highlight the significance of socialization and early learning within the homeplace for instilling awareness of the potential, possibility and practice of community involvement. Telling children stories of community involvement, such as Suzette's grandmother's scrapbooks or the story of the origins of Barbara's church, are also early learning experiences of community involvement. Although they might not realize the complex meanings of the stories as children, as adults with a greater understanding and experience of the world, this exposure to caring, helping, and action socializes children for potential community involvement.

LEARNING BY DOING: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Women commented that they didn't know how they did it, they simply did it. Learning by doing, or experiential learning was the most common means of learning identified by the women. Experiential learning reflects the organisational adage of the 4-H Movement 'learning to do by doing' (4-h Canada, n.d.). "Just by doing it. It's the 4-H doing, learning by doing," identified Barbara, and the nearly one-third of participants who were involved in 4-H as children, youth or adults.

As Marjorie expressed it:

I learned just from the experience of doing it and I think it very valuable. You know, take the chance. […] Learn by doing. Go in without a clue and just figure it out.

She added:

I still strongly believe in that I learn just from the experience of doing it and I think that very valuable.

Reflecting on how she learned community involvement, Simone stated the following:

I have no idea. Um, you know, sometimes it's not really, you know, that I'm becoming. That I am president because I am the best at that. […]
   [If] somebody needs to fill that position and, you know what, I'm willing to learn it. […]
   Not necessarily that I had the skills at first because I don't think I did. But I think you just learn them as you go and you realize what needs to be done now and what can wait. And yeah, I think it's something you just learn as you go.

Simone and Marjorie's sentiments were echoed by Jackie:

You just pick it up a little bit here and there as you live, I think.

Like Simone's description of her "becoming" and the comments of learning as you go, Carla described her learning to do community involvement as a progression of learning, noting that she is still learning, and there are things she doesn't yet know how to do or is confident in.

Elizabeth and Belinda both expressed needing to be flexible and spontaneous. Belinda described her process:

You steal ideas that look good to you and you morph them a little bit. […] You have to be ready to fly by the seat of your pants just a little bit.

Women may find themselves outside of their comfort zone, in new roles or tasks, not sure what they were doing.

Learning by doing and flying by the seat of your pants requires being comfortable with taking risks, expecting the unexpected, and comfort in standing outside of your comfort zone. In small communities, without a large pool of expert volunteers with every required skill or

knowledge, being involved can mean taking on new roles, like Simone becoming President, that

are outside of one's comfort zone. These experiences are often ripe with learning.

Remembering their experiences of trial, error, and reflection, women often chuckled at

their mistakes. Reflection is significant for improving knowledge and skills in order to increase

effectiveness. Describing her own 'trial and error,' learning Belinda shared:

> You have an excellent plan and then it goes right off the rails and you just
> go off on the ride.
> And later on, you come back, and you say "Oh boy, that was awful!" Or,
> "That was great!? But we had no idea that was how it was going to go.
> And then you decide from there, "Okay, next I'm not going to do this,
> and this and I'm going to do more of this and this." And it really is trial and
> error.
> I mean you get feedback from people even before you plan something,
> but, you know, you don't always. You're going out on a limb a lot of times
> so it's a bit risky.

Trial and error, assessing the process and outcomes, are common means of learning community

involvement.

Linda described:

> It was just a learning experience. You just plan and you watch, watch for
> any mistakes or just keep track of any mistakes that you made. And you try
> and fix them for next time.

Bea and Helena made similar remarks regarding assessing what happened and correcting

mistakes. Bea reflected:

> To move somewhere—be it at a snail's pace—but you move on by learning,
> by experiencing, by making mistakes, and being able to correct them.

Helena described her reflection process:

> You know, taking a step back sometimes and re-evaluating and then, like
> going forward again after. Like even if you have been shut down you have
> to go forward again, and reassess and re-evaluate.

Simone shared:

Learn from mistakes, reflect, realize and try to do better next time.

Belinda, Linda, Bea, Helena, and Simone emphasized learning by doing, assessing the process

and outcomes, and identifying and correcting mistakes.

Implied in this trial and error process is that there will be opportunities to fix your

mistakes and try again. Helena shared the following advice:

> It's just, if you make a mistake, you just say, "I'm sorry." And, you know,
> and as long as you are willing to acknowledge your mistakes, then
> everybody is sort of much more accepting of you carrying on and going
> forward.

The opportunity to fix one's mistakes provides opportunities to improve their community work,

as well as to challenge or validate knowledge by building strategies and skills. A reflective

process ensures enhanced knowledge and strategies for improved community involvement and

essentially better communities.

Women discussed how learning community involvement happened by doing community

involvement. This experiential learning often included learning through trial and error and

reflecting on experiences and mistakes as a means to refine their knowledge and skills in order to

build their community involvement praxis.

SOCIAL LEARNING

Often women's involvement is done in groups and provides many opportunities to

observe, question, and discuss practice to build knowledge and practice. Simone expressed the

learning potential of observation:

> Don't always realize right away. Sometimes it's just something someone is
> doing, something different, and you think, "Oh, that makes so much sense."
> Sometimes you don't know until you see it done another way.

Observing others, as noted Simone, provides opportunities to compare, assess, and reconsider one's own practice.

Through observation and involvement women are learning about how to organise events, what works and what doesn't work, how to work a crowd or set a positive tone, run a meeting, build credibility, public relations, address conflict, and much more. When Mia first helped to organise a community supper fundraiser, she drew a lot from the experience of the more experienced organisers:

> For example the [community supper]: I never organized something like that. And I mean you see, all of a sudden, they all work together and they all have certain jobs, the same job for so many years so it's like they know exactly what to do and who is in charge for what.
> It was like learning from the others that have done it for many years basically and sitting there first and listening. And then, I mean I didn't jump in like crazy, right away. I was pretty slow.
> And so you take on more responsibilities as you grow, you know.

Mia's story highlights the simultaneous learning by experience, observation, and social learning to learn how to organise and carry out a community supper to fundraise for a community organisation.

Being in community contexts, such as events or meetings, women watch and learn what works and what does not work. Sometimes, the 'mistakes' of others can provide a learning opportunity for women to understand what not to do as well as validate their own ideas and knowledge. Observing her mother being a super community-involved woman with a career and a family, Simone identified how she wished to be different and develop her own practice and habits, such as being on time:

> Its cause my mom was always late, and I said I don't want to be. […]
> Love my mother to death, but she—. She's still always late and she has no more kids at home.
> Before you could blame it on the kids, but now it's just her. Watch doesn't have the right time. But it's just—. […]

You know, some things you learn from people—"I don't want to do that." You learn from their mistakes obviously.

Observing others presents opportunities to determine how an individual wishes to be community involved. Watching her mother who is perpetually late, Simone determined that she wants to be punctual.

When participating in an event Elizabeth noted the importance of welcoming and validating the presence of attendees, particularly a first time event:

Because I've been to so many conferences and so many different things like that, that you pick up little things on how to run it.
So, for instance, one of the organizers said, right in the mic, "We're disappointed with the turn out, but we are glad you are all here."
What! And like, you don't say that! And, I told them at the beginning, not that I, you know, know everything, but I've been to enough of these things to know that whenever you run the first annual event chances are it's not going to be as good, unless it's some rich person doing it or whatever.
But generally they are a little bit lower attendance. But as you keep doing them, you get more and more involvement.

Connecting with others and observing what others do provides opportunities to assess, validate, or adjust one's own knowledge, as well as to share your knowledge with others, as Elizabeth experienced at a first annual community event.

By watching others women can learn what is most effective and less effective in community involvement. Observing others involved in their communities provides significant learning through reflection and comparison of practices and processes for doing community involvement. As well, practitioners reflect upon their own practice to assess, challenge, validate, or correct one's own practice. Sometimes, those whom the women are observing have a significant role for the women as mentors and role models.

MENTORS AND ROLE MODELS.

Learning often, invariably involves an element of being taught. The teaching-learning relationship within community involvement often manifests through individuals developing role models and mentors. Notably these learning relationships are typically not formalized and, for the most part, they develop organically and informally within organisations, initiatives, networks, and families. As Belinda suggested:

> I think they are probably around us but we probably don't always notice them and we might not notice them in the moment but we might think of them.

Women notice others whose behaviours, attitudes, values and wisdom they wish to emulate and integrate into their own community practice.

The significance of mentors and role models is vital to many, Louise underlined:

> Role models are terribly important.

Women identified people whom they attributed as both role models and mentors. While the concepts of role models and mentors are similar, and may be considered synonyms by some, they are also unique. Mentors are trusted, knowledgeable, or wise teachers, counsellors, or supporters. Role models are examples in regards to values or behaviours in a specific role that people look to and may try to imitate. A few women mentioned non-local women or famous women who they admired for their philanthropy and community-building initiatives. As articulated by the women in this study these concepts were blurred. Mentors are often also role models and vice versa. Considering the blurred line which can make it difficult to separate mentors from role models, I've decided to integrate both and examine women's responses according to the social spaces their role models and mentors represent: family, friends, organisations, and community.

Family

While parents were the most commonly named mentors and role models, women cited

other family members, including aunts, grandparents, mothers-in-law, and husbands. Women

described the extensive community involvement and leadership of family members, various

attributes which they wished to emulate, as well as the significant encouragement and support

received within their family. Considering the significance of early learning examined earlier in

this chapter it is not surprizing that family members are cited as mentors and role models.

Parents. Parents were the most commonly named mentors and role models. Marjorie

named her parents as role models and described how involved they are in their own rural

community:

> I guess my role models would really be my parents because they are
> extremely involved.
>   Like they're both—. Like my dad is going to be 80 and they're both in
> the late 70s, and I couldn't keep up with the pace that they keep up.
>   Like my dad is still a councillor so he is involved that way. And my mom
> is on a committee to bring ministers into the community and to get doctors
> and a clinic set up. So they are very, very involved in the community.

Describing her role models, Marjorie pointed out how extensively involved they are in their

community. Marjorie went on to add that, now, as she has moved to a rural area and is

community involved, she appreciates the work of her parents:

> I've started to have a better appreciation since I've moved out here of why
> they get involved and the amount of effort that they put into the work that
> they do. Just volunteering, not expecting any compensation for it.

Now a volunteer herself, Marjorie appreciates all the work her role models, her parents do for the

community, as well she notes her own practice helps her understand why they do it indicating a

reflective learning of motivation.

Looking at the community involvement of their mothers and at their own involvements,

both Simone and Elizabeth see themselves following in their mothers' footsteps. Elizabeth noted:

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My mom was volunteer extraordinaire. And even now she says, "Oh, [Elizabeth] you are so busy." And I say, "Yeah, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree." Because she was involved in everything.

Similarly, Simone observed how she is becoming her mother regarding community involvement:

My mom was so involved. Like she's crazy.

At some point I think I'm becoming her. I mean she was a […] teacher here. And then she became a school principal here, too.

She's now retired, which is great for her. But she was always very involved. And when she is into something, she goes full board.

So she's been really an inspiration too.

Their mothers were both involved in everything, noted Elizabeth and Simone, who also recognized how they are following in their mothers' footsteps. Marjorie, Elizabeth, and Simone all commented how extremely involved their role models are in the community, similar comments about role models outside of the family were also made as noted in this section.

While some parents were active in with organisations within their communities pursuing more formal community involvement, Helena, Fiona and Sonja also emphasized their parents' modelling informal involvement, such as helping neighbours and community members through caring, hospitality, and generosity. Both Fiona and Helena recalled their parents as models of generosity and hospitality, which inspired their involvement in adulthood. Fiona shared:

You know the door was never shut on anybody, and so I learned very early, that part of what you are supposed to do in this life was to reach out to others. So that I mean that, they were, that was part of my modelling.

Similarly, Sonya appreciated her mother's service with kindness and caring towards everyone, and her father's positivity, involvement, and encouragement:

So, my mom, in terms of her loving everybody. She really is just a kind person and loves everyone and serves well.

And you, know, so I think some of that example of service is what has driven me to involvement and doing what I can if there is something that I can do or someone sees that I can that would be.

Yeah, my dad: His involvement and encouragement. A very positive person in how he encouraged me along the way.

Always felt like I could do things you know.

Sonya pointed out her father's positive attitude and encouragement, which as her mentor gave her confidence to do things.

Helena, Fiona and Sonya identified their parents' early modelling of caring as examples of helping others, which informed their community involvement. Through their own formal and informal community involvement, parents not only socialize their children into community involvement and caring, as described in early learning, yet also serve as role models and mentors their own children, even in adulthood.

Grandparents. Moving back a generation, grandparents are also mentors and role models for their grandchildren's community practice. Holly singled out her grandparents as significant influences to her community involvement. Suzette grew up with her grandparents' stories of community building and recognized their role in supporting and inspiring her community practice. Louise was inspired by her grandmother:

> To do what is right, to do good. Not that they would preach at you or whatever but it was just you just knew it was expected and you wanted that acknowledgement.

Through her example demonstrating the expectation to do right and good, Louise appreciated what her grandmother taught her as well as the acknowledgement.

Grandparents can provide inspiration and insight into community involvement. Talking about her role models, Carla identified how her grandmother, although not community involved specifically, demonstrated traits Carla felt were important to community practice:

> My grandmother: I don't know that she was so much community-involved, but she is definitely—. […] But my grandmother definitely has the personality traits of a community-builder.
> She hasn't necessarily always put her energy towards best use but she's dynamic. And she is outgoing. And she's smart. She's ambitious. She's a go-getter. She's got lots of energy.

Looking at her grandmother Carla identified traits, such as outgoing, smart, ambitious and energetic, which she felt are significant to being community involved. Through their own community practice and being grandparents as role models, several women acknowledged, inspired and informed their community involvement.

Aunts. Women shared how aunts who served as role models and mentors. Louise, who grew up the middle child in a large family, viewed her aunt as a role model:

> When you grow up, you always had, like you said before, role models— people you look up to. And I know I had them in school and extended family.
> I had an aunt and she was my role model. Like I grew up in a family with ten siblings so very often, well, not all your needs were met. So to have a role model in the extended family was really helpful for me.
> And you have people who inspire you.

Having an aunt in her extended family she could look up to was significant for Louise.

Similarly, Pamela shared about her aunt who was more like an older sister:

> I have an aunt who is only four years older than I and feels like she is more of a big sister to me. She has a gift of encouragement.

Aunts can provide significant support for their nieces in regards to support and encouragement.

Aunts can also model values, attitudes, and lifestyles that inspire women. Jackie recognized her aunts as role models, in particular, one aunt whose values and wisdom she admired:

> So yeah, my aunts and that one aunt, in particular. She lived to be 93 and always had a word of wisdom.
> She'd say, "Who am I to judge?"—you know, when issues would come about. Like the homosexual issue was a big one in our church a few years ago. And she would always say, "Well, who am to judge? God put these people on the earth."
> So she was a mentor.

Jackie recognized her aunts as mentors, noting one aunt in particular, whose wisdom around respecting others she admired.

As well, aunts can model broader and alternative gender expectations and roles in society. Barbara identified an aunt whose life choices demonstrated an alternative to the typical lives of women in her community:

> I had an aunt who would show up every once and a while, and she was a very independent person. And so that was a role model different from other—.
> Like, because when we moved here, um, well none of the women spoke English and only some of the men.
> And the women were in the home and so was my mom.
>
> So here you had this aunt who travels all over the world and is a journalist in Australia, and so it was an interesting.

Noting her aunt as a role model, Barbara compares the lifestyle of her aunt who travels the world and has a career to the women homemakers, including her mom, in her childhood. Female family members, like aunts can be supportive and encouraging role models for women in their community practice. Such role models can be significant when girls and women are drawn to community involvement roles and issues outside typical gender roles and expectations, for example in leadership, politics or business.

Husbands (Partners). Some women identified their spouses as role models and mentors. Sometimes they are involved in the same organisation or initiative. Although she was involved before he entered her life, Sonya named her husband as one of her role models:

> My husband. In terms of how he gives of himself as well to the community. He has been involved in so many ways. Now that would probably reflect more of my even later years although I've been involved long before he came along, too.

Like Sonya, Dot also named her husband as a role model in light of his own involvement, noting that he is also supportive of her involvements:

> He has just been very involved. Very involved in a lot of interesting things and very supportive of what I do.

The first person Maria listed as a role model was her husband whom she suggested others would

say she considers him a hero:

> My husband is really involved in the community. And I think some of the
> many things I've done I did because he was involved in them and so I
> became involved in them as well.

Later, in regards to her husband's involvement she added:

> I often joke that if [my husband] would move to the Sahara desert, he would
> start a hockey team of some sort within the first four days because he's so
> really involved in sports and municipal politics.

Sonya, Dot, and Maria identified their husbands as their role models, noting in their own

community involvement stories that while they may have common involvement, they also have

their own which their husbands support.

Mothers-in-Law. Hilary and Louise recognized their mother-in-laws as role models,

noting how each of these women were significantly involved. Considering role models, Hilary

stated:

> Most certainly my mother-in-law. She came here as a teacher in 1929 and,
> you know, ended up marrying my father-in-law. She was a quiet woman but
> she did a lot in the community.

Inspired by her mother-in-law, Louise shared why this woman stood out for her:

> Another role model was my mother-in-law. Some people would say, "No,
> mother-in-law stories are not that good." Sometimes.
>   But my mother-in-law—did I ever learn from her! Dedication to family.
> Dedication to work. Perseverance.
>   Because she was basically blind and she raised 11 children. She never
> complained, you know.

Inspired by her mother-in-law, Louise also recognized her mother-in-law as a role model:

Extended Family. Extended family can also have a learning-teaching dynamic in regards

to community involvement. Gina visited the rural homeplace of her husband for years before

they moved to there in their fifties. During these visits her husband's aunts and cousins' wives took her under their wings and introduced her to the community:

> I would have to say that the people that influenced me in the community out in the country were [my husband]'s aunts and his cousins' wives. When I used to come out they used to make sure that I, um, was asked to go along when something was happening. So, yeah, they were a big part of it.

Going along with family members to community events and meetings before moving to the area, influenced Gina's later rural community involvement practice.

Family is a significant potential network of role models and mentors for women's community involvement. While parents were most commonly named as family role models, so too were grandparents, aunts, mother-in-laws, and husbands, for providing support, encouragement and setting strong examples of what it means to be community involved.

Friends

In adulthood friends become role models and mentors for women involved in community. Wendy preferred to refer to these role models as partners highlighting how they are involved in a collaborative learning-mentoring community involvement practice:

> [My friend] has been in my later years I would say. She's just an amazing woman.
>   And then there are lots of other, lots of other people, not role models, but partners.
>   Like [friend]. There's so much I can learn from her. And there's so much I can learn from [friend]. So much that I can learn from [friend]. Like it just goes on and on.

Friends are often role models we identify in adulthood, noted Wendy, who sees the potential to learn from numerous friends in regards to being community involved.

Considering that community involvement is a significant leisure space for women in which they create and nurture friendships, it is not surprising that women named friends as

mentors and role models. Gail recognized a friend and fellow local volunteer as a significant

mentor in her community practice whom she often turned to for advice and support:

> I have a friend [friend's name]. I met her through, well she was my
> neighbour and [I] was with her in [the community theatre group] and she is
> a person who really taught me how to be that. You know how they talk
> about ducks and about how ducks work. That their feet are paddling about a
> mile a minute but they are very graciously going over the water.
> So she taught me by me watching her; like how to calm down and how to
> when you are getting stressed how to recognize when you are getting
> stressed with any sort of volunteer thing and to just kind of bring it down
> and…so I call her. She's a big mentor for me.

How to calm down in a stressful moments during community involvements was an example of

what Gail learned watching her friend and mentor. Friends, as Gail pointed out, can be

significant mentors in community involvement. Wendy, Pamela, Lena, and Holly also identified

friends as mentors. This phenomenon is not surprizing considering several factors regarding

women's learning in relationships, leisure and social time and community involvement.

Organisations

In some community organisations mentorship takes a more formal form. For example,

organisational boards may have the positions of president-elect, president, and past-president,

wherein those in the president or past-president mentor the president-elect or president

respectively. These arrangements mentor an incoming or sitting president for a determined

period of time. Sadie highlighted how President-elects can be mentored by current presidents and

committee members or presidents mentored by those in past-president positions:

> You are going to watch and let the current president mentor you and you
> end up having a committee around you.

Mentoring organisational structures help ensure leadership is mentored into organisational

culture and practice.

Mentoring within organisations and initiatives can also occur informally as those new to positions rely on and follow seasoned leaders to help them figure things out. When she took on the role of Treasurer Gina relied on the President to help her:

> You know […] was our president, and I relied on her a good deal of the time to make [sure] I would do things right.

Denise described one means of learning community involvement as "following someone else." In organisations role modeling and mentorship can manifest as formal and informal learning opportunities, providing opportunities for localized learning, focusing on hands-on contextualized community involvement culture, practice, knowledge and skills.

Community members

Women also drew from a broader base of mentors and role models for their community involvement practice, to include women from the community who they may have a connection with either through work or education, or someone they have observed being community involved, including women outside of the participants own practice. In naming her role models, Georgia identified community women who she admires noting how being able to see them in action makes community building seem achievable:

> Well, I would to say [local female chairperson of a community organisation] is one of the most—. She is one of my most favourite people in the world. Right? […] She is someone who, you know, I look up to.
> Like, you know, even you know [another local woman]. I don't have many connections with her, and I've only worked with her a couple times. But again, today, I saw her, at [the care home], volunteering there, and I just think that's what I want to do in my retired years is to kinda have the time to be, to do that kind of stuff. To be the chair of the board for a [community organisation] or to volunteer at the, —I don't know if it's the right terminology—old folks home, and that, or, you know.
> Yeah, so um, it's funny because I don't really have a model whose famous like Mother Theresa or anybody like that. But I think that's because these are people I can touch and are accessible and they make it seem like it's achievable.

Local women provide realistic and accessible modelling of community involvement situated within a familiar context, which can help women, like Georgia, see the possibilities for their community. At the same time, these women are accessible to serve as mentors, coaches, and advisors to other women in their own community involvement practice.

Several women noted people within their churches during their childhood who inspired their community involvement later in life. These people were identified as taking on different roles, including mentor and encourager. Stacey recalled a "prayer sister" who supported her:

> I guess one was a mentor in my church and we were kind of like—. I think they called us prayer sisters or something like that.
>   So she was an adult and I was just a teen and I think just the feeling of support that I got from her.
>   That she really believed in me, made me feel like I could accomplish things.

Stacey's prayer sister became a mentor who encouraged her and gave her confidence to do things.

Similarly, Fiona recalled two facilitators who became mentors to her community practice:

> They were just such interesting people and they were just good mentors in how to become a positive role model. And I think the thing for me is I had a daughter. I wanted to give her—. I wanted to model for her what a woman could do in society.

Two workshop facilitators became significant mentors for Fiona in being a positive role model. Community women from churches or trainings became positive role models for women of what they are capable of and how to encourage others.

Role models from the community can complement the role modeling of parents. Reflecting on her role models identified three community women from her childhood who stand out. For Tanya they demonstrated what women were capable of in the community which differed from her mother who was not community involved:

You know I have three people in mind actually. There was a woman who was a volunteer in our school. She conducted the school choir and she also conducted a church choir but she was quite active in our school and then it would have been *[pause]* and then my two 4 H leaders that I had who were very active in the community and they were volunteering their time to be leaders in the 4-H clubs and they were also remarkable women. … Well, I think partly because I observed my mother being quite withdrawn from the community and then I saw these women who were really out there and active in the community and able to speak to an audience, and just seemed like very intelligent and capable women.

Tanya's teachers provided examples of how women can be active in the community, and be public, intelligent, and capable. When Carla moved to a larger community for high school and lived with a host family, her host mother, a very community involved woman, became a significant role model:

When I first moved to [community] for high school, that family was very community involved. And so, by virtue of that, I just kind of went along with what they were doing and then I found out that I like it and it was rewarding and so I just kept going.

Tanya and Carla identify how community women became role models for community involvement when being involved was not modelled by their mothers.

Recalling her childhood with the insight of experience and appreciation, Margaret identified women in her community as her role models and noted how these women formed the backbone of their community:

I would think that the women in this community would be my role models. The way they were just the backbone of so many events, picnics—like the village auction sale, weddings.

Like our wedding I had, like our wedding was in the village. It wasn't in a church. We didn't have a church in the village anymore, but the women just—. We hired—. We'd rented the high school cafeteria. It was very new then. But the women—. It was just a given that they offered service to serve and prepare the food.

That and funerals. It was just the women would always do that and to me they modelled community service that way.

But that's—. That's a thing of the past, I think. Women aren't quite so readily available to serve at a wedding these days. We aren't organized that way. But they were there and helped each other out.

Margaret notes that these village women modeled community service, which is how she learned

to be community involved:

> With them, like just model, role model. I think that was just, that was the
> best. That was the way that I learned how to do it.

Margaret's analysis of the role modelling she observed from the village women in her childhood

highlights the significance of early learning and the socialization girls receive through the

examples of familial and community women which can influence women's community

involvement in adulthood.

The workplace is also a community space from which women identified role models.

Recalling her days working at a local department store, Belinda recognized the unique people

skills of a co-worker, which Belinda transfers into her community involvement:

> When I worked at [a department store], I had a woman there by the name of
> […]. She was awesome too. Like just so awesome.
>   Totally different world you know. I wouldn't say community building,
> but she had such a way with people, such a knack with people. So whether
> she was selling you a package of socks or you were telling her about
> somebody who passed away that was important to you in your childhood,
> she had a knack with people.

Watching and experiencing how a co-worker valued people taught Belinda a valuable way of

relating with others.

Within our discussions of role models, women often identified people who were strong

supports to their community practice. Holly reflected upon how she has been supported by her

community and family, and she attributed this support to a quality and practice within First

Nation's communities:

> For Native people, they'll come and hold you when you are part of the
> community.
>   So I always think there probably was a lot of people that, when I was
> little, they—. They held me and probably talked to me. Grandparents of
> course. My aunties. My uncles. Some of the neighbouring people. Um, that

> sort of thing. My father, my mother, my brothers and sisters. Just about a lot
> of people around me.
>
> I think I have been very fortunate, you know, with who has been around
> me. I've had—. My brothers and sisters are really, really supportive.

Although support is not always considered a primary learning or educational means, it is crucial

to sustaining learners' efforts, including when the learners and their learning are focused on

community action. Holly identifies those who have supported her and that she has been fortunate

with their presence. This support can validate and affirm a person's values and commitment to

community involvement.

For myself, the discussion around mentors and role models is intriguing and personal as it

connects with women's informal learning, knowledge, and agency within rural contexts. These

mentoring relationships are typically informal and situated within organisations or communities

of practice. All the 'how-to' knowledge tailored to specific communities that women have gained

through their years of community involvement is either passed on to people in the organisations

and initiatives through an informal mentor-leaner relationship or lost. When the knowledge and

skills are not passed on women are forced to create the knowledge for themselves, reinventing

the wheel, leaving present and future women community builders at a disadvantage.

Belinda observed a lack of mentoring among women, which she felt hinders the

advancement of gender equality and social justice:

> I feel there is a bit of a gap actually with that, like with that whole—, with
> women in general.
>
> We're harsher to each other rather than being the mentors that we should
> be, to the next generation.
>
> That is why I think there are always gaps when it comes to, um, the
> feminist movement or whatever. We are always recreating, because we have
> not taken the real time to connect between the generations and so then we
> don't know what happened and then we start from scratch. And we start
> from scratch.
>
> So I think there's a real—. That whole piece around—. Rather than us
> judging other women harshly, there needs to be a way that we can be role

models and mentors to each other, in a different way, a gentler way, or maybe a more deliberate way then what we have.

The repercussions of competitive relations among women and the absence of intergenerational mentoring, Belinda observed, result in women having to recreate the knowledge and start from scratch within each generation due to limited intergenerational knowledge exchange.

While there may be a lack of formal or organized mentoring happening among women, women are informally mentoring each other. In regards to how women do learn community involvement, Belinda points out that the support and mentoring opportunities women encounter in community involvement can be challenging and the environment competitive. She indirectly poses the challenge for change by suggesting that a gentle, deliberate, and collaborative approach among women could make a difference in advancing gender specific concerns and issues.

Gender and social justice advances women worked for in their communities are often lost, or the process is drawn-out. Thus change can take longer. Belinda's insight raises several questions. Where do women find or build their mentoring relationships? How does the space, or specifically the gender culture of that space (church, community-based organisation, local chapter of provincial or national organisation, neighbourhood initiative) inform mentoring among women? How are mentoring connections established? Or are there broader and larger mentoring networks? Women's networks, like mentoring provides significant support for women's community work. The significance of mentors and mentoring in regards to women's community involvement, in particular informal mentoring, is I suspect, under-recognized. Regarding Belinda's concern about women's mentoring, is there a connection between the type of mentoring that is happening, in particular the informal mentoring and the presence of a women's movement or advocacy for gender equality in rural areas? These questions highlight

the need for further research in the area of rural women's mentoring in community involvement and gender advocacy.

The women's stories reveal a life-span continuum of role models, starting with family members in childhood and youth, which continue throughout. As adults, women noted more community members and friends as significant influences. Some role models are 'here to stay' and others, noted Wendy, come in at certain relevant points along the journey.

Gleaning women's stories of role models, the noticeable majority identified other women who were busy caring for and building their communities. Childhood memories were peppered with reflections of mothers and grandmothers modelling 'just what you did' and 'what was expected' in regards to women and community involvement. Nearly all of the role models identified were people known to the women who provide accessible, realistic, achievable, situated, contextualized examples of how women can be involved in their communities. Watching local women, noted Margaret was the best way she learned how to be involved in her community. What stands out for me is that women look at other local women for tangible educators as role models and mentors, be they family, friends or colleagues.

Mentoring is a significant means for women's learning community involvement. The majority of mentoring happens informally, and may not be recognized as mentoring, as women "learn the ropes" from others. Women might only recognize these mentors retrospectively. Mentors can assist women in learning general and situated knowledge and skills beneficial to community involvement. Board structures, which include the positions president-elect or past-president, incorporate mentoring for incoming leaders. Mentoring not only supports women's community involvement by teaching valuable skills it also passes on significant organisational and community knowledge and history. There is a lack of broader partnerships among women to

mentor with the intention of empowering women collectively in order to advocate for women's

rights and gender equality.

TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE

> The Women's Institute was a big part of it. Like learning how to chair meetings. How to—. You know, just the confidence.
>   Katimavik helped a big deal because there you were thrown in. You were living with twenty-one virtual strangers for nine months and you learn how to give and take. You learn how to, you know, budget, negotiate.
>   Coming from a large family—the same thing. You have to give and take.
>   Working in the hospital setting you are always working with people not under the best circumstances. So you have to learn how to, you know, how to deal with those kinds of circumstances.
>   And, you know working with seniors, too, you get a whole different perspective when you realize their lives, you listen to some of their stories. And you think, "I have it easy.
>   So those all the different kinds of things that help you in what you are doing now.
> — Helena

Community involvement requires pulling knowledge from various areas of life, including

previous community involvement, formal education, previous and current work, and personal

relationships and adapting these. The above quote from Helena demonstrates how she pulls what

she learned from numerous experiences inorder to do her community work

Belinda, who dealt with her local city council for a personal situation, shared the

following observation:

> Even when I went to city council or city hall to work out some of the details. [ ]…So I think that created some amount of awareness.
>   But what it also did is show me that there are avenues that I could use. I can use those. They all have a process.
>   If you understand the process you can use it to your, maybe, advantage. It's at least an opportunity to express yourself.

Understanding what avenues are there for her to use, what the processes are, and that she can express herself were key insights Belinda learned dealing with city hall for a personal matter, yet she realized she can transfer this knowledge.

Like Helena and Belinda, women continuously transfer knowledge and skills into their community involvement practice from other areas of their lives. In this way, their current involvement practice incorporates a myriad of knowledge and skills learned across and throughout their lifespan. Previous community involvement, work, and formal and informal education were all areas women identified drawing knowledge from and applying it into their community practice.

Previous Community Involvement

Knowledge and skills developed in previous community involvement was often transferred into new community action. Dot credited prior community involvement, in particular her involvement with a foundation which gave her an understanding of targeted and successful grant-writing, with her ability to handle a fundraising project she was involved with:

> Earlier community involvement was what gave me the knowledge I needed to handle this. Otherwise we would have been floundering. And we would not have been able to do it, I don't think.

Having sat on the board of a foundation and assessed grants for funding gave Dot crucial knowledge on successful fundraising, in particular, writing successful grants. Community involvement itself provides knowledge and skills, which can often be transferred into new community involvement experiences.

A third of the women were involved as children and youth in 4-H, and attributed the knowledge and skills in civics, citizenship, government, organising, public speaking, record keeping, financial literacy, and running meetings as beneficial to their current community

involvement practice. "Actually my involvement in 4-H," reflected Tanya, who attributed her

learning how to be involved to her years as a 4-H youth. Louise identifies knowledge and skills

relevant to her on-going community involvement:

> I was fortunate enough to be involved in the 4-H club.
>   And I think, now thinking back, if our young people had the opportunity,
> would take the opportunity to be involved in 4-H, they would learn an awful
> lot.
>   Like first of all, respect for people in authority, for governments.
>   And they would learn about borders and boundaries, roads, and miles,
> sections and quarters, which kids these days don't know.
>   If you give them directions, they don't know where they are going. And
> we learned all of that in 4-H.
>   Yep, it was good program. […]
>   I started with the garden club at age 8. Then I was in the garden club until
> age 12. Like we had to raise our own, plant our gardens and take care of it,
> keep track of weeds.
>   We had to do—, like, learn how to make speeches, judge at the local fair.
> We had to judge a good chicken—which is a good chicken and which is not
> a good chicken. And we had—. And then I was in the sugar beet club where
> we had an acre of sugar beets to take care of.
>   And the financial end, too, you know keeping financial records. And that
> was just great.
>   I know now, looking back, programs like that are very valuable for our
> young people. You felt you were doing something that would help you
> when you grow up.

Recalling her experiences and learning in 4-H, Louise names skills she carries into her own

extensive community involvement throughout her adult life, noting those early experiences in

public speaking, responsibility, civic knowledge, record keeping, and financial management

were valuable later in her life.

Debra attributed 4-H to where she learned how to plan events. Similarly, Pearl, who was

both a 4-H participant and leader, had opportunities to learn skills she carried into her adult

community involvement, in particular what she learned in her 4-H leadership training:

> When I was in the 4-H program that was many years ago, part of the 4-H
> program had leadership training. So they sent me to—once a year, a bunch
> of us 4-H'ers in Manitoba—and we had leadership workshops and camp.

> I went four years, one as a member and then three or four years as a
> leader. So you learn things.

Kathy noted how she and her husband had just asked themselves where they learned about process and how to run meetings and groups. She attributed these transferred skills to their time in 4-H:

> And in 4-H I did—. I was the secretary. And so there were rules to follow.
> [Kathy's husband] and I just discussed where did we learn about process?
> We're not sure, but I'm thinking that would have been my first
> experience, was in 4-H when I had a guide book for how to be a secretary.
> And in that same book was the president, what it was called, and the
> secretary, and there was the treasurer, and there was job descriptions and
> what you did.

Kathy, Elizabeth, Pearl, Louise, Barbara, Tanya, Helena, and others transferred knowledge and skills from their years as children and youth in 4-H into their adult community involvement. Throughout their adventures in community involvement, women pull from past involvement experiences with different organisations, events, and initiatives in order to effectively and competently participate in new endeavours.

Work

Numerous women transferred their work skills and knowledge into their community work. Pam implemented knowledge and skills from previous jobs into her involvement with environmental concerns. Marjorie noted that she too drew upon past work experience in her community involvement, yet the two are not the same:

> Some of my past work experience helped out too but it's a different,
> completely different thing.

Prior to her community involvement, Wanda worked as a volunteer coordinator. Transferring knowledge and skills between life spheres, such as work and community, may require adjusting how things are done or thought out in consideration of the context and task.

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Some women applied their own professional education and experience to their community involvement. Sonia, an accountant, applies her accounting skills and expertise as treasurer for her church and a group home. When Wanda worked as a volunteer coordinator for a local organisation she took several courses on volunteer management, which she applied to her later volunteer work with volunteers in her church, on Parent Teacher Committees and with numerous community organisations.

It is easy to see women transferring direct or hard knowledge and skills like Sonia using her accounting skills and knowledge in her community involvement. For example Maria observed on her writing funding grants:

> It's something that I can do, but I don't like doing it.
> But I can do it so I've done some of that, filling out applications and things.
> I guess there's something about having done some studying that maybe disciplines you to be able to do it.

At the same time, women are applying 'soft skills' or practices they've learned such as writing skills for grant or report writing, as Maria highlighted.

As noted by Helena's story, at the beginning of this section, community involvement draws upon knowledge and skills from many areas of our lives. Transferring knowledge and skills into their community involvement was a common practice of all women. Women talked about bringing in knowledge from previous community involvement and work into new community involvement practices. Significant to transferring knowledge was the act of adapting existing knowledge into new circumstances. This adapting process is itself a learning experience, often incorporating elements of learning-by-doing, including trial and error; social learning as much community involvement is done in groups; and support and encouragement from mentors.

Although often connected to transferring knowledge, formal and non-formal learning were identified by several women as means to their learning community involvement. Formal learning is considered learning which takes place within an education institutions such as a university or college. Non-formal learning refers to learning within an organised setting, such as a workshop or conference, yet not an institutionalized education context such as a school or university. Often non-formal learning is facilitated through an organization.

In discussing how they learned to do community involvement, several women discussed conferences and workshops they had attended that either directly or indirectly connected to an aspect of their previous community work. Many non-formal learning opportunities were through regional, provincial or national levels of an organisation associated with their local community involvement. For example, women involved with local chapters of provincial or national organisations, such as 4-H or the Women's Institute, had opportunities within these organisations to attend workshops and conferences focusing on specific community involvement skills. Through her involvement on a community emergency coordination committee Stacey attended a conference on community emergency coordinating.

Often women were able to draw upon their own formal tertiary education for their community involvement. Margaret, whose academic background is Home Economics, draws from her studies for her involvement in food preparation, food security and textiles for organising community meals and fundraisers within her involvement with sustainable living initiatives. Wanda, a trained Home Economist, acknowledged that her education transferred into her involvements:

> I went into Home Economics which I think is a big influence on who I
> became and the involvements that I've had in my life because of the

background I had in family management, in child development and family systems and things like that.

Wanda's Home Economics education transferred into her development of early child literacy and family programs. Sonia applied her accountant training to her volunteer work as treasurer for her church and a community group home. Notably, women who discussed formal education in connection to their learning for community involvement did not specifically pursue the education for community involvement. Rather, the learning was for their careers or professions and transferred into their community involvement praxis.

In our conversations women did not speak at length about formal or non-formal learning directly connected to their community involvement, suggesting that it is not a significant or conscious consideration of learning for their practice. The everyday and unpaid nature of community involvement may make it difficult to qualify the necessity of taking a university or college course or program offered through an organisation for community involvement in light of the fees and costs for transportation, parking, childcare and potentially lost wages. In rural areas formal and non-formal opportunities for learning often require driving significant distances. Women are then forced to consider if this is really an expense that they can afford. Most women work, parent and volunteer, acknowledging what they are capable of doing within a day or week, also suggesting that women might not have the time to pursue extensive formal or non-formal learning for their community work. As well, participating itself requires a time commitment that takes you away from your everyday responsibilities. These costs and considerations can make it difficult for women to participate in more formal learning opportunities, and are perhaps some of the reasons women draw and depend extensively on 'free' learning such as learning by doing, social learning, transferring knowledge as well as role models and mentors. Furthermore, by observation I've noted the opportunities for local non-

formal learning directly related to community involvement are few. The two times that I've co-facilitated a women's advocacy and leadership program in the area, participants have commented on how few options there are locally for women to develop their leadership skills outside of their workplaces.

Women expressed transferring knowledge and skills from various areas of their lives, including post-secondary education and their careers, into their community involvement practice. While some skills and knowledge can smoothly and directly transfer others may need some adjustment to effectively apply into a new context or culture, as highlighted by Belinda who stated she borrows and morphs ideas from others into her own community involvement. Transferring and transposing knowledge and skills into different contexts and practices can require unique and specific knowledge of the contexts, particularly potentially in regards to religious and gender cultures. Notably, community involvement does not take a cookie cutter approach. While generic or universal knowledge and practices are present, nuanced knowledge is essential to ensuring effective and successful community building practice.

CONCLUSION

Women's stories of learning their community involvement practice reveal a life-long learning journey. This patchwork started in childhood through early learning and socialization of community involvement within the homeplace where as girls and women they became aware of the possibilities and potential of community involvement. By doing community involvement women learn by experience, at times "flying by the seat of their pants" through trial and error, reflecting, assessing and adjusting their practice for success. In groups, women learn through relationship and collective action where they jointly negotiate knowledge and skills around

community, culture and action. Role models and mentors, including family, friends and community members, provide significant inspiration, encouragement, coaching and support to women, in particular local women who demonstrate what is possible in women's home communities. Women constantly transfer knowledge from other parts of their lives into their community involvement practice; drawing lines between home, work, as well as past and present community involvement. Finally, women pull from their formal and non-formal education to enhance their community involvement practice, providing expertise in skills such as accounting, child development, safe food preparation, nutrition, and more. Their stories highlighted a continuous, concurrent, unrecognized, and unidentified, learning practice within our everyday living that we do not name. This everyday learning in and for community development ensures a better life for individuals, families and communities.

CHAPTER EIGHT

What Women Learn

The knowledge and skills women depend upon in their volunteering may be taken for granted and seldom, if ever, critically considered or reflected upon. Considering the everyday and tacit nature of learning for and in community involvement it is difficult to develop an exhaustive and comprehensive list of all things women learn for and in their community involvement practice. Drawing from the women's narratives this chapter explores the three key areas of knowledge identified: self-knowledge, socio-cultural knowledge and strategic knowledge.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Through community involvement women gained increased awareness of themselves, their capabilities and vulnerabilities. Women developed confidence, awareness of their strength and capabilities, passion for lifelong learning, and vulnerabilities.

Capabilities and confidence

Discovering their capabilities through community involvement increased women's self-confidence. Stacey comments:

> I believe that I am strong and capable.

Maria surmised she's capable of more than she thought:

> I've probably found that I'm more capable than I ever thought I was. I've never ever thought of myself as being capable or not. I've just kind of done things you know.

Others like Maria may not think of themselves in regards to capable or not but rather just do

things. Lois shared:

> [My community involvement] has really helped me with my self-
> confidence. I feel like I can accomplish anything that set out to do and I am
> not afraid to try anything.

Similarly, Gina and Wanda gained confidence. Wanda reflected that she can do something that

will make a difference:

> I think it gives me confidence that I can do something and make a
> difference.

Being involved, noted Dot:

> Has given me a lot of self-confidence. The willingness to try new things and
> not to worry about falling on my face if I don't do a magnificent job.

For Joan, a strong advocate for her community and creative initiative-maker and taker, her

involvement increased her confidence in her sense of being who and why she is:

> I probably have more confidence than I ever have had before in the things
> that I do and who I am, and why I am. […] Confident in some of the things
> that I think are important. And if somebody says "No." you think, "Okay,
> well, I'll have to approach that different if it's going to get done one way or
> another."

Through her involvement, Joan gained confidence not only in who she is, yet also in her abilities

to get things done, noting she has more confidence now due to her community involvement.

Gina and Simone learned they were capable of taking on leadership roles. While Gina,

treasurer for a community organization, did not identify leadership specifically, her reference to

a 'position of responsibility' suggests leadership:

> I learned that I could take on a position of responsibility and be confident
> that I could do the job. Whereas before when I lived in a Winnipeg and
> worked in an office, there was always somebody else who was responsible
> for things. And I learned that, yeah, I can be responsible.

Gina learned she can be responsible. Simone spoke specifically of learning she's a leader

through her community involvement. She was the only participant who connected her confidence

and capabilities with being a community leader:

> Well, not that I wasn't a leader in school. I was, you know, I was just never kind of a pusher. I was, you know, "things are going to get done when they get done." And now I feel like I push stuff and I want so much more.
>   I'm a bigger leader. I believe in people, kind of.
>   People phone me for different things: "I thought you would know the answer to this." You know, really, I do know, but I don't know why I know, you know?
>   I've learned that I am a leader and not that I can do just about anything, but I think that I can learn to do just about anything.
>   Sometimes I think that I'm over my—[head]. When I see my weekly schedule, it's like, "why am I doing this?" But you know you just keep pushing and then you—. And then you get surprising things.
>   So yeah, I've learned that I'm a leader, [I] never would have thought.

Not only did Simone learn what she needed to know to do her community involvement work,

along the way she discovered that she's a leader.

In regards to capabilities and community involvement, several women attributed their

involvement to overcoming shyness. Denise, who described herself as shy, developed confidence

in her ability to get something done, be it organising an event or speaking in public. Being

involved helped her get out of her shell:

> I do have the confidence that I can get something done. I have planned lots of events and they have run quite smoothly. So I do have the confidence.
>   I know now that I can get up in front of people even when people look at you and your mouth is dry and you 'ah, ah, ah.' I still have to read it word for word but I can still do it.

Denise wasn't the only woman who spoke of overcoming her shyness through community

involvement. Sadie noted that her involvement helped her overcome her shyness and build

confidence in her abilities to engage in the community:

> I was extremely shy, really, really—.

> And work, the volunteer work, the volunteer stuff really gets you
> engaged and opens up your world a bit when you are not—, when you are
> shy. I know it was shyness. I know I wasn't confident at all.
>   So I think that, when I think about what I hope, that all that it has given
> me is a quiet confidence. I'm not the one in the centre of the room drawing
> attention to myself. I'll be the one closer to the side.
>   But when I think about how I was before a lot of this involvement, I
> wouldn't have even gotten into the room.

Like Denise, Sadie attributed her community involvement with taking her out of her shell and helping her build a "quiet confidence."

Once women got their foot in the door and began their community involvement they learned that they were interested in things that they didn't realize that they were interested in, as Marjorie shared from her own experience:

> I think you just kind of learn that you are interested in things that you didn't
> necessarily think you would be when you started the whole process.

In the midst of their activities and bustle of community involvement women develop confidence and learn that they are "strong and capable." These women shared how through community involvement they have developed confidence—confidence in who they are, confidence to try new things and to continuing trying, confidence to be in the room, and a quiet confidence. Sometimes, being community involved revealed to women that they are capable of more than they thought.

Lifelong learning

Women learned that they are life-long learners and that a lot of learning takes place through community involvement. For many of the women our conversations were the first time they actually stopped to reflect and talk about their involvement; they were simply out there doing it. Bea's desire to be involved meant that she had to teach herself a lot of how to do things:

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You learn, you experience, you see, you hear. Um, you teach yourself like I'm constantly teaching myself.

Pearl's interest in learning keeps her involved with a local rural women's organisation which hosts regular workshops and conferences:

I always want to learn more but physically it's getting harder to do. Mind has lots of ways of doing things it's just that sometimes the body doesn't follow the mind that well.

Pearl, a retired dairy farmer who lives with mobility issues, loves the learning potential in volunteering though she lives with the physical challenges that come with aging. For Wendy, being involved requires her to learn her innate skills and to build on them. Simone said that she 'could learn to do just about anything' regarding community involvement. These women's comments suggest that learning is a requirement of community involvement, and that being involved in the community assumes a willingness to learn. Some women may choose to be involved with particular organisations or groups because of the learning component and opportunities these organisations offer to expand their knowledge and skills in related areas. Women may become involved because they want to learn more about how their community works and how to make a difference. Along the way, women unintentionally and intentionally engage in learning a plethora of knowledge and skills.

Depleteable and vulnerable

Women learned that they are vulnerable, finite, and fragile. Putting yourself out there in the community can be challenging as you are vulnerable to failure, criticism, and the ingratitude of others. For many women their community involvement was their passion for making their

communities better in order to reflect their dream of what the community could be yet it was also

challenging, as Stacey revealed:

> At the same time it hasn't been all glorious. I've talked about how I do feel
> damaged to some extent because when you are putting your passion into
> your work and it is not always appreciated or criticized it is not all positive.

Women often faced criticism for their work when people didn't agree with what they were doing

or how they were doing it. Fuelled by their passion many women made sacrifices in order to do

their community work. When we met Suzette was questioning her future involvement. She had

given so much, done so much and sacrificed a lot without receiving much support in return:

> I don't regret helping out with everything that I did now but I think—. Like,
> I say, I just over exerted myself and wanted to do too much and tried to do
> too much that I just kind of got sick of it.
>   'Cause I'd give up going camping. I'd give up going to parties. I'd give
> up so much just to plan for the next [community] event.

Suzette's situation raised a valid concern among volunteers—burn-out. Later, Suzette candidly

pondered:

> I don't have—. I don't want to say "the energy." And I just don't have the
> desire to volunteer as much anymore. I don't know what it is. I don't know
> if I just *wasted* all my energy" (emphasis added).

Talking with these passionate women, I was continually awed by their passion which fuelled

their feats, sometimes during family or personal challenges. What happens to volunteers like

Suzette who give their all to their community and then question if they just wasted their energy?

Wendy's reflection on her own vulnerability and finite-ness raises an important point that

may help in understanding how our perceptions of ourselves inform our ability to volunteer:

> Well, I've learned that the first thing that comes to my mind is that I've
> learned that I am finite, that I am depleteable. And so I am learning about
> self-care.
>   I think that is ongoing when your construct is like mine because it is
> really easy to not think about that.
>   So I am learning that I am, I'm not indestructible, that I can be as fragile
> as the people I work with.

> And in the systems that we are working with I'm learning that nothing is
> for sure. And I'm learning that there is amazing good and there is amazing
> bad. And it is all part of the package.

These women are, in fact, finite and fragile with non-renewable resources such as time and

energy. Wendy's observations pointed to the importance of self-care in order to build up their

resistance and replenish their energy and passion. Community involvement takes a lot of effort

and energy, often without expressed recognition or appreciation for the hard work and sacrifices

on the part of volunteers.

In community involvement women learned their capabilities and developed confidence.

Learning itself was valued and necessary to involvement. Women also recognized their

limitations and vulnerabilities; their energy is finite.

SOCIO-CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Sunshine streamed into the living-room while Stacey and I shared a pot of tea during our

conversation. Discussing community involvement and learning she identified how her

involvement taught her about her community, she now has:

> A much better understanding of how communities work and the different
> types of people that make up a community.

Similarly, for Belinda being community involved affirmed her knowledge of her community:

> I think I understood it pretty good before and all that it's done is validate
> that.

Through community involvement, women's socio-cultural knowledge of their communities is

validated and expanded. Women spoke about learning how diverse communities are—as noted

by Stacey above—how their communities care for and support people in times of distress and

how they built an understanding of what is happening in their communities.

Support

Communities are supportive of both community involvements, as well as towards the individuals and families in their communities in times of crisis and need, for example, fire, natural disasters and critical health matters. Dot observed that in her community:

> You can start things up and get support and it's a very vibrant community.

Lena's experience and understanding of her community paralleled Dot's:

> When I moved here and started to live here, it was like the Super Bowl. If you had an idea you, could get it done. Like there is nothing that you couldn't do in [her community] or I think in a small community.
> But, like, if you thought it, you could try it. Like it might not work or nobody might come along with you but you could try it.
> And then I found that there was so much media. And they were willing to put a story in the newspaper. And there's radio has always been good. So that if you wanted to promote something or do something, there was sort of nothing stopping you because there was those kind of people there to help and so on.
> And so I think I sort of found that a little bit fascinating in terms of, like—"If you say something, then just don't think about it, idiots, like, go do it, go try it."

Some communities were identified by the women as supportive of new community building initiatives, which involved cooperation among people and groups as well as volunteer support. Several women observed that their communities had strong spirits of cooperation and volunteering, which for Sonya created the impression of a strong community:

> I think we have a very strong community with a high number of volunteers and a high buy-in to participating. I think there are a lot of people who care about this community. And I'm now talking, well every one of those communities probably that I'm involved in I could say the same of.

Through their community involvement many women learned how to and to what extent communities support members in times of need. For example, Helena recalled when the community offered support to her family after wildfires caused damage on their property:

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Even though you don't ask for help, if you are in need of help, that the community will support you, always.

Like we had a couple of fires and we really didn't need assistance. And the community just came and gave us stuff even though we weren't short and we were covered [by insurance].

But they just—, so, like, then the community rallies around you in a time of need and that because they know you.

Helena was touched when the community offered to help and rallied around people, including her family, in time of need. Jackie also spoke of communities caring for others:

I've learned that there's very caring people in the community. And it comes out when—, when a person has tragedy in their lives or something and you find you are living in a space where you have support.

The caring factor in communities identified by Jackie and Helena is significant, though sometimes it is overshadowed by conflicts and issues. As Holly pointed out:

And we all live together, but, you know, what this community, even though so much happens in it and we have all our problems, there are still some really good caring in this community.

And I think that people need to see that more instead of, "Oh, they have been fighting for years over the same darn issue." Well, yeah, but there's still that caring. Like they don't—.

Right now, the young people, there are some young people here that are into the drugs and that sort of thing. But there's the parents are still there looking for something better for them and the community is there too. Even though the young people don't see some of the things that are being done, you know it's being done.

It's being done but it's not being done in the way they probably want done. You know there are other ways of expressing it. So there's caring and there are a lot of good things.

Holly emphasized looking at the caring and good things in a community. As well, focusing on concerns with the youth in her community, she pointed out that caring can happen in different ways and may not be recognized or meet expectations. Community involvement opened women's eyes to the caring potential and practice in communities. Even in spite of conflict or turmoil, people came together in crisis and times of need.

Diversity

Communities are made up of people with a variety of personalities and interests who bring diversity to the various initiatives, boards and committees. Women acknowledged that they learned how to work with diverse groups. Reflecting on her work on various community initiatives, Margaret shared:

> I have learned that there are very many different types of people and that you read them and you try to work with them and be creative with that. You don't write them off, but you try to work with them. Some of them are easier to work with than others. Yeah, just working with a diverse group of people, really.

Volunteering with requires learning how to work with different types of people.

At the same time, community involvement can expose people to issues they may not have been aware of if they had not become involved, for example poverty, domestic violence, hunger and food insecurity, and discrimination. They can gain a more complex understanding of the issues, as Fiona shared:

> And so I guess when I think about communities and community involvement there is less of a wow factor. Like I like living here, Robin, I do. It is a quiet community. It's a really nice place to retire.
> But I'm not—. You know, I also know that we have social issues. There are things that need to be done. There is outreach that is needed. Ah, yeah.
> And I think if you weren't involved in your community, you wouldn't know that. You could blissfully go ahead and go "Oh, this is a really neat place. You know, everybody's got a really nice lifestyle."

While Fiona points out how community involvement can create awareness and opportunities to learn about issues in a community, I suspect that not all forms of community involvement would have this effect or create this learning opportunity, especially without critical thinking and reflection. For example, while coaching and managing your child's sport team, you may not learn about poverty, discrimination or racism in the community unless you consider who is and

who is not involved in sports and why. Furthermore, social-cultural knowledge learned in community involvement is dependent on the learner.

The decision to become involved can be motivated by wanting to learn specifics about one's community. For example, Lena, who moved to her community, helped revive her community's historical society out of her interest in learning about why her community is the way it is:

> I think that if I was just sitting here, you know, and you wouldn't learn anything and I think that even some of my observations of the community…where you look and you look for answers and you look for 'why did it turn out this way?' and so some of my observations that I started to make about the community…in discussions or other work that I'd done been answered…they have been answered by some of the historical things.

Lena's curiosity of her new community drew her to learning about community history through the historical society, in the process she discovered answers to her questions.

In regards to their communities a few women noted that being involved confirmed what they already knew. Also, no one disclosed that community involvement challenged what they know of their community which suggests that women had a realistic understanding of their communities from the start, or women did not want to discuss how their understandings of their community were challenged through their involvement.

By being involved in their communities women have the opportunity to learn socio-cultural knowledge about their communities in regards to who is living in their community, issues within their communities, and an understanding of why the community is the way it is. Such socio-cultural knowledge informs women's involvement and understanding of the ordinary and extraordinary realities of people in their particular communities.

For Dot, volunteering stretched her as she learned more about community organisations and fundraising:

> That was again a good experience, a good stretching experience because I learned again more about the community, about community organisations, about fundraising.

Through their community involvement women gained strategic knowledge for their volunteering, including: systems and processes, working with people, organising, financial planning and accounting, communication, and patience.

Systems and formal processes

The knowledge of how communities work and what is going on in the community is significant for those who are involved in their communities. Louise pointed out:

> Well, if we weren't involved we wouldn't know what is going on would we, and we wouldn't understand right.

Gail also shared her story of learning how her community works:

> I actually think it has also helped me learn about the actual workings of the community. You know the, um, that kind of aspect of it. And I don't mean Political like you know the Politicians but you know but how [my community] works. Like how if I wanted to do something or see something happen how can I? What would be the best way to do that now? I don't feel like I'm so much in the dark as I would have been years ago.

Likewise, as previously discussed, Belinda learned about how city council works when she dealt with it for a personal situation and transferred that learning into her community involvement. Understanding how things work, the political systems and processes in place that inform how municipal and other levels of government function. What the bureaucratic processes are and how to follow them was knowledge women discussed learning through being involved.

Working with people

Interactions with their co-volunteers were significant factors in women's involvement in both positive and challenging ways. For many women being involved taught them how to work with others, as well it was an opportunity to meet new people and possibly make new friends. Through her involvement Kathy learned about people in her community, in particular what motivates people to be involved:

> You learn so many things about people…You meet all kinds of people. I think that is part of why I like doing it. You just have an opportunity to meet new people and there too you see different reasons for people getting involved in different organisations and you can understand where some people are coming from.

Sonya shared a similar response:

> As a volunteer working with many people, bringing—, you know, valuing everyone's opinion, always respecting people because with the type of personality that I am, I often want my ideas, you know I don't even want it my way, at least in my heart I do. Hopefully I don't spout it but in here I do. And so I have to restrain myself. So what I have learned is that there are many contributors to a community. […] I've learned it's important to have variety in your group that you are working with and just the rewards that come with working as a team on projects and that sort of thing, that we could do something together.

Community involvement is a means for meeting people and learning from others in your community. Like Kathy and Sonya, Pearl and others shared similar reflections on learning to work with diverse groups. Pearl shared:

> I guess the ability to share and get along and be able to work constructively with others.

Denise noted:

> You get to learn how to deal with people, different styles of people, you get to try to not get mad at somebody because they are doing this when you want to do it this way and you try to let them do it their way.

Women expressed how volunteering with others in the community taught them to value another's perspectives and ideas. Dot shared this reflection on how our eyes can teach us to respectfully work together, particularly when working with difficult people:

> Working with difficult people and you always find that kind of challenge in groups. You need opinions and differences of point of view because that's how we work best as if we look at a whole range of options, a whole range of opinions. Unfortunately, people too often are threatened by differences instead of looking at it as a way of becoming more aware of the full situation. One of the things that hit me a while ago is that, our eye sight. We do not see the same thing out of each of our eyes. It is just a slightly different point of view from each eye and that is what helps us see perspective and distance and that is part of why we need other people's points of view so that we get a deeper understanding of whatever it is that we are looking at and talking about and need that. We should not be threatened by differences. We should welcome them and try to work with them. But that is a big challenge because the people we are talking with are so often threatened by other points of view and feel like theirs are the only right way. It's difficult to work with strong personalities, which is what you often get in things like this, activities like this. You get people who are just passionate about what they are doing, but they have their own vision and feel that that is the best way forward.

Through their involvement women experienced working with many different kinds of people, and learned how to deal with different personalities and backgrounds. Being open to seeing the diversity of ideas and perspectives, as Dot reflected, helped group members gain a deeper, richer understanding of divisive situations.

Women noted that through their involvement they encountered different sorts of people which presented the potential for interpersonal conflict. Belinda noted that when conflict manifests itself you have to deal with the people and the issue. To manage and resolve conflict, women shared that they learned tolerance, patience, and listening skills. Helena advised:

> Everybody has a story and whether you agree with it or not. And that they have feelings and that sometimes we overlook that. At the same time, understanding that people are complex and may have a lot going on in their lives.

What happens at a meeting can be the 'final straw' of compounding concerns not related to community work, as Helena added:

> Sometimes it might just be a personalities clashing because there's personality clashes. And some people take offense really easy, too.
>   If somebody is—, and then the next person just lets it go. But those that take offense easy need to be appeased because, you know, we don't always know what all there is, you know, house and home. And everything is so—.
>   It might just be—. It's got nothing really to do with the statement here [what's said in the group meeting]. It could be everything else, but it just sort of surfaces there. So you sort of have to have that—.
>   So those are things that we sort of have to look at.

Helena's comment speaks to being realistic in the sense that adults have different personalities and simultaneously balance various roles and responsibilities in their everyday lives. Through their involvement women learned how to respect and get along with others, develop understanding, and patience for differences and the complex lives others may have, and be open to new ideas and perspectives.

One specific area of working with people women discussed could be considered volunteer management. While a few of the women had taken workshops or courses on volunteer management, most women attributed their knowledge on this to being a volunteer and working with other volunteers. In regards to volunteer management women discussed recruitment, retention, and support. After not being welcomed the first time she visited a community craft club, Gail realized how important it is to be welcoming of new people:

> When I wanted to join [the craft group], I went to the group. And I went three times, and nobody really welcomed me. Nobody really talked to me. Nobody! Really!
>   And I'm a really outgoing person so it was okay. I would walk around the circle and chat and everybody was really—. It was like you walk in, find a seat, and sit down.
>
>   So after three times I kinda was saying to myself, "I don't really know if I want to do this. I don't really know about this group but I wanted to learn so much more about [crafting] that I stuck with the group."

And, that little situation just taught me, in volunteering, and little things like that, when somebody comes in like you be there, you welcome them, you make them a part of it, you bring them it. And after that when I would talk with them they would say "You know we really need to get some more members. How come we are not getting any new members?"

And I said to them, "You know, when I joined this [group]—." And I told these ladies and most of them were older than me. And I said that I walked in there and nobody so much as welcomed me and you probably don't realize it. But I was just determined. I was determined.

"You"—that, everybody was shocked—"what are you talking about?" I said, "You just didn't. Nobody, nobody made the effort.

And now [in the group] everybody makes the effort and it's great. And I think it was just one of those things that people just didn't realize somebody walks in and everybody just assumes that somebody else knows them or you know. And I was new in town.

So it is a little tiny thing, but for me it was a big learning.

Learning from experience the importance of welcoming people into a group, Gail emphasized this in all her volunteer work. Like Gail, Helena emphasized the importance of inviting and welcoming new people into a group:

If you look at the community and you think we have new people coming in and we don't involve them simply because we don't know them. So they might be great people but nobody has asked them because we don't know them. And then you don't feel comfortable asking and then they are not going to be comfortable volunteering because they are new in the community.

Helena's observation highlighted how it can be easy to get comfortable with the old crowd, the regulars and people with whom you have known for years. The familiarity felt within homogeneity of a rural area or community group is comforting. When it comes to volunteering people often want to have other people they know with them for security, predictability and fun. You know them, you know what their strengths and weaknesses are, and you know how to be an effective team. This mentality can be a hurdle to welcome newcomers into community involvement, and can also be intimidating for newcomers (including but not just immigrants) to break into involvement in their new community. Furthermore, for women, community involvement is also often their leisure time, which can make it harder to be open to welcoming

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new women into the group as their presence can add, initially at least, unpredictability and

discomfort, while group dynamics adjust. At the same time, by not being welcoming and

inviting, new people will not want to participate or join. The cycle perpetuates itself.

While some people join on their own initiative, sometimes women invite others to join a

group because they think it could interest them, or be mutually beneficial, as Jackie illustrated:

> There was a young woman walking to the post office one day. And I said "Hey, you know this is happening, and we really should have some younger people giving ideas for what could happen. Do you feel that we need some activities in town?"
> And she said, we certainly do—for everybody's mental wellbeing."
> And I thought, "wow! This sounds good. So I said "[…]. Would you be interested in coming to this meeting?"
> And so she did. And she brought another young woman with her. And now they are on that committee to set up this grant and hopefully get some things going in the hall for the community as a whole.
> And they have contacts with different people than say my age group have. So I like it when things like this happen.
> I get really thrilled.

When you invite one there is the potential for more to come. Some people may be able to jump

into a group without knowing others, yet for some it can be helpful to have someone there they

already know. A buddy system can be helpful when getting people involved initially. At the

same time, a buddy system can help ensure that all personalities, even those that may conflict

have an opportunity to contribute.

Helena suggested the buddy system for engaging people into volunteer groups:

> We don't always all mesh because there are just so many different personalities. But there is at least one person in that group that the difficult one will mesh with so you just have to find that sort of mix.
> So, if you are asking someone onto the committee that you can work with but anybody else can't work with then you have to make sure that you are not pushing them off onto somebody else to work with. And, then you have to be the one to be working with them on the committee that they need to be with.
> So you sort of have to delegate a little bit how your committees are set and, know what, you have. "Okay, this person is—. Okay, they are really good at what they do, but they are a little bit, you know, difficult for

everybody else to work with. So then if I'm inviting them or asking them on to the committee, then I'm going to have to make sure they are my helper rather than putting them on a committee somewhere else.

So that is one of the strategies. Yeah, it takes a little more time management on my part, but it is something that is important, too, to look at and manage because sometimes we neglect the talents of people because they are not easy to work with.

And, that is probably the biggest thing, is that people, don't they get overlooked and I think that in a community there are people who could be great at it if they would just be asked.

Helena's strategy of the buddy system requires time and initiative from the leader to strategically delegate tasks and establish working groups, with the understanding that the right opportunities can bring in new people who could really shine.

Similar to Helena's suggestion of a buddy system, Pearl emphasized the importance of matching volunteers' interests, skills and knowledge to organisational roles and tasks:

If you have people who are willing to volunteer and you know their specific avenue that they are good at that's what you lead them to or direct them to. Because if they like what they are doing, they do an excellent job.

Helena and Pearl highlight the importance of matching skills and interest to roles and tasks to ensure the success of the work and enjoyment of the volunteer.

Women acknowledged that, through being involved, they learned about working with people, including dealing with difficult people, and substantially recruiting and managing volunteers.

Organising

Women discussed various organising skills they developed through practice, including but not limited to event planning, meeting facilitation, program development, strategic planning and evaluation. Involvement with community organisations and groups develops organisational skills and knowledge. Women identified learning how to take an idea such as a family literacy

program, a food bank, resource centre, church welcome program, or slo-pitch tournament and make them become realities. This entrepreneurial drive highlights what Kathleen and Barbara called their volunteering – entrepreneur and social entrepreneur respectively—as mentioned earlier. The initial idea may have been their own or come from a group they were a part of, and the progression from seed to fruition came about through their doing, usually with others. For Wanda, a pastor's wife, after hearing a study reporting that when a new person visits a church if within ten days they are invited to the home of someone from that church they are more likely to attend that church regularly, she saw a seed:

> And so I said, "That is easy." And so I developed this program that we have now. […]
> It just worked very well at the beginning, you know things, kind of go like this. And it is actually working. It isn't a big involvement, but it is. It's a program that I never saw anywhere, but I'm, like, if you can do it, if that works, like, why wouldn't we organise it a little bit to make it happen, right?
> You wish it was happening without organizing a program, but if it's not happening, let's make a program.

As social entrepreneurs, women develop significant programs and services for their communities.

Organisational skills can also refer to the practice of ensuring all the details are organized to ensure the efficient management and execution of an event or program. Gail reflected on how her preference for having things well organized motivated her to develop her organizational skills:

> I think that being with all the groups that I've been [in] my organisational skills—. I've just really think that I've developed those. I'm a—. I have a really hard time if I join something and it's not organized.

Organizing skills, from developing programs to running meetings and groups were crucial skills these women developed through community involvement.

Financial competence

For many women community involvement is an opportunity to learn financial skills including money management and fundraising. When Gail took on the role of treasurer, she nearly ran away at first as she'd never been a treasurer before. With support of the then-President she learned the skills and knowledge necessary to fulfill her role. Fundraising includes looking for grants, grant writing and following through with reporting requirements. For Barbara fundraising also meant figuring out where the money is, and whether it is in the form of grants or donations and support from local businesses and philanthropists. Louise who was the president of a community centre during significant renovations shared that she'd used the funding options strategically:

> That means more fundraising but I have one organisation that I kept exactly for that so hopefully they will grant us some money.

Women who take on formal volunteer roles such as President or Treasurer, learn how to account for the organisation's money, where to find money, fundraising and how to allot it to their needs.

Communication

Previously in the section on Self-knowledge we learned how women developed confidence to speak-up and come out of their shells. Being community involved, particularly through formal volunteering, requires an ability to effectively communicate in meetings, committees, boards, and perhaps a larger public audience – including to the media. For some women their community involvement roles involved public relations and working with the media. Since becoming a town councillor Lois, shared:

> I am so much more comfortable making a speech or doing a radio interview.

Lois reflected on how she's developed comfort in public speaking. Speaking up can be a

challenge for some women, who must learn how to do this comfortably for themselves. Women

may be concerned because they are uncertain of how what they say will be received. This

excerpt from my conversation with Louise illustrates this point:

> LOUISE: Like I said before I speak up and to know when to speak up, how to speak up that is something I'm still learning. That is an on-going thing.

> ROBIN: Like learning to speak up and how to speak up? How do you think that has contributed to your community involvement?

> LOUISE: Well, obviously it must have because people sometimes come up to me and they tell me that and oh but I didn't do anything. Well yes you did.

> ROBIN: You spoke up.

> LOUISE: Yeah and good things come of it.

> ROBIN: Why do you think they notice that you spoke up? Because other people aren't speaking up?

> LOUISE Well working in a committee is I think you have to. Well, you take a risk every time you speak up and but people often come up to me and they acknowledge it, that it was good. Well, okay thank-you.

Louise focuses on speaking up as taking a risk that you have to take when you are on a

committee. Although she doesn't go into detail about the circumstances or contexts, for example

are the groups single or mixed-gender groups, I wonder how gender plays into her perception of

speaking in groups. I also wonder how age factors into women's experiences of speaking up, in

regards to how and when do women speak up, the response they receive and the influence of

women's physical abilities particularly as they get older and may experience hearing, speaking or

mobility challenges. As well, I'm curious about how women can be a product of their generation,

yet realized that context, socialization and personality were also key factors for women speaking

up.

Women identified learning significant skills in working with the public including public relations in the community, petitioning the community for funds, and speaking to the public. How you present things makes a difference, noted Belinda who emphasized knowing your audience and the politics around the audience and your purpose for speaking to them:

> I mean everything is so politicalized I mean you think it wouldn't be but it really is.

She went on to explain:

> Like that's so silly, really. And it's like that with lots of things—. I guess from that perspective that how you present something can make a very very big difference.
> Whether it's the presentation you are making around whatever it is you are marketing. […]
> I have to be very aware of who I'm talking to and why I'm talking to them and what, if anything, I'm going to be asking of them. And that's going to make a difference in how I'm interacting with them.
> Because I'm talking to you [the researcher], you may be fine with me talking to you about the touchy feely that may have enough value for you, but it won't for the mayor.

Comparing our interview to speaking with the mayor, Belinda highlights the importance of knowing your audience and what they value in order to get your message across.

Considering the ongoing development in technology, in particular computers, Internet, and social media I was surprized that technology did not come up in more discussions. Perhaps, this is because of how technology has been integrated into our everyday lives, establishing ordinary status. Speaking mostly of the present, or near present, women tended not to compare the everyday-ness of organizing over the many long years of their involvement—for some women over fifty years, and did not reflect on the days of phone-trees, multi-party lines, and typewriters. Only Louise, in her seventies, discussed learning to use a computer and the Internet for her community work:

> I got a computer. I learned how to use the computer and so it worked but I didn't have internet until now in November.

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She continued:

> That's right and so I'm learning how to do all that. I even sent a picture to my daughter via email. You know I'm learning all these things you know at 70. Oh it's so much!

Prior to learning how to use computer, Louise was writing notes by hand for a community history book she wrote with her husband. In the current world of community involvement knowing how to use computers and the Internet and also having an email address are an important part of staying connected and communicating within committees and organisations, and the broader community. Louise's experience highlights that for many older women, for example those in their 70s and 80s, learning to use new technology can be challenging, though not impossible. For older women who are not technology literate the necessity of technology to be involved in formal volunteering can be a barrier to their involvement.

Dot, a web-designer, presented a different perspective on learning and technology in volunteering. Dot designs and maintains websites for community organisations (such as her church) and events on a volunteer basis. To be current with technology Dot is continuously learning:

> And now I need to change what I'm doing and make it more accessible for people at church to help me with what I am doing. …]
> [The] software is so expensive and now WordPress which is a blogging site has a free download of its software and so you have to pay for the website, but you don't have to pay for the software so it allows people to do it very inexpensively. So if I change over to that it will be helpful.
> So that is my next project. One of my next learning projects.

When technology is your means of volunteering, it's important to stay current. Dot's web and online involvement highlight the growing area of technology and volunteering—e-volunteering. Keeping up with technology can be significant to one's involvement, whether you are involved with an organisation in person or online. For some women access and knowledge of technology could be a barrier to being involved, in regards to the knowledge, skills and physical ability, as

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well as the expense of having a computer and Internet service. Technology can also presents new opportunities for involvement.

Confidently and effectively communicating to various audiences, including the media, is a skill women discussed learning through their involvement, even when it's a challenge. The key is understanding the audience and ensuring you connect with what they see as valuable. Considering the rapid integration of computers, the Internet and social media into community involvement, learning how to use technology as required within volunteering, whether through organisations, initiatives or online volunteering, can be beneficial.

Patience

Patience was a trait and practice women identified learning in and for community involvement. Patience in regards to the time it takes for change to happen, as well as patience in regards to working with others. Working with people and advocating on issues for change simply takes time and one needs to be willing to give it the time it needs. Working with others can require a lot of patience, particularly when there are conflicts. Denise identified learning patience in working with others:

I do have the patience to work with other people and I can deal with other people. Patience and time are also important when working with individuals. Many of the women in this study discussed helping individual people, as in times of need.

Patience in regards to the time it takes for change to happen is also important. One may think one is not having an effect on people or circumstances. However one doesn't always see it, as Holly learned:

> Well, like, you don't know what does it for people. Like you don't know if you are making an effect on anyone?

Sometimes, you do. Sometimes, you don't. And sometimes it comes way later on in the years. […]
And we have to keep just doing what we do and just leave it, leave it, go about your way and just leave it. You know, and sometimes it's not that easy, but I mean just leave it and let whatever takes place take place.
So yeah, that's kind of what that taught me.

Along with learning to be patient, Holly's story also highlights learning to have hope, hope that change may happen. Holly's story suggests that in regards to change, hope must accompany patience. Change might not happen when we may like it to happen yet it still can happen, in its time, when things align for individuals and communities.

Women talked about learning patience with the change processes at the individual and community levels. Helena, who organised many events and is involved with several organisations and advocating for various concerns, identified learning patience and perseverance, stated:

So I guess one of the biggest things that I have gained through volunteering is first probably patience and you know taking a step back sometimes and re-evaluating and then, like going forward again after, like even if you have been shut-down you have to go forward again. And reassess and re-evaluate.

Patience combined with perseverance, women learned in volunteering, particularly when it came to advocating for change. Wendy reflected on patience and change in reference to an issue she and others had to put aside for a while because the timing was not right:

More and more people will ask it. And I think there's a place where people can ask the first question.
It's like those waves of feminism, right? There's these people will ask now and in a certain given time then the next set of people will ask those questions and then eventually—. […]
I think it is about social change. Well, about change period.

Learning to be patient with advocacy means learning that sometimes things just take time to change. In community involvement, patience was a skill and attitude women learned in regards to both working with others and anticipating change.

Learning in and for community involvement, women gained strategic skills and knowledge which assisted them in being effective in what they did. Women identified numerous areas of strategic knowledge they acquired through their involvement, including system and process knowledge, how to work with people and volunteers, organising, financial skills, communication, technology and patience. One area of learning which only rarely came up in women's stories was leadership. Explicitly, leadership was typically discussed in regards to holding a former role on a board or voluntary organisation. Women identified learning about leadership as well as leadership skills and knowledge. For example Sonya reflected:

> I think I've certainly organisational skills and certainly learned more and more about leadership. And learned that it is not always easy. […] There is lots to be learned in how to be a leader. And a person could be a very top-down.—"I'm the boss" kind of leader. And yet, I guess a lot of my roles have been leader roles so I'm focusing on that for the moment.

Organisational skills and leadership are not the same for Sonya; being a leader is something she is learning. Perhaps since women tended not to self-identify with being leaders, they do not frame their learning in regards to leadership.

CONCLUSION

After a day at school, a common question my daughter is asked is, "what did you learn today?" Rarely do we ask ourselves to consider what we have learned on a daily basis, outside of a formal school setting. Community involvement renders itself a rich context for learning self-knowledge, socio-cultural knowledge and strategic knowledge as highlighted by these women's narratives of their own community involvement practice. What women learn through their community involvement benefits their community involvement practice. Due to the tacit nature of learning for and in community involvement, I acknowledge that this is not a complete or

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exhaustive list. Rather, the discussion highlights the plethora of knowledge and skills women learn in and for community involvement. What women learn through their community involvement enhances their community involvement knowledge and practice and informs their understandings of themselves, others and their communities.

Coming soon to a community near you.[51]

Red, orange, blue, green, yellow, black, pink, purple, white, and the favourite—glow-in-the-dark nickel-sized elastic bands cover the coffee-table. A seven-year old girl sits on the couch and turns these elastics into bracelets while listening to Christmas music. Red, green, and glow-in-the-dark she announces as her next pattern. Carefully she stretches the first elastic, a red one, over her pointer and middle fingers on her left hand. Adds a green elastic, pulls…. . Once she's done she carefully slips the piece off her finger and secures the ends together with a 'C' clip. This bracelet is added to the collection in the plastic bag beside her. These bracelets are a key part of her plan to raise money to help a local refugee settlement organization.

Two weeks later, she's at a Christmas market selling her handiwork. Carefully she writes '$2.00, with $1.00 to support refugee families in our community,' on a piece of paper, folds it in half, and stands it up next to her wares on a table. She places a vintage owl piggy-bank beside her jewelry for people to put the money into. She sits behind the table in the next to her mother and starts a word-find. Some children come and look at the bracelets. They ask her some questions and she happily responds. She sells two. The girls delight in putting their coins in the owl. A lady comes by and asks her about the bracelets, the artist doesn't say anything. This time it's her mother who has to do the talking. The girl looks up briefly and smiles. The lady buys one for her granddaughter. As the evening goes on slowly the bracelets disappear, and finally only two remain. At the end of the evening $15.00 was raised to help support refugees settle in the community. She's ecstatic – so much money! New plan, she announces. "Next time I'll ask my friends to help. We'll have more bracelets to sell and we can raise even more money."

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[51] This vignette is an account of my daughter's recent fundraiser.

CHAPTER NINE

Gleanings: Concluding Analysis and Recommendations

When I embarked on this study my curiosity was two-fold, put simply: how are rural women involved in their communities (past and present) and how did they learn to be community involved. Positioned in the theories and work of peace building, I saw women's community involvement as part of the everyday peace, which Laura Ring (2006) notes "proliferates yet goes largely unremarked" (p. 65). Using a grounded theory approach to build understanding and theory from the knowledge and experiences shared by the women who participated, this study sought to build an understanding of rural women's grassroots peacebuilding through women's community volunteering and in doing so focus on how women learn community involvement. An assumption was that if women had not learned community involvement, they would not be involved, and so the significant community action and care work performed by women is learned. By learning I do not just mean the knowledge and skills required to get the job done, I am also referring to becoming aware of and learning the values, morals, traditions, and possibilities of volunteering and helping-out.

The everydayness of community involvement is a blessing—it is inclusive as many women volunteer in some way in their community making for many potential participants as well as ensuring the research, findings and analysis will be relevant and applicable to many. My motivations were simple. To examine how rural women's community involvement represents a local, grassroots peacebuilding practice and culture situated in South-Central Manitoba—to reveal the peace work of rural women. This reflects Fiona's response to why she has been involved in her community, "I wanted to show my daughter what women are capable of." And, I

have been incredibly grateful for the opportunity to sit with these inspirational women in person to hear them tell their stories, and then sit with their stories after and have the privilege of sensing the cumulative effects of their community care work in the region. These women have shown me what women are capable of. Always one to consider learning, my second motivation was to develop an understanding of the learning-teaching culture within rural women's community involvement.

At the crux of it, this study looked at two seldom examined related phenomena—women's community involvement and community involvement learning. In their stories of community involvement and learning these rural women highlighted the everyday nature of their community involvement and the informal and tacit learning within community involvement practice. This chapter provides a review and analysis of these two curiosities as explored through the women's stories and theoretical literature, and then provides some recommendations for future peace and community development practice based on the analysis.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In their 'just doing what needs to be done' these rural women reveal how identifying and addressing local needs and issues, and performing public acts of caring have entered into the routines, habits and rituals of their everyday. As Debra stated, "it's just what you do." Being involved, for some women, is so much a part of who they are—normal and expected—that they do not have a name for it; as some women observed of their involvement —"I just be." Other women did have names for it, which often reflected spiritual values and ideas of citizenship and social justice, for example service, responsibility, entrepreneurism, advocacy, and activism.

Women may strategically name their community involvement for themselves and their communities inorder to build connections and allies.

Women's involvement is motivated by their ideas of care, social justice, and citizenship informed by their spirituality and ideas of democratic citizenship. Although, the women did not frame their involvement with the terms of peace and peacebuilding, their narratives reflect the feminist definitions of peace and culture of peace emphasizing the absence of physical and structural violence, and presence of social justice, reciprocity, trust-building, and solidary. As well, peace is active; it's dynamic ongoing processes significant to individual and community well-being. This understanding of peace informed this research. Viewing the women's involvement through a peace lens reveals a significant community peace practice. To paraphrase Georgia, community involvement may have a more significant and direct impact on one's community than voting. Women want to live where they and their children have opportunities for recreation and leisure, as well as resources for their health, education, and wellbeing. As Pearl said, she wants "a thriving community to bring her family home to." For these women it's about creating the community they want.

Connecting with others, in particular other women, is a significant motivator for many women, past and present, to be involved in their communities. Through volunteering women spend their leisure time with others, often intentionally other women, with whom they build networks that provide them with emotional, informative and instructional support. For many women, this social aspect of volunteering sustains and supports their on-going involvement as well as nurtures their sense of self and efficacy.

The act of being involved was never questioned. Even after Sonya and Sadie took a year off of involvement to rejuvenate and refocus, they returned to being involved in more considered

ways. As their personal circumstances changed over their lifespan, work, children, and retirement, women continue to be involved—although how they are involved and what types of initiatives they are involved with sometimes change in relation to what else is happening in their lives. Women's involvements are often reflected in what is happening in their homes or families. This is particularly true for mothers with children still at home as their involvement typically revolves around their children, such as coaching or managing children's sport teams, sitting on daycare or family resource centre boards, or Home and School Associations/Parent Councils. Piecing the women's stories together revealed common stages of women's community involvement reflecting these stages of their lives in general. Other factors that influenced their involvement included career, critical illness, disability, moving, education, and change in caregiving responsibilities within their family.

Women discussed informal and formal involvement, similar to the distinction of formal and informal volunteering. Formal involvement with organisations typically reflected specific roles such as president, chair, co-chair, secretary, treasurer, board member, convenor, or committee member. Some women volunteered on a freelance basis with organisations, preferring flexibility, more leisure time and less responsibility over the busy schedules, time commitments and responsibilities that can come with formal roles, in particular leadership roles. Informal involvement was identified with more public caring work, being neighbourly, and helping out as needed and able. Informal acts of care may seem small or simple, such as being the family an elderly neighbour calls every day just so that someone knows he's 'still kicking,' or driving someone to go shopping or to an appointment, or sharing homemade goods or garden produce with neighbours. However, in all of this they foster a sense of meaning and belonging, build

trust, reciprocity, and social cohesion. In essence they are creating both ontological security and abundant communities.

Though largely taken for granted, women's community action is crucial to the wellbeing of individuals and communities. "Without women's work in the community life, as we know it would not exist," Dominelli argues (1995, p. 133). Pam noted, "Women are not always seen as being in the forefront of, in the public eye, but the work that we do has a huge impact." Many women talked about the significance of women's community work, noting that if women didn't do it, it wouldn't get done; if you wanted something done, you have the responsibility to work at it. Women's experiences in society and their perspectives and knowledge, informed by their lived experiences, influenced their community involvement.

Women, as Jackie argued, have "a totally different perspective than men's often on certain issues. Women also have their experiences to bring to the table a whole new perspective that men sometimes don't see and after all we are half the population or half the gender so why wouldn't we be involved?" Women make up half the population of the region, province, nation and world—why wouldn't they be involved? Conversations with these women on the significance of women's community involvement parallel discussions on women's peacebuilding and involvement in peace-processes (Anderlini, 2000, 2007; Brienes, Gierycz, and Reardon, 1999), notably that women, women's issues and women's work are often left out or marginalized, and not taken seriously or recognized, despite women's presence and ongoing efforts to improve communities and societies, and address violence and socio-cultural, economic and political issues.

Women's community involvement often reflects local socio-cultural gender norms and expectations within the local gender culture. Rural women's community involvement in this

study reflected observations regarding women's community action, which point out that women tend to participate in caring-work typically associated with female labour and the private realm of the homeplace. However, women, in particular mothers, use their authority and position as mothers to advocate for resources and social change.

For mothers, community involvement informs their volunteering motivation and focus. Mothers tend to be involved in initiatives that support the interests and lives of their own children. Through volunteering mothers role model values and behaviours that emphasize social justice, caring, and active citizenship. Volunteering can also be a teaching-learning parenting practice.

Locating current rural women's community involvement within the collective, long memory of women's community service and action historically, especially focusing on local historical initiatives by women, emphasizes that locally there is a tradition of women's community involvement. The historical examples of women's community action, volunteering and community building can provide significant inspiration for current and future creativity and solidarity.

This study reflects women's community involvement at a particular time and place. Rural women in other areas may be involved in other volunteer sectors, for example volunteer firefighting. At the time of data gathering I had not observed any female volunteer firefighters in the research area. However, in March 2016, I watched two female volunteer firefighters, from a community in the research area, play in a friendly community firefighters' broomball match. During intermission one of these women, still in her firefighting gear, came into the public waiting area to nurse her infant. A uniformed female volunteer firefighter nursing her young

infant reflects an astounding confluence of volunteer and mother roles, as well as an analogy of gender.

Women's community involvement represents formal and informal volunteering at the grassroots for building communities which foster individual and community wellbeing. Motivated by values of care, responsibility and citizenship, women help out as needed by sitting on boards, advocating for a family centre, starting farmers markets or coaching soccer. Their past and present involvement is fundamental to community life as we know it, despite not being recognized for the significance it has, not just for women and their families, but also for the entire community.

LEARNING

Considering how women learn community involvement participants identified that most of their learning happened informally and socially. For many it was during their early years in the homeplace, by observing their parents' formal and informal volunteering, that they gained awareness of community involvement. Always willing to help someone in need and welcoming neighbours to the table were significant observations from childhood that could influence someone's volunteering in adulthood. The importance of the homeplace in women learning community involvement reflects the larger discussion in women's learning theory on the significance of the homeplace for women's learning (Gouthro, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). By 'just doing it' and 'flying by the seat of their pants' women learn many of the skills and knowledge of community involvement through experiential learning, both individually and collectively; sometimes making mistakes which are seen as learning opportunities. Mentors and role models are significant teachers of community action, as elders they carry the knowledge and experience

with which to guide the learners. Family members including parents, grandparents and aunts, friends, community members, and fellow-volunteers were identified as role models involvement and helping-out others in the community. This reflects women's learning theory's emphasis on connecting as learning and the importance of relationships and networks in fostering and supporting women's learning experiences (Hayes and Flannery, 2000). Women transfer knowledge and skills from one aspect of their lives into their community involvement; for example, human resources skills used at work help women work effectively with others on committees, or training in accounting transferred into a woman's work as treasurer. Women draw from their formal education to assist them in their community involvement.

Sometimes women have the opportunity to attend non-formal learning events such as workshops or conferences, however these opportunities are rare and not available or accessible to all volunteers. For example, formal volunteering with local branches of provincial or national organisations such as the Women's Institute or churches (which are part of larger denominational networks) may present opportunities for non-formal learning. However, these opportunities may not be economically or geographically accessible to rural women. Learning community involvement is typically informal and social, by experience, and transferring and adapting knowledge and skills from other areas of life into community involvement practice. There may be non-formal learning opportunities: however, they are not always accessible.

Notably most learning happens in the space of community involvement, situated in the socio-cultural community in the thick of the action. Community involvement learning is not necessarily recognized as learning, as the focus is on the doing, rather on a learning-reflection dialectic to enhance practice.

Through community involvement women learn a plethora of skills and knowledge applicable to their volunteer practice. Women learn skills-based knowledge on how to do things, strategic knowledge on how things work within organisations as well as political and economic systems and structures. Women learn about their communities: community history; community needs, issues and assets; how their communities function; power dynamics in communities (patriarchy, the old-boys club), as well as the people living in their communities. Women also learn about themselves including their strengths and vulnerabilities. Women sometimes surprize themselves by how much they care about people, their communities and an issue, what they are capable of doing and achieving a goal they never considered possible.

Examining women's learning for and in community involvement in a more specific and nuanced way, as this study does revealed that learning in community involvement is typically informal and social in nature, often manifesting through the experience of just doing what needs to be done. As children observe the community action of parents, family and community members, they gain an awareness of the values, behaviours and possibilities for community action—highlighting the significance of both early learning and learning in the homeplace for community involvement. Role models and mentors are pivotal teachers of women's community involvement. Women transfer and adapted knowledge and skills from other areas of their lives into the community involvement practice. Through their involvement women learn skills and knowledge about community involvement; communities and societies, as well as economic and political structures influencing; and they learn about themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section proposes three recommendations in light of this study. Listed in order of how the concepts appear in this section, yet not in order of priority. The first recommendation is for greater consideration of volunteers and volunteering into Peace and Conflict Studies. Second, in recognition of women's community involvement as a significant site of learning, this study proposes a theory of women's community involvement learning. Finally, as a result of this research with rural women, and recognizing the absence of relevant resources for local women's community action, this study recommends supporting women's networks to foster learning and sustainability.

Bring in the volunteers!

The preference for the term activist and phenomenon of activism in Peace Studies, reflects a partiality for the extraordinary (activist, activism) over the ordinary (volunteer, volunteerism). Considering the high rates of volunteerism (Statistics Canada, 2012) and its universal manifestation (United Nations Volunteers, 2011), volunteer and volunteerism are more inclusive concepts for peacebuilding discourse and practice. Expanding our analysis and language of active subjects in peacebuilding to also include volunteers, I believe will make this field more practically and conceptually accessible to more people. Many 'lay' people do not self-identify as activists or peacebuilders, yet spend hours volunteering in their communities in order to improve community wellbeing, for example: address inequality and social injustice, create equal access to opportunities, resources and programs. Isn't that building peace? Freire (1999) speaks to the power of naming and when you name the world you change the world. By naming or introducing and building the concept of (community) volunteer as peace-builder, I'm

suggesting we change the way we see grassroots everyday peace work. I believe I'm making it accessible, and inclusive. At the same time, this integration presents opportunities to consider the gendered nature of women's peacebuilding volunteering in specific and nuanced ways not yet examined.

Another critical connection to examine between volunteering and peacebuilding within Peace Studies is the observations that volunteering nurtures relationships and builds a civil society and a culture of peace—fostering social cohesion, trust, mutuality, empowerment, reciprocity and solidary—all are fundamental to civil conflict resolution and sustainable community development (United Nations Volunteers, 2011).

Further research bridging volunteering, peace and conflict should look specifically at formal and informal volunteering in warzones, including before, during and after war or cease-fire and peace agreements. Considering the research in Volunteer Studies reporting a doubling and tripling of volunteer rates in response to historical significant events, such as the 9-11 attacks in the United States (Penner, 2004), further research within Peace and Conflict Studies could look specifically at the implications of this phenomenon for fostering peace or conflict or both. As well, in consideration of the linkages between volunteering and building a culture of peace, recommendations for future research include exploring volunteering in communities experiencing overt structural, cultural or physical violence. For example research on inter-racial, cross-cultural, or inter-faith volunteer associations and neighbourhoods could shed light on how volunteering fosters cultures and practices of peace and peace-building.

Integrating volunteer and volunteering into the field of Peace and Conflict Studies highlights the everyday peacebuilding actors, practices and knowledge that exist. Peace-building can become a more inclusive practice, not only ascribed to advocates and activists, but also to the

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millions of volunteers active in their communities and neighbourhoods. Further research on volunteering and peace could examine volunteering, war and conflict, as well as volunteering and the building of a culture of peace in various diverse settings.

Women's community involvement learning

As mentioned, a curiosity which lead me to do this study is the learning-teaching culture of women's community involvement. Understanding the situated cultures of learning and teaching within community involvement can shed light on how to foster, nurture and facilitate learning within community involvement to strengthen the dialectical nature of action and reflection to build praxis (Brookfield, 1984, 1987; Chovenac, 2004; Foley, 1999; Freire, 2000). For the most part this learning is informal, incidental, organic, tacit, continuous, spontaneous, and entrenched within community involvement—usually unrecognized by the learner (Duguid, Mundel and Schugurensky, 2007; Chovenac, 2006; Foley, 1999). Despite happening under the radar, this learning-teaching culture is fundamental to sustaining and developing effective community involvement knowledge and practice. Nuanced to peacebuilding, this learning and teaching culture is fundamental to creating sustainable peace at the community, society, national and global levels.

Within adult education and peace education there is no specific concept which focuses on learning in community involvement or learning in volunteering. While peace education attends to expressing, identifying and building peace learning and teaching to build peaceful and socially just societies for all, it lacks the specificity of explaining the learning process and the nuances of learning within community involvement. Adult learning theory provides concepts from which to understand learning such as indigenous learning (Gouthro and Plumb, 2003) and learning as

dwelling (Plumb, 2008) which argue that learning is more than where it is happening, credentials, and a cognitive process—it is an embodied means of meaning-making as beings in the world building intersubjectivity and agency. Adult education has a tradition of popular education for community development and social justice, and brings with it research and analysis of social movement learning and learning in volunteering. However, while social movement learning, both internal and external, addresses some of the inadequacies of peace education, on its own it is too defined and confined by social movements to encapsulate the nuances of learning in community involvement. While for some people community involvement can mean being a part of a social movement, for many others their community involvement is not associated with a social movement. Existing studies on learning in volunteering focus on formal volunteering in organisations and excludes informal volunteering and the significance of early and lifelong learning.

The women's learning narratives highlight that community involvement is a significant learning site. In my review of the literature on social movement learning and learning in volunteering, I encountered a lack of critical gender analysis on the ways in which gender influences these forms of learning and the gendered experience of social movements and formal volunteering as learning sites. As well, the women' stories are the threads we can use to weave together an understanding—some would call it a theory (hooks, 1994) of women's community involvement learning, integrating learning in social movements (Foley, 1999; Holford, 1995), social movement learning (Clover and Hall, 2000; Hall and Clover, 2005; Hall and Turray, 2006), learning in volunteering (Duguid, Mundel and Schurugensky, 2013), women's learning (Gouthro, 2005, 2009a, 2009b; Hart, 2002; Hayes and Flannery, 2000), learning for a culture of peace (Eisler, 2004), peace education (Fisk, 2000; Harris and Morrison, 2003; Reardon, 1988;

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Vellacott, 2000), popular education (Gustavson, nd.; Gougoulakis and Christie, 2012; Tosse, 2009), and adult education's historical community development traditions.

I propose that a focused examination specific on women's volunteering would identify nuances and dynamics overshadowed or lost in broader theoretical analysis under the umbrellas mentioned above. I am hesitant to propose yet another theory such as a community involvement learning theory among theories for fear that one more simply adds to the categorical cacophony already at play within theoretical discourses within and between disciplines, something that could result in the fundamental element and necessity being lost in theoretical debates. The fundamental element to concern ourselves with is learning for a better world, locally at the grassroots, happening every day, by the majority of actors (volunteers and helpers—just being neighbourly, doing what needs to be done)—not (just) the activists and advocates. As such this focus on meeting community needs falls into Hall and Turray's (2006) definition of social movement. I am proposing examining community involvement as a cognitive praxis. Volunteers are learners and teachers engaged in a teaching-learning dialectic to make sense of their world and develop their praxis, as actors or citizens in their local communities engaging in an education in imaging and building a good life for themselves, their families and communities (Wiens and Coulter, 2003).

Friesen's (2004) examination of the Manitoba Royal Commission on Adult Education noted that the purpose of this Commission was to understand how adults make sense of their world, an aspect of the research focused on numerous formal volunteer practices, associations and organisations in which adults engaged with each other, ideas and community. Considering its purpose and focus on volunteering we can deduce that people volunteer to make sense of their world. That this Commission manifested under the banner of adult education suggests that

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theoretical considerations already exist, as also demonstrated in this study on rural women's learning in community involvement, between the field of adult education and volunteering.

An analysis of community involvement learning with attention to volunteers making sense of their world connects with Penner's (2004) research on volunteer activators such as significant personal experiences and significant historical events. Often people try to make sense of what is happening in their world in order to process events into their existing meaning schemes. The juxtaposition of the extra-ordinary into the ordinary, can threaten our ontological security. To make meaning of these events, people volunteer. A similar phenomenon is presently going on in Canada in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, the Syrian refugees coming to Canada against the backdrop of the prevalent terrorism and anti-Islamic discourses. Countless citizens are volunteering in formal and informal ways to support these newcomers, by directly volunteering with them or indirectly by attending fundraising and awareness raising events, giving money or needed items for newcomers to start their lives in Canada.

Recommendations for further study on community involvement learning include conducting qualitative studies on the learning-teaching dialectic within community involvement practices across communities and demographics in order to develop a generalizable theory. Considering the internal and external learning dimensions of social movement learning, future research could determine if a comparable distinction exists in regards to community involvement learning. Research specific to the sense and meaning making practices within community involvement could look specifically at these processes in response to volunteering motivated by significant historical events – such as the Syrian refugee crisis, rising Islamophobia in Canada and terrorism, for examples.

How does community involvement learning manifest in pre-war, war and post-war zones? Comparative case study research focusing on community involvement learning in areas experiencing violent conflict, including war, would shed light on an under-examined phenomenon. This research should consider everyone's experiences and practices and not be limited to a peace-building agenda.

How is community involvement learning gendered? Gender, including LGBTTQ, experiences of community involvement learning are vital to understanding the experiences of all people in regards to volunteering in their communities and how these experiences may be gendered.

Community involvement learning is a cognitive praxis informed by a teaching-learning dialectic informing individual and collective meaning-making and practice. While this learning may hold similarities with social movement learning, it is also unique in its own way. Further research on community involvement learning would look at this cognitive praxis across communities and demographics, in relation to violence, war and peace-building, as well as how this learning praxis is gendered.

Supporting rural women's networking

My final recommendation is not academic or theoretical, it is practical and grassroots. The rich and diverse experiences of the women who participated in this study, and the wealth of knowledge they shared for this research, represent a fraction of the community involved women in rural areas whose knowledge and skills ensure the betterment of their communities, this province and country, and our world. While listening to the experiences of women who participated what stood out for me is that their knowledge and learning are valuable assets for

community builders around the region, and yet rarely do they have opportunities to sit with other community active women to learn best-practices and build support. Networks are significant to women's participation in peacebuilding, community action and community involvement –as acknowledged in this study. Currently, any networking happens informally through organisational and personal connections. There is no known accessible, local resource to facilitate rural women connecting with women beyond their immediate communities to share knowledge and practice, as well as record a collective women's history. Such an endeavour must be pursued collaboratively at the grassroots and move out and up. A possibility would be to develop and engage a participatory action research project on women's networking in the region and, through the use of asset-mapping and storytelling, begin to account for community based assets. This project must be intentional in bringing together a diverse group of rural women, cross community, religious, cultural, racial and class lines.

Three recommendations have been put forward. By introducing and integrating volunteer and volunteerism into peace studies, a more inclusive and accurate examination of who is engaging in community level efforts in this field will be revealed. Developing an inter-disciplinary theory of women's community involvement learning will develop a nuanced understanding of learning and teaching culture, both interior and exterior, in regards to women's community involvement. A deeper, critical, understanding of how women learn and teach within community involvement will assist in strengthening the learning and teaching processes and essentially women's community involvement itself. At the same time, identifying and understanding the external learning that happens by those affected by women's community involvement can be informative. The final recommendation is practical and resourceful in

nature—the development of networking opportunities for rural women to foster networks, inform, educate and—inspire!

CLOSING STATEMENT

It's the beginning of September, harvest season. While driving to and from my daughter's daycare ten minutes away in the neighbouring town over the summer we noticed the fields change from black to green, to flowering, to ripe, and now the later crops are brown, and it occurred to me that harvest seems a most metaphorically appropriate time to write this dissertation. As the harvesters maneuver their massive expensive combines through fields of winter wheat, canola and spring wheat, then later bean, sunflowers, potatoes, and corn, I analyze the data, gleaning women's experiences and knowledge, including my own, as well as theory to harvest a report of this study on rural women's community involvement. With the bounty of harvest comes the anticipated community meals—Soup and Pie Suppers which nourish the individual and collective wellbeing of communities. Life, often in unexpected ways, reflects the everyday seasonal rhythms, rituals and routines around us.

This feminist ethnographic study of rural women's peacebuilding on the prairie sought out rural women involved in their communities across South-Central Manitoba to share their stories of community involvement. These women represent a fraction of the local women involved in their communities. They, like their foremothers, continue a long tradition of rural women's community involvement—engaging in community caring through formal and informal volunteering.

However, often this caring work goes unnoticed and we must be patient, linger and look carefully, to see it bubbling, as Sonya reflected:

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> At first glance coming into this…'oh what can I possibly get out of this very, well, slow, mundane little society that we have here'. Happy as I am, I love it, but it's sort of, we are that way though. There is nothing short of dramatic going on here, on the surface at least. And so, to come in and find out what this bubbling in the hearts and minds and souls of the women that's exciting.

The mundane of rural communities is not really mundane at all, as Sonya rightly observed. There is more to discover, by lingering attentively to attend to the excitement below the surface. What bubbles below the surface, women's community work, is fundamental to our experiences and life in our communities as we know it (Dominelli, 1995).

Pearl observed the significance of women's ongoing involvement in their communities and their passion to 'just do it':

> If women didn't do it nothing would get done for one thing. Women always seem to be looking out for their family and the community. They want a thriving community for their children to live in and their families to come home to. … Women, you don't have to get them started they are usually going.

Women volunteer, applying their knowledge, skills, and passion to doing what they see needs to be done, to make their communities places they want to bring their families home to.

Through their community involvement women negotiate meaning, as well as develop knowledge and skills relevant and applicable to their community practice. Community involvement learning recognizes that not only is community involvement a significant site of learning it is also a cognitive praxis. Recognizing the significance and potential of knowing women's history, Nettie Wiebe, the first woman president of the National Farmers Union, stated:

> That is why women's history is so important. That knowledge that there are others who have gone before you and who have worked in difficult circumstances. Not to romanticize the pioneering in any way but just to know that it has been done, that it can be done, circumstances change, but there we all are, sort of at the heart of what is strong and regenerative and progressive. Knowing that it goes on that it is not one single women's star that sort of rises and then drops. It is much earthier than that, it isn't about

stars at all! It's about roots, shoots and seeds. And it is regenerative. (as cited in Desmarais, 2005, p. 10)

Wiebe's words poetically express the essence of women's community involvement. As Hall and Clover (2000) argue, "without collective memory, people lose the creative ability to envision change" (p. 8). It isn't just about the past, it is also learning the present attentively, dwelling as Plumb (2008) would suggest, while building a long and wide collective memory, to connect and learn from one another.

This study began as a quest to tell a recent story in the long memory of women's community involvement as peacebuilding on the prairies. I write 'a story' because I recognize that there are many stories of women's local peacebuilding in existence though few are written. There are many told and untold stories within this long memory that happened long ago, yesterday, and this morning. Starting today and into the future more stories will be added.

INTERVIEW QUIDE

Research Questions

Introduction:
1. Tell me a little about yourself?

Community-building Motivation: Why are you involved in community-building?
2. How have you been involved in your community?

3. When did you begin being involved in your community?

4. Why were/are you involved in your community?

5. What do you consider the highlights of you community involvement?

Community-building Learning: How did you learn to do community-building?
6. When you think about everything that you have done in your community how did you learn to do this community work?

7. Have you had any significant learning experiences (formal or non-formal) in regards to your community involvement?

8. Who are you teachers or role models?

9. What expertise or special knowledge have you gained through your community-work that you think you may not have gained otherwise?

10. What have you learned about your community through your community involvement?

11. What have you learned about yourself through your community involvement?

Community-building Roles: What have you done in community-building? How did you do your community-building?

12. What is the relationship between your community-work and your other roles (family, job, church, home, farm)?

13. Do you have a name for your community involvement?

14. What challenges have you experienced in your community-building?

15. What strategies have you used for overcoming these challenges and conflicts?

16. Why is women's community work important?

17. How do you think being a woman has influenced your community involvement?

18. How do you think culture, including religion and/or living in a rural area, has influenced you community involvement?

Closing:

19. What advice do you have for rural women who are involved in their communities?

20. Do you have any questions for me?

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