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— breaking the silence —

Toward a Theory of Women's Doctoral Persistence

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Faculty of Education

We accept this dissertation as conforming to the required standard

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## ABSTRACT

Supervisors: Dr. S. Allen, Dr. T. Johnson

In recent years educational researchers have expressed a growing concern about both increased rates of attrition from doctoral programs and the increased time required to complete the doctorate. Many researchers have estimated that upwards of 50% of doctoral students withdraw from their programs prior to completion of degree requirements. Although women's rates of enrollment have grown significantly over the past decade there is also much evidence to show that women withdraw from doctoral programs of study at higher rates than men. Given these trends there is good reason to examine more closely, factors that influence women's doctoral degree progress.

This study provides an in-depth qualitative examination of the challenges women encounter in pursuing the Ph.D., and the meanings they attribute to their experiences, with the purpose of identifying critical factors that influence women's doctoral persistence. The study breaks new methodological ground by demonstrating how the Internet, often thought to be a cold and impersonal medium, can be used to conduct in-depth personal interviews that are rich in meaning despite separation of interviewer and interviewees in both place and time. Utilizing grounded theory methodology for analyzing the data, five women Ph.D. candidates and two recent Ph.D. recipients were interviewed over the course of one year (1995). A critical feminist perspective provides the theoretical framework for understanding the women's learning experiences within the contexts of their institutional and departmental milieux.

Findings relating to women's doctoral persistence emerge through an analysis of electronic mail transcripts and face-to-face interviews. Central to the findings is the illumination of a complex interaction of personal, social and institutional factors that both enhance and detract from women's doctoral persistence. Eleven elements of a theory of women's doctoral persistence are put forward. The benefits and limitations of using electronic networks to conduct qualitative inquiry are examined.

Examiners:

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In following my own path toward completion of the doctorate I have learned many lessons – both vicariously through the stories of the seven women who participated in my research and first hand – about the use and misuse of power in faculty relationships and the struggle to shape one’s own voice as an emerging scholar. Not all the lessons were wanted or appreciated; however, they *have* served to make me wiser and to deepen my appreciation for the systemic nature in which power is embedded into the structure of institutions of higher learning.

I am appreciative and thankful for the support of my dissertation chair, Dr. Sheilah Allen, and the members of my committee. Without their support this dissertation would not have been written. They have modelled a lesson I will gladly carry forward with me in my future work with graduate and undergraduate students.

I would also like to express my thanks and appreciation to Dr. Jane Gaskell, University of British Columbia, as my external examiner, for her thoughtful questions at my defense. Her questions focused on the absence of my own voice in this dissertation and provided an important validation of my views about qualitative research.

I would also like to express appreciation to my friend, Lona McRae. Over the past seven years Lona has been witness to the many ups and downs of my own dissertation process and no one could ask for a better friend in life than she has been to me.

## Dedication

It is significant that I am writing this dedication and filing this dissertation on April 25th, 1997, for today is the third anniversary of the day I first met Scott – now my husband – online. Yes, we met “on the net”. Using electronic mail over those next months in 1994, we came to know each other “from the inside out”. We came to know each other better than most people do even after many years of marriage. His unfailing support and belief in me through the many stages of the dissertation process is an exemplary model for all faculty and partners to emulate. He has been patient with me in my moments of self-doubt and hesitation and he has spent countless hours alone during the past two years enduring the final stages of the process, often only able to watch from a distance as I ruminated over each word, each comma, and each turn of phrase. His has been the kind of support than any dissertating student would wish for – and more. Thank you Scott, for everything. You are the light of my life.

Today I emerge from this cocoon to celebrate our anniversary and enter into a new phase of our relationship – without the dissertation.

## DESIDERATUM

Just as archetypes equating manliness with conquest and domination are inappropriate for a healthy masculinity, these archetypes are inappropriate for a healthy femininity. But they *are* appropriate for a society of in-built power imbalances in the relations between women and men. Female archetypes splitting woman into an idealized mother-wife or a despised temptress-whore effectively teach both women and men that good (asexual) women like Mary passively accept the male's superior power, whereas bad (sexual) women like Delilah and Eve wield power over men with disastrous results. Not only that, most of our archetypes of femininity basically deny women any independent existence, defining them only in terms of how they further (or hinder) male-defined goals. Above all, they strip women of legitimate power, be it temporal or divine.

(Riane Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure*, 1996, p. 266.)

## PRELUDE TO DISSERTATION by Marilyn Union

Gap-  
 unfilled time between birth  
 and motherhood  
 placenta still attached:  
 time  
 between conception  
 and bindery  
 while the placental committee  
 tethers my words:  
 time  
 between year's end  
 and beginning-  
 chaos-  
 when priests walk in rags  
 and peasants ride asses:  
 I am neither. I fly.

My maternal grandmother's only son  
 was stillborn.  
 She was never forgiven her body's resistance  
 to patriarchy.  
 I have borne two sons and though I love them,  
 it is time for a daughter  
 one who will speak wildly in woman's tongue  
 and be heard:  
 woman's tongue  
 resisting,  
 one who will dance in moonlight  
 -sacred baptism  
   of the lunacy which is her birthright-  
 unafraid  
 [nine million women were murdered in European witchhunts. My friend Mary D. was not  
 permitted to stage "Vinegar Tom" at the small Catholic college where she teaches theatre.]  
 It is time for daughters!

Articulation is the issue ...  
 my own articulation ...  
 tau[gh]t.  
 I am stretched  
 on the rack of the academy  
 -- crow calls stretching across the land  
 taut between the topmost branches  
 of dead trees--  
 the peaks of rooftops.  
 The crow can loose her voice  
 and fly.  
 I am tethered by loving hands  
 and hooded.  
 What faith falconers must have  
 to wait the return of the falcon  
 from her maiden voyage.  
 What certainty  
 in over-determination.  
 Articulation is the issue-  
 the irony, that unclipped wings return to the tether.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This study examines women's understandings of their doctoral experiences and the critical challenges they encounter on their journeys. This is a story of women's voices – a story of women who, in order to give meaning to their lives, have chosen a path of academic scholarship. It is a story of women in pursuit of the Ph.D.

In their stories, like stories of the science fiction genre where the normal rules that govern society and civilized social intercourse are altered (and on occasion suspended altogether), the agendas are not always visible, the endings are not always predictable, and the memories are not always coveted.

I really had no idea, though I suspected that it would be both hard and invigorating ... It represented being able to become a professor, and that meant a certain freedom of thought and flexibility of lifestyle that I desired.

I would say I no longer think of the degree as a means to an end, as I don't expect it will get me a job. The degree itself means very little to me now, though I suppose it means most when I think of it as an official marker that I've finished my dissertation. It gives me a good reason to have a party. I know that probably sounds flip, but it's not meant to be.

(Karen, Doctoral Candidate)

\* \* \*

I thought it was going to be difficult and challenging. I was afraid everyone would be smarter than me. I thought I would learn a tremendous amount. I thought it would be fun. I expected to really learn and grow.

It has been difficult and challenging, not because everyone is smarter than me but because the faculty is insane. As for how my views have changed, I guess I'd have to say I've lost my innocence. I had originally thought the process was set up to help me learn as much as possible, but now I realize that the process is mostly political and has very little to do with helping students learn. I feel pretty disillusioned.

(Margaret, Doctoral Candidate)

## Women's Participation in Higher Education

In the post-war period of the 1960s, higher education in North America saw massive expansion in both faculty teaching positions and student enrollments. In Canada, the full-time university teaching staff increased from 4,973 to 29,710 between 1956 and 1975 with more than 10,000 new teaching positions created between 1964 and 1972 in the humanities and the social sciences alone (Cude, 1988, p. 20). In the United States, between 1965 and 1975 the student population grew from 6 million to 11 million (Finnegan, 1993). During this period and in the decades that followed, women's rates of participation in higher education also increased steadily. Today, in both Canada and the United States, more than half the undergraduate student population is composed of women (Caplan, 1994).

Currently, more women are enrolled in graduate programs than in any previous period in history (Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992). In the US, by 1992, the enrollment of women in master's and doctoral programs represented 52% of the total graduate enrollment (Council of Graduate Schools, 1993). Canadian institutions have experienced similar increases in the enrollment of women graduate students. In Canada in 1971, women represented 22% of the full-time and 24% of the part-time graduate enrollment (Education in Canada, 1991). By 1988 these figures had doubled to 41% and 51% respectively (Caplan, 1994) and they remained virtually unchanged in 1991.

Women's enrollments in doctoral programs have increased as well but in both countries men's enrollments at the doctoral level continue to surpass those of women. In 1972 women represented 19.5% of Canada's total doctoral enrollment. By 1994 this figure increased to 37.7% of Canada's total enrollment of 26,081 doctoral students (Canadian Association of Graduate Studies Statistical Report, 1994).

In addition to increased doctoral enrollments, women in both Canada and the US are currently earning a higher proportion of doctoral degrees than in previous years. In the United States, between 1920 and 1966, the percentage of women doctoral recipients ranged between 11% and 20% (Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992). Since 1966 this overall proportion has grown. In the mid-1980s, women represented about one third of earned doctorates in the US (Caplan, 1994) and since then this figure has risen only slightly. By 1992, of the 38,814 doctorates awarded in the United States that year, 63% (24,448) were awarded to men while only 37% (14,366) were awarded to women (Ries and Thurgood, 1993). The most current data show that in 1993 women represented 38% of earned doctorates (Thurgood and Clarke, 1995). In Canada, the proportion of doctorates earned by women is

lower than that of US women, having increased from less than 18% in 1977 to a little over 31% in 1992 (Education in Canada 1992).

### Problems in Doctoral Education

Two problems of concern to researchers in recent years have been the increased time required to complete a doctorate and the rate of attrition in doctoral programs. While these trends affect degree completion by both men and women there is much evidence to suggest that degree completion by women may be affected adversely in comparison to men.

#### Increased Time to Degree

Over the past several decades the length of time students take to complete the doctorate has been the focus of much research (Baird, 1990; Berelson, 1960). According to Berelson (1960) the length of time required to complete the doctorate remained quite stable between 1930 and 1960. However, based on their study which analyzed the Doctorate Records file of the National Research Council, Tuckman, Coyle and Bae (1989) have suggested that it is now taking longer to complete the doctoral degree than at any previous period in US history. a trend which is paralleled in Canadian higher education (Caplan, 1994; Cude, 1988; Yeats, 1991). In the US, between 1962 and 1992, the median registered time to degree (the time actually enrolled in graduate school, including the master's degree) for doctoral recipients across all fields of study increased from 5.4 years to 7.1 years while the median years to degree (the years between receipt of the baccalaureate and the Ph.D.) increased from 8.8 years to 10.5 years (Ries and Thurgood, 1993, p. 23). In both registered and total time to degree, the increase represents nearly two additional years of schooling over the past thirty years.

There is reason to question whether the increased time to degree might be affecting women's progress to a greater extent than men. Ries and Thurgood (1993, p. 13) reported that when financing their education, US women doctoral students were more likely than men to be self-supporting and while university funds provided the primary source of financial support in traditional male fields of study such as physical and life sciences and engineering, in traditional female fields like education, humanities and the social sciences where women enroll in higher numbers than men, personal resources were most likely to provide the primary means of financial support.

Whether Canadian women doctoral students also are more likely than men to be self-supporting is unclear. Data from Statistics Canada (Education in Canada, 1991)

indicate that between 1982 and 1992, the part-time enrollment of graduate women increased by 5% while the part-time enrollment of men changed little during this period. It is not known whether this increase in women's part-time enrollment was distributed evenly across master's and doctoral levels. Nonetheless, given that Canadian men were not equally affected by this trend, it is not unreasonable to wonder whether time to degree for women as a group is affected adversely by enrollment patterns and funding practices that differ according to field of study and by the need to supplement income with part-time employment.

### Attrition in Doctoral Programs of Study

There has been growing concern among educational researchers that the rate of attrition in doctoral programs, which in the US is estimated to be about 50% (Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992; Tinto, 1993), has reached an unacceptably high level.

In most countries, the more selective the level of education, the higher the rate of student completion. In the United States the reverse is true. The higher, the more selective, the level of education, the lower the rate of completion. In nonselective secondary schools of America, approximately 25 percent of all students fail to graduate. In more selective four-year colleges and universities, between 35 and 40 percent of entering students fail to obtain a degree. In the most selective institutions, the graduate and first-professional schools, our best estimates is [sic] that up to 50 percent of all beginning students fail to complete their doctoral degree programs (Tinto, 1993, p. 230).

Such claims give faculty, administrators and students cause for concern. However, broadly painted statistics, such as a 50% attrition rate, can have the effect of concealing more information than they reveal. For example, this statistic does not make clear what relationship, if any, exists between attrition and variables such as field of study, gender or ethnicity. Despite a plethora of available statistical data on graduate education we know very little about those who leave doctoral programs prior to degree completion. In Canada, particularly, there is very little in the way of systematic data collection across institutions with respect to doctoral students, their programs and rates of completion or attrition (Cude, 1991; Holdaway, 1994).

The literature on graduate school attrition [in the US] reveals two consistent patterns: women are more likely than men to drop out, and students of both sexes are more likely to fail to complete doctoral programs in the humanities and social sciences than in the physical sciences (Patterson and Sells, 1973, p. 84).

One way of understanding how women may be affected differently than men by attrition is to examine the gender patterns of doctoral degree production across various

fields of study. In Canada, women in traditional male fields have increased their presence significantly at the undergraduate level; however, women at the master's and doctoral levels continue to be underrepresented in these fields (Bellamy and Guppy, 1991). Of the 5,582 total doctorates awarded in Canada in 1994, over 75% (4,482) were awarded in the life, natural and applied sciences where men enroll in far greater numbers than women. Only 23% (1,370) of the total doctorates were awarded in the humanities and social sciences where women enroll in greater numbers than men (Canadian Association of Graduate Studies Statistical Report, 1994).

In the United States a similar pattern exists. Of the 20,908 doctorates awarded to men in 1987, 55% earned degrees in the physical and life sciences and only 25% earned doctorates in the humanities and social sciences (Touchton and Davis, 1991). In contrast, of the 11,370 doctorates awarded to women in the same year, only 27% were awarded in the physical and life sciences while more than 67% were awarded in the humanities and social sciences. In 1987, in the field of education, which typically records the longest time to degree of any field, women doctorates outnumbered men by more than 2 to 1. In 1993, nearly 60% of US education doctorates went to women with a total time from baccalaureate to doctorate of 18.4 years for men and 19.7 years for women; in contrast, only 9% of the engineering doctorates went to women (Thurgood and Clark, 1995).

#### Why the Concern about Attrition and Time-to-Degree?

Historically, attrition at the doctoral level has not been viewed as an important issue; in fact, it has been quite the opposite. Doctoral attrition, reflected in the idea that 'only the best will survive' (Sternberg, 1981), has been understood to be normal, and even desirable, as part of the 'cooling out' process. This 'cooling out' process is invoked through the use of broad admissions policies and then counterbalanced by the "slow killing-off of the lingering hopes of the most stubborn latent terminal students" (Clark, 1959, p 547).

A 'survival of the fittest' model of doctoral education is becoming increasingly vulnerable to criticism for a number of reasons. First, as Clark has suggested, the cooling out process functions as a low quality substitute for weak and/or unstructured admissions policies. Second, because graduate education is the most costly form of education (Baird, 1993) and because it is becoming an increasingly lengthy and costly process (Baird, 1990; Caplan, 1994; Cude, 1988; Ploskonka, 1993; Tuckman, Coyle, and Bae, 1989), there is concern, in this period of unprecedented global economic restraint, as to whether we are making the most effective use of campus resources (Baird, 1990; Huber, 1992). Third, the

increasing financial debt loads that doctoral students are accumulating in both the US and Canada (Hauptman, 1986; Yeats, 1991) combined with a shrinking job market, provide reasons for doctoral students to be concerned that the social and economic rewards of a higher degree may not continue to be commensurate with the personal investments they make in their education (Cude, 1988; Yeats, 1991). Fourth, also cited frequently in the literature as reason to be concerned with attrition and increasing time to degree is the anticipated shortage of university professors and researchers (Berger, 1989; Bowen and Sosa, 1989). Doctoral education is uniquely positioned as the training ground for future faculty of the academy. It provides the most advanced level of training for a wide range of professions and disciplines and the quality of undergraduate programs hinges directly on the success of doctoral programs (Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992). Should adequate numbers of graduates not be available to fill the anticipated vacancies, access to higher education for future generations of students will become increasingly competitive. What is less clearly understood about this argument is the extent to which the current period of retrenchment will impact on these predictions and in effect further reduce the anticipated number of vacant faculty positions.

It has been demonstrated that even at the doctoral level the rate of participation by women in higher education has improved steadily in recent years (Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992). However, in both Canada and the United States, fewer women than men complete doctorates in most academic disciplines and women generally take longer than men to complete their degrees (Canadian Association of Graduate Studies, Statistical Report, 1994; Ploskonka, 1993; Thurgood and Clarke, 1995). These trends are occurring despite the fact that "in terms of academic achievement, women demonstrate equal if not superior performance levels" (Bellamy and Guppy, 1991, p. 174). Women have higher grade-point averages than men (Solmon, 1976), they score slightly higher than men on the verbal portion of the Graduate Record Exam, and, on average, score higher than or the same as men on virtually every objective measure (Simeone, 1987). If women's abilities are at least equal to those of men, why then are fewer women completing doctorates and why are they taking longer than men to complete their degrees? In view of these seemingly contradictory indicators, the available statistical data do little to explain why these trends might be occurring.

## The Call for New Understandings of Doctoral Persistence

To address some of the 'why' questions about attrition and increased time to degree, educational theorists have attempted to develop models that might be useful in predicting doctoral persistence. Most noteworthy is the work of Girves and Wemmerus (1988) and Tinto (1993). In highlighting a research agenda for the 90s and beyond, Tinto calls for a range of studies that "empirically document the scope and varying character of the graduate persistence process" (p. 241). In particular, Tinto calls for:

1. Longitudinal studies of graduate work that use representative samples of beginning doctoral students to track their experiences and differing outcomes. Tinto describes the need for such studies to examine persistence across different stages of graduate study (e.g., during the early phase of course work, during efforts to reach candidacy, during the proposal phase and during the research and writing phase of the dissertation) and the influence that experiences during early phases of the degree process have on experiences in later phases;
2. Studies of institutional behaviour (particularly those of departments and faculty) and the ways in which these factors influence program completion during different phases of the degree process;
3. Studies that examine the 'nested effects' of faculty-student interaction and the role of advisor/advisee relationships on degree completion in ways that consider the different experiences of male and female students, older students and students of colour;
4. Studies that examine the differential effects of 'field of study' on graduate persistence, both within and across institutions; such studies would examine the collaborative and individualistic structures of work associated respectively with the physical and social sciences/humanities to determine their influence on persistence and degree completion. Tinto further suggests that such studies need to examine the influence of department-specific norms in contrast to norms associated with particular fields of study and the degree to which the norms of one might influence the other;
5. Studies that examine the influence of personal factors on graduate persistence including commitments to family, work and community, particularly as they affect older students who have dependent families;
6. Studies that examine the influence of institutional behaviour and policies on graduate persistence including residency requirements, various forms of financial aid, e.g. teaching and research assistantships and the benefits and limitations of each form of assistantship during different phases of study.

Tinto (1993) stresses the need for studies that employ both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry. He suggests that quantitative research is necessary to develop longitudinal studies which track and link student experiences to eventual outcomes and to enable researchers to make generalizations that are applicable to other populations as

well as institutions. Tinto argues just as strongly for the need for qualitative studies. He suggests that strategies to improve degree completion rates and the development of useful models for predicting doctoral degree persistence must be based on something more substantive than “informed speculation.” They must emerge from an understanding of the graduate experience as it is understood by doctoral students themselves. Qualitative methods “are needed to probe the meanings differing individuals attach to their experiences ... [and] ... more than any set of longitudinal path equations, help us to make sense of why it is that particular types of experiences lead to differing types of outcomes” (Tinto, p. 243).

McKeown, MacDonell and Bowman (1993) criticize much of the current research on student attrition for beginning with assumptions about the nature of the student experience that are based on constructed variables such as Tinto's concept of ‘social integration.’ Such variables, they suggest, are based on the experiences of the researchers and lack any fixed or uniform indicators. However, like Tinto, these authors argue that our understanding of the doctoral experience must “be more firmly grounded in an examination of the worlds of the actors than is the current practice” (McKeown, et al., 1993, p. 83). The voices of students, particularly those of women, have been absent from the research literature on doctoral education and the current study was designed with this critique in mind.

### Research Questions

This study, which focuses particularly on the experiences of women doctoral students, is intended to respond to calls in the literature for a new understanding about the nature of the doctoral experience. The following questions guided this research:

1. What is the nature of the doctoral experience as it is understood by graduate students themselves?
  - (a) What experiences and factors are understood by students to influence their doctoral progress?
  - (b) What meanings do students attach to these experiences?
2. How does our understanding of the meaning of student experiences contribute to our knowledge of doctoral persistence?

## About the Study

This study examined the nature of women's doctoral experiences and the meanings women attach to these experiences. This research is intended to advance our understanding of the factors that contribute to persistence in women who pursue the doctorate. Storytelling, as a narrative method of research and inquiry, was used in conjunction with open-ended questioning techniques to probe women's understandings of their experiences and to promote further reflection on their experiences through individual written exchanges with the researcher.

Private, one-to-one exchanges of electronic mail between December, 1994 and December, 1995 served as the primary means of communication and method of data collection. This method was designed to simulate an open-ended, face-to-face interview that encouraged and supported women's written reflections of their doctoral experiences while at the same time maximizing the women's control over their participation in the study.

A critical feminist perspective (Agger, 1993; Olesen, 1994; Young, 1990) provides the theoretical framework for the study and, in conjunction with the grounded theory method (Conrad, 1982; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), was used to analyze the women's stories and develop richer understandings about the meaning women attached to their doctoral experiences.

## Theoretical Framework of the Study

The function of theory as "an integrated body of propositions, the derivation of which leads to explanation of some social phenomenon – is to give order and insight to what is, or can be, observed" (Denzin, 1978, p. 6).

Theory, founded on a particular set of assumptions, provides us with a lens through which we interpret our universe. My lens, my personal perspective of the world, emerges from a set of beliefs grounded in my own experiences and my own understandings about my world. In naming this perspective, I connect my own experiences and beliefs to the larger body of established literature developed by those who explore similar questions about our understandings of the universe. This provides me with a framework – a congruency of assumptions – for linking theory with practice. This larger body of literature to which I refer reflects a critical feminist perspective.

## A Critical Feminist Perspective

While in many respects the underlying epistemologies of feminist and critical theory share common assumptions, their histories reflect important differences. Feminist theory originated with the Suffragette Movement in the United States in the mid-1800s. The feminist movement was given new impetus in a second wave during the 1960s and '70s, first through President Kennedy's establishment in 1961 of the President's Commission of the Status of Women and second, by the subsequent formation of the National Organization of Women (Rossi and Calderwood, 1973). During the early days of this second phase feminists and feminist researchers focused on "the absence of women from or marginalized reports of women in research accounts ... [and stressed] a particular view that builds on and from women's experiences" (Olesen, 1994, p. 163). Later feminist researchers were concerned with ethical issues and focused their criticisms on the research act itself questioning many of the assumptions central to the positivist paradigm.

The critical theory school of thought emerged in the 1920s in Germany through a group of writers, all men, who were associated with the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, the most notable of whom included Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse. When Germany fell under Nazi control these researchers immigrated to California where it has been said that they produced some of their most significant work (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994). Agger (1993, p. 15) suggested that the most important contribution of the Frankfurt theorists was to broaden "Marx's concepts of exploitation and the alienation of labor into the category of domination, hence explaining aspects of structured social inhumanity unanticipated by Marx." Following in this similarly broad interpretation of critical theory Kincheloe and McLaren (p. 140) offer their definition of a critical theorist as someone

who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness); that certain groups in any society are privileged over others and although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them; and finally, that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression.

Critical theory in the Frankfurt tradition attempts to discover the ways in which power and privilege are institutionalized in a culture. Agger (1993, p. 18-19) uses the term 'original critical theory' to distinguish critical theory as a grand critique of domination and social inequity from subsequent genres of critical theory in which postmodern perspectives have abandoned the construct of a 'grand narrative' and deconstruction has been used (1) only to disqualify existing theoretical statements rather than generate new theory or, (2) as a theoretical critique of language.

Of central importance to critical theory is the continuing need to question the role of logical positivism which represents the objectification of human experience. Critical theory challenges the traditional binary perspectives of positivistic science such as "the knower and the known, the researcher and the researched, the scientific expert and the practitioner" (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994, p. 150) and asserts that the "notion of self-reflection is central to the understanding of the nature of critically grounded qualitative research" (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994, p. 147). In contrast to the empirically generated proofs offered by positivistic research, critical theory assumes that findings are always tentative and provisional in nature (Tierney, 1991). Similarly, critical theorists view the role of the researcher differently, not as one who is objective and detached or apparently neutral, but as one who is inseparable from the personal values and assumptions that one brings to research as part of life's experience. Critical theorists assume the position that such biases and presumptions are to be made visible to the reader rather than assuming they are non-existent or can be controlled. In this respect, critical reflection is understood to be an essential means by which critical theory can transcend the limitations of both instrumental reason, a rationalist orientation which ignores or seeks to discount political and ethical thought since they fall beyond the realm of a rational decision-making process, and hermeneutic reason, which has been criticized for neglecting reason or rationality in the elevation of one element over another (Young, 1990).

Feminist theory reflects a broad range of perspectives held by women with regard to their position in society (Jaggar and Struhl, 1978) but it also shares many of the perspectives central to critical theory which question epistemological assumptions about what constitutes knowledge, about the nature of power, about who can be the 'knower' and about methodological approaches to the search for understanding and knowledge. Perhaps the singular distinguishing feature of these perspectives is the central focus 'on' women, 'by' women, that so dominates feminist theory in contrast to the central focus of power relations which characterizes critical theory. This is not to say that feminist theory does not focus on issues related to differentials of power within relationships, only that the

issue are expressed in different ways and from gendered perspectives. The absence of a gendered perspective as a central focus is readily apparent in the work of Habermas (Young, 1990).

Habermas, a critical theorist, has received much recent attention from educators, in large part because of his belief that educational processes lie at the center of possibility for human progress. Higher education is viewed by Habermas as an ideal medium in which, as a learning species, we can better understand ourselves and our own method of learning (Young, 1990). Habermas has suggested that the modern crisis in education manifests itself as a motivational issue in the schools where “fewer young people are making either a relatively conflict-free or even satisfactory transition to adult life” (Young, p. 48) and this in turn reflects a larger social crisis characterized by economic, political and motivational dimensions. It is a struggle in which

two tendencies are at war with each other. An education which stresses the emancipation of the individual and through the universalisation of that emancipation, the development of autonomy-promoting social institutions, nationally and internationally, and an education which seeks to meet the more urgent economic and political needs of the nation in its contemporary situation (Young, p. 47-48).

Habermas suggests that this crisis is distinguished by the prevalence of an educational rationality and by the resultant loss of motivation and meaning that is associated with learning. As society moves forward into the 21st century in search of a moral foundation for educational praxis, the struggle for individual freedom comes into direct conflict with the needs of government and business. In an age driven by technological advancement, both government funding practices and increased demands by the business sector for specialized training of its workers are mechanisms that have the effect of “starving suspect disciplines like the social sciences and humanities” (Young, 1990, p. 53). Young provides an example:

seemingly neutral changes, such as the shift from funding student input to funding on the basis of graduate output creates a pressure for changed educational practices likely to reduce student choice in the curriculum .... The part that educational policies play in this process clearly identifies the educational theory of neoconservatism as one of those theories of education which places the needs of the state first and the needs of the individuals and their fullest development last (p. 53).

“Enlightenment,” or the questioning of “blind tradition,” which is fundamental to a critical theory of education, is neither valued nor protected within the neoconservative tradition. However, in his observations of the differential funding practices in education and the deleterious effect on the social sciences and humanities, Habermas forsakes an opportunity

to focus on the differential effect such practices might have on women in academe. Such an examination would not escape the attention of feminist scholars. A critical feminist perspective addresses this important discontinuity by connecting original critical theory as a critique of domination with feminist concerns about the status of women in social institutions and rejoining a commitment to the possibility of a grand narrative (Agger, 1993).

Such a perspective involves first developing a critique by understanding the contradictions within an existing state of affairs; this critique and the insights gained therein then are communicated in such a way that authenticity of the critical vision can be tested; and finally, learning and change are actively promoted through ethical and democratic action (Young, 1990). It is this last element which Young claims extends the Habermasian perspective of a theory of self and society into the arena of activism and moves beyond the simple capacity to make moral judgments.

Gilligan's (1982) seminal work in moral development provides an important feminist critique of Kohlberg's research which she saw as limited in its very conception. His theory of moral development was derived from a study of boys whose development he followed for some 20 years. On the basis of this work Kohlberg claims universal applicability of this theory and he attributes differences in women's conceptions of reality to their own developmental shortcomings rather than to any deficiency in his model. In contrast to Kohlberg's model, a critical feminist theory, as a means for understanding self in relation to society, is inclusionary with respect to our understanding of gendered perspectives. Young suggests that, through critical reflection, we can achieve new levels of understanding "where feminine and masculine elements can be acknowledged in every person" (p. 28). It is this mutual acknowledgment of, and concern for, gender-related differences in perspective, and for the roles that power and privilege play in marginalizing sectors of society that critical theory and feminist critique share.

Our way of knowing is a part of our way of being and an expression of our culture and our time; it is not a separated history and subject-free product to which we can relate from the outside (Young, p. 72).

Gilligan (1993) and Belenky et al. (1986) have suggested that this pattern of using the male experience to define all human experience is particularly apparent when models of intellectual development are considered. Mental processes such as thinking and feeling are conceptualized as binary activities and, in a culture which values rationality and objectivity, the processes stereotyped as feminine are devalued. Feminist critique asserts that this

masculine bias is embedded in the heart of our institutions and in the theories and methodologies of the academic disciplines (Gilligan, 1993).

Gilligan, currently a professor in the Harvard Graduate School of Education, with her writing of *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, is said to have pioneered a revolution in psychology and the social sciences. She began this work some 25 years ago at a time when she was still co-authoring publications with Kohlberg. In her work Gilligan discusses how girls and boys experience the growth process differently in terms of both psychological and moral development and how, as adults, this influences understandings and feelings about relationships. She says

... relationships, and particularly issues of dependency, are experienced differently by women and men. For boys and men, separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. For girls and women, issues of femininity or feminine identity do not depend on the achievement of separation from the mother or on the progress of individuation. Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation. Thus males tend to have difficulty with relationships, while females tend to have problems with individuation. The quality of embeddedness in social interaction and personal relationships that characterizes women's lives in contrast to men's, however, becomes not only a descriptive difference but also a developmental liability when the milestones of childhood and adolescent development in the psychological literature are markers of increasing separation. Women's failure to separate then becomes by definition a failure to develop (p. 8-9).

In support of this theory, a 1982 study by Pollack and Gilligan compared the stories written by male and female students in response to four pictures. They found that men, as a group, "projected more violence into situations of personal affiliation than they did into impersonal situations of achievement .... In contrast the women saw more violence in impersonal situations of achievement than in situations of affiliation" (Gilligan, 1993, p. 41). In the subsequent analysis of these findings and throughout the myriad examples in her book, Gilligan suggests that the feminine ethic of caring stems from an effort to prevent aggression and maintain a nonhierarchical sense of connectedness in relationships. For both men and women, then, Gilligan suggests there exists a paradoxical truth about the nature of human experience:

we know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others, and ... we experience relationship only insofar as we differentiate other from self (p. 63).

A feminist perspective recognizes that there exists

a tension ... an endless counterpoint between two ways of speaking about human life and relationships, one grounded in connection and one in separation (p. xxvi).

However, it must be recognized that neither voice within this bifurcated counterpoint is understood to have particular affinity to either gender in all cases. While power and privilege may evolve through gendered behaviours, they are not, in and of themselves, gendered constructs.

For the purposes of this study a critical feminist perspective acknowledges the bifurcated nature of the human narrative and focuses on an examination of the ways in which power and privilege are intertwined in the fabric and culture of graduate student life.

### Significance of the Study

Why is it important to understand women's perceptions of their experiences as doctoral students? The answers to this question have both practical and theoretical importance.

Although there is a significant body of research on undergraduate retention very little research has focused on the doctoral process, particularly as it relates to women (Heinrich, 1991; 1995). Existing research on doctoral education tends to be embodied in statistical data or is specific to particular issues and institutions (Holdaway, 1994; Tinto, 1993). These data would suggest that women's progress is being affected adversely and disproportionately in comparison to men (Feldman, 1974; Patterson and Sells, 1973; Thurgood and Clarke, 1995).

While factors such as adequate financial support, satisfactory advisor/advisee relationships and departmental structure appear to be related to student progress (Hauptman, 1986; Scott and Bereman, 1992; Tentoni, 1992), Tinto (1993), in his research on undergraduate attrition, found that students' decisions to withdraw from college were significantly influenced by events which took place during the college experience. It may be that events which take place during doctoral programs have a much greater influence on students' decisions to withdraw prior to degree completion than heretofore has been understood. The doctoral experience is a process that is intended to be transformational. At each stage of the process – from course work to committee formation (including committee negotiations and restructuring), to candidacy, proposal development, data collection, analysis, writing and the final defense – students are presented with a number of unique challenges which must be negotiated and mastered. However, we know little about the way in which students' entering expectations, beliefs, goals and identities are influenced and changed in the process.

The current high rate of attrition from doctoral programs would tend to suggest that either admission processes are failing to adequately screen students, and/or as Baird (1990) purports, that students are withdrawing for reasons other than those related to academic ability. Given the high cost of doctoral education and increasing demands for institutional accountability, we need to develop a better understanding of why women with proven academic abilities, who are among the brightest students in the nation, are withdrawing prematurely from their programs.

If future policies and institutional practices are to be implemented with the goal of reducing attrition, the length of time to doctorate, and ultimately, reversing the 'leaking pipeline' effect for women in higher education, such changes must be grounded in robust theories that are developed within the context of a full and deep understanding of women's experiences. This study, by giving voice to women's doctoral experiences, begins to address this critical gap in the literature. Through an understanding of the factors that both enhance and impede women's doctoral persistence this study lays important groundwork for the development of a more comprehensive theory of doctoral persistence.

### Assumptions Underlying the Study

Three primary assumptions were fundamental to this study:

1. Androcentrism represents the dominant character of the academy.
2. There exists more than one 'right' model for graduate education.
3. The telling of one's story depends, in part, on the storyteller's audience (Tierney, 1993).

#### 1. The Androcentric Character of the Academy

Fundamental to this study is the underlying assumption that the dominant character of the graduate academy is 'male' oriented. Historically, the academy was defined by men and organized around the male life-cycle. Women were excluded from and only later admitted to higher education primarily for the purpose of meeting men's needs.

... Oberlin College enrolled men students who produced crops to help pay for their education. It became apparent, however, that a domestic labor force was necessary to clean, cook, launder, and mend clothes – and women students fit the bill. Once admitted, women students attended no classes on Mondays when they did laundry, and each day they cooked, waited on tables, and served meals. They were also regarded as a 'balance' to men's mental and emotional development, altogether duplicating the conventional role of women in the family (Conway, 1974 in Fox, 1995, p. 222).

The shortage of male students and dwindling enrollments during the Civil War encouraged administrators to open their doors to female students (Graham, 1978 in Fox, 1995, p. 222).

In the United States, the post-war introduction of the G.I. Bill further advantaged men, largely to the exclusion of women, by financing a college education for one-third of the returning veterans. Only 3% of all veterans were women (Fox, 1995). And, prior to 1972 and the introduction of Title IX to the Education Amendments Act, women applicants were subject to blatant discriminatory admission practices: for example, a male applicant at Pennsylvania State University was five times more likely to be accepted than a female applicant (Fox, 1995).

Attitudes and conventions, grounded in practices and traditions that favour men, persist in the academy today. The years of graduate study and pre-tenure employment, during which scholars must give primary attention to their research, coincide precisely with women's most fertile child-bearing years. Women who attempt to balance child-rearing and academic pursuits are sometimes thought to be less serious than men about their academic careers and in practice, they are treated differentially (Breslauer, and Gordon, 1989). In contrast to men, women graduate students experience limited opportunity to find same-sex mentors, earn higher degrees, obtain financial support, attend full-time, access child-care, and obtain post-degree employment in tenure track positions (Braun, 1990; Clark, and Corcoran, 1986; Dagg, 1989; Dagg, and Thompson, 1988; Fox, 1995). "Women are disproportionately likely to be part-time students and faculty and, concomitant with part-time status go a host of disadvantages, ranging from scarcer financial resources to difficulties in getting to know the politics of the department" (Caplan, 1994, p. 22-23). Caplan goes on to point out that "women graduate students in many fields are disproportionately unlikely to receive financial support .... [that] women are disproportionately likely to work in lower-status institutions [that] women faculty tend to have heavier teaching loads and family responsibilities than do male faculty ... [and that] women are severely underrepresented in administrative positions" (p. 23). "Men tend to occupy the highest ranks in academe" (Astin and Bayer, 1973, p. 339). These diminished opportunities disadvantage academic women primarily on the basis of their gender.

In addition to diminished opportunity, the learning climate in the academy can be unfriendly and unwelcoming for women. The use of sexist language serves to perpetuate sexist thoughts and beliefs (Black, 1989). Sexual harassment continues unabated and women often feel unable to seek redress for fear of being targeted further.

In summary, men have defined which subjects are acceptable to study and which methods of research are preferred and women's activities and beliefs are often excluded and/or judged to be inferior when they differ from those that are commonly accepted. This androcentric character of the academy disadvantages women by failing to recognize that their needs, interests and orientations to research may be different from those of men (Caplan, 1994; Dagg and Thompson, 1988; Fox, 1995).

## 2. More Than One 'Right' Model for Graduate Education

Different cultures depend on competition to different degrees in structuring their economic system or schooling or recreation. At one end of the spectrum are societies that function without any competition at all. At the other end is the United States ... Not only do we get carried away with competitive activities, but we turn almost everything *else* into a contest. Our collective creativity seems to be tied up in devising new ways to produce winners and losers. It is not enough that we struggle against our colleagues at work to be more productive; we also must compete for the title of Friendliest Employee... No corner of our lives is too trivial – or too important – to be exempted from the compulsion to rank ourselves against one another. Even where no explicit contest has been set up, we tend to construe the world in competitive terms (Kohn, 1986, p. 1-2).

For two centuries, our educational system has been based upon competitiveness and the laws of survival. With very few exceptions, we do not teach our kids to love learning – we teach them to strive for high grades (Aronson, 1988, p. 192-3).

This study is premised on a second assumption, that there is more than one 'right' model for graduate education. It has been suggested that the traditional model of the Ph.D. is grounded in an ethic of the "survival of the fittest" (Kerlin, 1995a; 1995b). This ethic is based on a competitive model of learning in which there are clear winners and losers. But there exists a tension in higher education between traditionalists who would cling to the competitive ethics embedded in an androcentric model of the academy and those who promote a feminist model of learning in which the struggle is not for superiority, but for an equality of vision. These emerging paradigms suggest new ways of relating and understanding and may provide the foundation for new structures and models of graduate education – models that are inclusive rather than isolating, collegial rather than individualistic, and collaborative rather than competitive.

## 3. Storytelling and the Role of Audience

Tierney (1993, p. 130) writes, "a story is always told to someone. The postmodernist assumption is that the telling of that story in part depends on the storyteller's audience." Before reading this passage from Tierney's work, I had a long-held belief that the role of audience as active listeners has significant interplay in one's evolving

understanding and multifarious concepts of self in relation to society. This stems, in part, from research in online learning communities and from my own experiences with online learning and instruction in which the social self is, in some ways, much more strongly integrated as part of the learning experience than might normally occur during regular classroom, face-to-face, instruction. It has been my observation in online learning environments that it is through interaction with others that we come to know ourselves. In this study and others like it, I believe this is a construct which applies, not only to the participants, but to the researcher as well. Tierney (p. 120) says,

in coming to terms with our subject's reality, we in turn help define our own ... how the author defines the self represents a dialectical process between author and subject to the extent that both interviewer and interviewee shape and are shaped by one another. In the final analysis, 'narrative product' is thus mutually defined and shared.

The concept of dialectically constructed text, mutually defined selves and the role that audience plays in this construction may have roots in Festinger's (1957) theory of social comparison. The underlying assumption then, is that through our interactions, both the participants in this study and I as researcher will be changed in important ways by the experience.

### Limitations of the Study

This is a qualitative study of the voices of women doctoral students in which I examined women's understandings of their doctoral experiences and the meanings they attached to these experiences. Participants were encouraged to reflect on and write about their experiences in the context of their own life circumstances.

Narrative and open-ended questioning techniques were used as the primary method for investigating the complex understandings women have about their doctoral experiences. While survey and telephone methods with large numbers of respondents are useful for collecting data that are broad in scope, the narrative method is used more appropriately over an extended period of time with smaller numbers of participants to elicit deeper and more complex understandings. This study focused on an in-depth examination of the understandings women had about their doctoral experiences and for this reason was limited to seven participants.

This was a study of women doctoral students' experiences. It was not a study of institutions, programs, curriculum or academic disciplines. The in-depth nature of the study and the small number of participants necessarily limits the degree to which the findings can be generalized to women doctoral students as a whole. The grounded theory method, in

conjunction with a critical feminist conceptual lens, was used to develop deeper understandings of women's doctoral experiences and the meanings they attached to these experiences. The findings emerging from this methodological approach serve to enhance our understanding of the factors that influence women's persistence in ways that would otherwise be impossible to discover using traditional survey techniques. A further comment with respect to the limitations of the findings is worthy of note. The findings in this study reflect the women's recollections of their doctoral experiences and therefore carry all the limitations of any self-reported data.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Existing research on doctoral education can be conceptualized within five broad categories that include:

1. Statistical data on attrition, retention and degree completion that reflect institutional and national perspectives of degree progress;
2. Studies that focus on the conditions of graduate study within a particular program;
3. Studies conceptualized around single issues such as sexual harassment or mentoring relationships;
4. Studies that focus on specific student populations grouped by race, gender, or field of study;
5. Research presented in the form of 'how to' books and guides (see Hawley, 1993; Sternberg, 1981).

Golde (1994) has suggested that because much of the current research has been purely quantitative in nature, attrition has been conceptualized as a solitary event, rather than as the consequence of a dynamic process. If we are to understand why students are withdrawing from doctoral programs in such large numbers it is essential that, as researchers, we examine and understand the ways in which degree progress is influenced by students' understandings of the doctoral experience. To date, student voices, particularly those of women, are noticeably absent from this research. And while statistical data can do little to address the question of why students are withdrawing from their programs they do provide researchers with a baseline for understanding what is known and what is not known about degree production. In this way, the very absence of important statistical data can provide a window to researchers in understanding which issues might be worthy of further investigation.

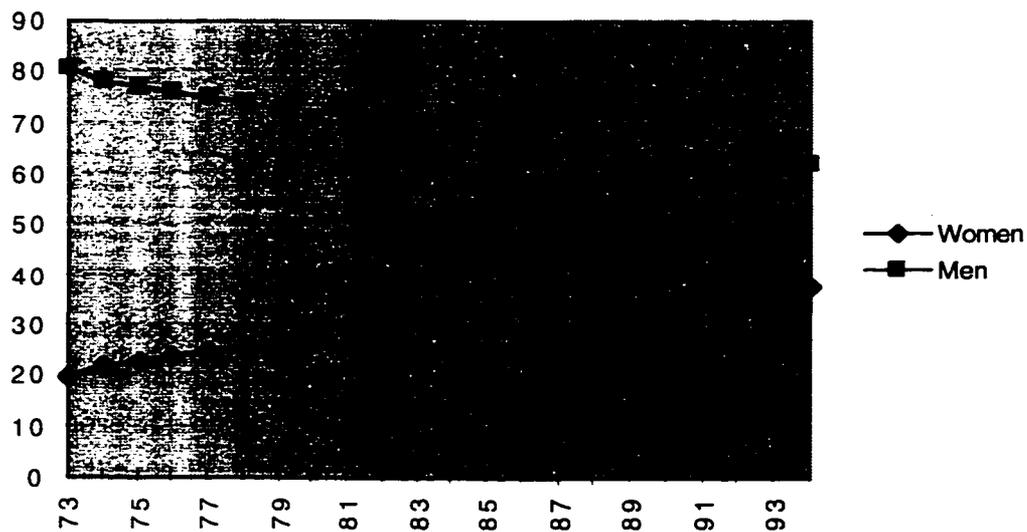
The discussion of the current status of women in doctoral education thus begins with a broad statistical portrait of degree progress. Institutional practices as well as social and personal factors that influence women's doctoral progress will then be discussed and linked to the issue of the 'leaking pipeline' that characterizes women's progress throughout the ranks of higher education. Finally, given that we know little about the complex ways in which these institutional and social factors interact and thereby influence women doctoral

progress these factors will be discussed in the context of the need for new models of doctoral persistence.

### A Statistical Portrait of Doctoral Education

#### Enrollment Trends

In both the US and Canada, women's enrollment in doctoral programs has climbed steadily over the years (see Figure 1; Appendix A). However, men's enrollments continue to surpass those of women. In Canada, women represented 19.5% of the 1972 total doctoral enrollment. By 1994 this figure increased to 37.7% of Canada's total enrollment of 26,081 doctoral students (Sharpe, 1995).



**Figure 1.** Doctoral Enrollment in Canada by Registration Status, as a Percent of Total Enrollment, 1973-1994.

**Note:** From "Canadian Association of Graduate Studies Statistical Report, 1994" by C. A. Sharpe, C. A., 1995. St. John's, NF: Canadian Association for Graduate Studies, Memorial University. Material in the public domain.

### Trends in Doctoral Degree Production

Degree production at the doctoral level has also increased in both countries over the past 30 years (Tables 1 and 2). In the United States, between 1960 and 1970, the number of doctorates conferred rose from just under 10,000 to nearly 30,000; doctorates awarded between 1960 and 1973 increased by 238% in the humanities and by 196% in science and engineering (Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992). As can be seen in Table 1, in the 30 year period between 1963 and 1993, there was a three-fold increase in the overall number of doctorates awarded by US universities.

Table 1

#### Doctorates Awarded by US Universities, 1963 to 1993

<u>Field of Study</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1993</u>
All Fields	12,728	33,755	31,282	39,754
Physical Sciences	2,910	5,311	4,426	6,496
Engineering	1,357	3,364	2,781	5,696
Life Sciences	2,083	5,168	5,554	7,397
Social Sciences	2,027	5,757	6,095	6,545
Humanities	1,842	5,414	3,500	4,481
Education	2,137	7,238	7,174	6,647
Professional/Other	372	1,503	1,752	2,492
US Citizens	10,925	27,914	24,359	26,386

Note. From "Summary Report 1993: Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities" by D. H. Thurgood and J. E. Clarke, 1995, Washington, D. C., National Academy Press. Material in the public domain.

In Canada, annual doctorate production has nearly doubled from 1,702 degrees awarded in 1977 to 3,136 degrees in 1992 (Table 2).

In both the US and Canada, women also are earning a higher proportion of doctorates than in previous years. In 1977, women in Canada earned less than 18% of the doctorates awarded, but by 1992 their proportion of earned doctorates had increased to just over 31% (Table 2).

In contrast, US women are earning a higher proportion of doctorates than their Canadian colleagues (Table 3). In 1993, US women earned 38% of all doctorates (Thurgood and Clarke, 1995).

Table 2

Doctorates Awarded in Canada by Gender, 1977-1992

<u>Year</u>	<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>	<u>Female %</u>	<u>Total</u>
1977	1,396	306	17.98	1,702
1978	1,488	331	18.20	1,819
1979	1,434	369	20.47	1,803
1980	1,339	399	22.96	1,738
1981	1,384	436	23.96	1,820
1982	1,290	423	24.69	1,713
1983	1,370	451	24.77	1,821
1984	1,368	510	27.16	1,878
1985	1,473	528	26.39	2,001
1986	1,609	609	27.46	2,218
1987	1,702	682	28.61	2,384
1988	1,680	738	30.52	2,418
1989	1,791	782	30.39	2,573
1990	1,815	858	32.10	2,673
1991	2,017	930	31.56	2,947
1992	2,136	1000	31.89	3,136

Note. From "Education in Canada," 1992. Catalogue No. 81-229, Statistics Canada. Material in the public domain.

Table 3

Percentage of Doctorates Granted by US Universities to Women by Discipline, 1963 to 1993.

<u>Field of Study</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1993</u>
All Fields	10.9	18.0	33.7	38.0
Physical Sciences	4.3	7.2	13.9	20.7
Engineering	0.7	1.4	4.5	9.1
Life Sciences	9.9	17.8	31.0	41.7
Social Sciences	13.0	21.0	39.5	49.3
Humanities	16.5	28.6	43.7	47.5
Education	19.5	24.6	50.4	58.7
Professional/Other	17.7	12.7	29.4	35.9

Note. From "Summary Report 1993: Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities" by D. H. Thurgood and J. E. Clarke, 1995. Washington, D. C. National Academy Press. Material in the public domain.

There are similarities in doctoral degree production by field of study between Canada and the US. As can be seen from Table 1, more US doctorates are awarded in the life sciences than any other field of study. In Canada the fields of study are grouped slightly differently with education being subsumed under the social sciences. Despite this difference significantly more doctorates in Canada are awarded in the life sciences compared with other fields of study (Table 4).

Table 4

Doctoral Degrees Awarded in Canada by Discipline, 1993-1994

<u>Division</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Humanities	403	6.89
Social Sciences	967	16.52
Natural & Applied Science	1,148	19.62
Life Sciences	3,334	56.97
Total	5,852	100

Note. From "Canadian Association of Graduate Studies Statistical Report, 1994" by C. A. Sharpe, C. A., 1995. St. John's, NF: Canadian Association for Graduate Studies, Memorial University. Material in the public domain.

However, as Cude (1991), Holdaway (1994) and others have suggested, the lack of adequate data on graduate education severely limits our knowledge of degree progress. For example, as can be seen in Table 4, 77% of Canadian doctorates in 1994 were awarded in the natural and applied sciences and life sciences while only 23% of doctorates were earned in the humanities and social sciences. However, since these data are not disaggregated by gender it is not possible to compare women's degree completion rates across fields of study or with men's progress within and across fields of study. Graduate enrollment figures that include both master's and doctoral students (Table 5) would suggest that many more men than women are likely to be enrolled in the natural and applied sciences at the doctoral level. In view of the higher percentage of awarded doctorates in the natural and applied sciences compared to the social sciences and humanities the question might be asked as to whether the degree progress of women as a group might be influenced by practices that differ across fields of study.

In further consideration of this question, a 1991 study (Table 6) by the Council of Ontario Universities examined the graduation rate for the 1980 cohort in ten Ontario universities. While the overall graduation rate approached 60%, graduation rates in the traditional female fields such as the humanities and social sciences were dramatically lower

than in traditional male fields such as mathematics and the agricultural/biological and physical sciences which had graduation rates of 75% and higher.

Table 5

Percent Graduate Enrollment in Canada by Gender and Discipline, 1993-1994

<u>Division</u>	<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>
Humanities	46.4	53.6
Social Sciences	45.9	54.1
Natural & Applied Science	79.6	20.4
Life Sciences	53.6	46.4

Note. From "Canadian Association of Graduate Studies Statistical Report, 1994" by C. A. Sharpe, C. A., 1995. St. John's, NF: Canadian Association for Graduate Studies. Memorial University. Material in the public domain.

Table 6

1990 Graduation Rate (%) of the Fall 1980 Ontario Doctoral Cohort

<u>Discipline Group</u>	<u>GR%</u>
Agricultural/Biological Sciences	85.37
Math/Physical Sciences	74.85
Health Professions	72.31
Engineering and Applied Sciences	60.00
Education/Recreation Studies	61.64
Social Sciences	49.70
Humanities	44.91
All Disciplines	57.34

Note: From "Doctoral Graduation Rates in Ontario Universities: A Discussion Paper" by M. Yeats, 1991. Ontario Council on Graduate Studies, Council of Ontario Universities. Material in the public domain.

A similar trend with respect to earned doctorates is occurring in the US as can be seen in Table 7. Fewer women than men are completing degrees in both traditional male fields and the humanities and social sciences. Education is the one field where this is an exception. In 1993 women earned 58.7% of the US doctorates awarded in education (Thurgood and Clark, 1995, p. 59). In Canada, 329 doctorates were awarded in 1994 but, as previously discussed, these data are not disaggregated by gender. What we do know is that in 1994 Canadian women represented 69.1% of the total graduate enrollment in education (Canadian Association of Graduate Studies Statistical Report, 1994) and, therefore, that more women than men in education were likely to be doctoral recipients.

Table 7

Doctorates Awarded by US Universities by Gender and Field, 1963 to 1993

<u>Field of Study</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1993</u>
All Fields	12,728	33,755	31,282	39,754
Men	11,336	27,670	20,749	24,646
Women	1,392	6,085	10,533	15,108
Physical Sciences	2,910	5,311	4,426	6,496
Men	2,786	4,929	3,809	5,152
Women	124	382	617	1,344
Engineering	1,357	3,364	2,781	5,696
Men	1,347	3,318	2,657	5,175
Women	10	46	124	521
Life Sciences	2,083	5,168	5,554	7,397
Men	1,876	4,246	3,833	4,311
Women	207	922	1,721	3,086
Social Sciences	2,027	5,757	6,095	6,545
Men	1,763	4,546	3,689	3,316
Women	264	1,211	2,406	3,229
Humanities	1,842	5,414	3,500	4,481
Men	1,538	3,864	1,969	2,351
Women	304	1,550	1,531	2,130
Education	2,137	7,238	7,174	6,647
Men	1,720	5,455	3,555	2,743
Women	417	1,783	3,619	3,904
Professional/Other	372	1,503	1,752	2,492
Men	306	1,312	1,237	1,598
Women	66	191	515	894
US Citizens	10,925	27,914	24,359	26,386

Note. From "Summary Report 1993: Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities" by D. H. Thurgood and J. E. Clarke. 1995. Washington, D. C. National Academy Press. Material in the public domain.

The National Research Council (NRC) in the US, the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies and Statistics Canada are among the organizations collecting the most comprehensive data on doctoral education. The NRC emphasizes degree completion rather than enrollment rates in their data collection whereas in Canada the emphasis is reversed. One of the likely reasons that US doctoral enrollment data are not collected by the NRC relates to the fact that in many US universities students enter Ph.D. programs after completion of the baccalaureate degree rather than after the master's degree as is the practice in Canada, and it is difficult to distinguish between students who may intend to terminate

their programs after the master's degree and those who intend to progress forward to the doctorate. However, in both countries, in the absence of more comprehensive data on enrollment and degree production that are disaggregated by gender and field of study it is difficult to know precisely how many students are withdrawing from their programs prior to completion and which fields of study are most affected by such withdrawal.

One set of data examined the 1994 graduation rate of the 1986 entering cohort in 30 of Canada's 55 doctoral granting institutions (Table 8). These data indicate that in all fields of study except the social sciences, men had higher degree completion rates than women. Because the social sciences division includes education, and because women in education have higher enrollment and graduation rates than men, it is likely that these rates may be disproportionately influencing the overall completion rates in the social sciences. In Canada, were education not included in the social sciences, the trends in doctoral progress by gender and field broad field of study would parallel trends in the US. These data

Table 8

Status of 1986 Entering Doctoral Cohort in Canada by Division and Gender, 1994\*

<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Cohort</u>	<u>Total Completed</u>	<u>Males Completed</u>	<u>Females Completed</u>
Humanities	367	172 (46.9%)	88 (24%)	84 (22.9%)
Social Sciences	665	299 (44.96%)	108 (16.2%)	191 (28.7%)
Natural & Applied Sci.	572	414 (72.4%)	360 (62.9%)	54 (9.4%)
Life Sciences	526	392 (75%)	274 (52.1%)	118 (22.4%)
Total	1,604	1,277 (79.5%)	830 (51.7%)	447 (27.8%)

Note. These figures represent data from 30 of Canada's 55 doctoral granting institutions.

From "Canadian Association of Graduate Studies Statistical Report, 1994" by C. A. Sharpe, C. A., 1995. St. John's, NF: Canadian Association for Graduate Studies, Memorial University. Material in the public domain.

provide additional evidence to support the idea that women's degree progress might be influenced adversely by educational practices that vary across fields of study. The available evidence on enrollment data and degree production would tend to suggest this may be the

case (Astin and Malik, 1994; Dagg and Thompson, 1988). And while statistical data won't provide answers to this question there remains a need for more comprehensive statistical data that will inform researchers about men's and women's degree progress within the narrow fields.

### Trends in Time to Degree

In recent years, the increasing time required to complete the doctorate has gained the attention of educators and researchers in both Canada and the US (Holdaway, 1994). Increased time to degree is a factor thought to be related to doctoral attrition (Hanson, 1992; Isaac, 1993; Ploskonka, 1993; Tuckman, Coyle and Bae, 1989). Time to degree is measured differently in Canada and the US. In the US time to degree is measured from completion of the baccalaureate degree to the completion of the doctorate. In Canada, time to degree is measured from completion of the master's degree to completion of the doctorate.

Tuckman et al. examined the time to degree in 11 scientific and engineering fields and found that the median time to degree fell in the 1960s, but took a swift and sharp increase after 1970, such that by 1987, it took longer to complete a doctoral degree than at any previous time during the century. Although there are within and between field differences, Tuckman et al. found that since 1967, the average total time to degree, from completion of the baccalaureate to the doctorate, has increased by 20%. The authors suggest that no single reason can adequately explain this increased time to degree and that multifarious explanations are likely related to larger market and monetary trends and to institutional and demographic factors as well as student ability and preference factors. Their findings also indicate that registered time to degree, rather than total time to degree which includes periods during which students stepped out of their programs, accounts for most of the increase and they therefore recommend that institutional factors should be closely examined.

Table 9 illustrates the median years to doctorate (the time period within which 50% of those who actually graduated had completed the degree) in both registered and total time to degree over a 30 year period. Both the median registered time to degree and the median total years to degree have increased by nearly two years over the past three decades.

The number of years to doctorate varies by field of study. Tuckman, Coyle and Bae (1989) calculated the median years to doctorate for a number of different fields of study and contrasted figures for 1967 and 1986. As can be seen in Table 10, using registered time to

degree as the more conservative of the two measures, the fields that have the most women and have seen the greatest growth in enrollment also had the longest time to degree.

Table 9

Median Years to US Doctorate, 1963-1993

Median Years to Doctorate	1963	1968	1973	1978	1983	1988	1993
	Registered	5.4	5.3	5.8	6.1	6.6	6.9
Total	8.6	8.1	8.4	8.9	9.8	10.5	10.5

Note. From "Summary Report 1993: Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities" by D. H. Thurgood and J. E. Clarke. 1995, p. 27. Washington, D.C., National Academy Press. Material in the public domain.

Table 10

Mean Years to US Doctorate by Field of Study, 1967-1986

Field	Mean Years to Doctorate			
	Total Time		Registered Time	
	Years in 1967	Increase to 1986	Years in 1967	Increase to 1986
All Fields	8.19	1.65	5.63	1.39
Social Sciences	10.59	2.35	5.88	2.90
Economics	9.20	0.34	5.11	1.90
Psychology	8.57	2.33	5.86	1.62
Earth/Atmos/Marine	8.73	1.25	5.72	1.62
Math/Computer Sciences	7.15	2.12	5.39	1.58
Agricultural Sciences	8.75	0.74	5.38	1.19
Biosciences	8.34	0.65	5.83	0.94
Health Sciences	10.50	2.81	6.46	0.88
Chemistry	6.36	0.84	5.01	0.82
Engineering	8.39	0.88	5.68	0.80
Physics/Astronomy	7.10	0.96	5.90	0.79

Note. The 'Increase to 1986' is computed as mean time in 1986 minus mean time in 1967.

From "The Lengthening of Time to Completion of the Doctorate Degree" by H. P. Tuckman, S. Coyle, S. and Y. Bae, 1989, Research in Higher Education, 30(5), p. 503-516. Copyright by Human Sciences Press.

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In 1993 the shortest total time to degree was in the physical sciences (8.3 median years) while those in education had the longest (19.2 median years) time to degree (Thurgood and Clark, 1995). The shortest registered time to degree was in engineering (6.3 years) and the longest registered time to degree was in the humanities (8.3 median years). Thurgood and Clark indicated that although there is little difference in registered time to degree for doctoral men and women the total time to degree was shorter for men than women. These data would lend further support to Baird's (1990) claim that women's degree progress may be affected less by factors related to academic ability than by other factors such as the need for adequate financial resources or different practices across fields of study.

Another way of examining the differential effects of time to degree for women and men is to study the time to degree trends for US citizens. Excluding non-US citizens from the data is important because in recent years the increased enrollment of non-US citizens has been predominantly men who have high enrollments in traditional male fields such as engineering and computer science. However, even when the influence of foreign student enrollment is removed the increased time to doctorate for US citizens appears to affect women to a greater degree than men as Table 11 illustrates.

Table 11

Median Years to Doctorate for US Citizens

	<u>1975</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>Average</u>
Men	7.1	7.3	7.9	8.3	7.7
Women	7.3	8.1	9.1	9.8	8.6

Note. From "Minorities and Women in American Professions" by E. Smith and J. Tang, editors (in press) New York, NY: SUNY Press. Copyright by Smith and Tang. Adapted with permission.

Over the 15 year period between 1975 and 1990, the median years to doctorate for US citizens has increased by only 1.2 years for men but for women the median years to doctorate has increased by 2.5 years. This represents an increase in the gender gap from 0.2 median years in 1975 to 1.5 median years in 1990. Smith and Tang (1994) suggest that declining federal support for higher education and the increased presence of women doctoral students who have family responsibilities may provide partial explanations for the time to degree differences between the genders. And indeed, Thurgood and Clark (1995) reported that in 1993 male Ph.D. recipients received primary financial support from their

universities whereas female recipients were more likely to be self-supporting. Financial need and the necessity of part-time employment therefore may provide partial explanations for the increased total time to degree for women doctoral students.

In Canada, data collected from the 55 doctoral granting institutions on time to doctorate are reported only by division rather than by discipline or field of study and are not disaggregated by gender. It is therefore difficult to know whether time to degree is experienced differently by Canadian men and women. The need for data that are disaggregated by gender is important, especially in the social sciences where we know the figures for education may well be skewing data across the division. Table 12 combines two types of data: (1) data on time to degree at 30 of Canada's doctoral granting institutions disaggregated by gender and (2) data, lacking the gender differentiation, from all 55 doctoral granting institutions. In the humanities women's mean time to degree was 4.2 months shorter than men in 30 of Canada's 55 doctoral granting institutions. However, compared to national figures in all 55 institutions women generally took two months longer to complete their degrees. In the social sciences women took between one and two months longer to complete their degrees. In the natural and applied sciences men and women

Table 12

Mean Number of Months to Doctorate in Canada by Division and Gender

<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Cohort*</u>	<u>(1) Males</u>	<u>(1) Females</u>	<u>(2) M &amp; F</u>
Humanities	106	68.3 n=57	64.1 n=49	62.2 n=124
Social Sciences	240	61.8 n=141	62.8 n=99	60.3 n=282
Natural & Applied Sci.	307	54.7 n=258	54.7 n=49	53.9 n=345
Life Sciences	311	56.8 n=219	62.0 n=92	55.1 n=352

Note. (1) Full- and part-time students from 30 of Canada's 55 doctoral granting institutions.

(2) These figures include data from all Canadian universities.

From "Canadian Association of Graduate Studies Statistical Report, 1994" by C. A. Sharpe, C. A., 1995.

St. John's, NF: Canadian Association for Graduate Studies, Memorial University. Material in the public domain.

completed their degrees in approximately the same length of time and in the life sciences women took between five and seven months longer to complete their degrees. However, in both the smaller sample of 30 doctoral granting institutions and the larger group of all 55 doctoral granting institutions the field of study comparisons were the same: the longest time to degree occurred in the humanities, followed by the social sciences, life sciences and natural and applied sciences respectively. The failure of this national data set to include statistics that are disaggregated by both gender and field of study seriously limits our capacity as researchers to develop a clear understanding of the patterns that are occurring in doctoral programs across Canada.

#### Limitations of Statistical Data

Most current studies that focus on attrition and retention at the doctoral level tend to examine issues from an institutional perspective (see Baird, 1990, 1993; Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992; Bowen and Sosa, 1989; Pauley, 1994). These studies provide us with a broad statistical portrait of the participants in graduate education. However, much of the available statistical data, particularly those pertaining to Canadian institutions, are neither as current nor as comprehensive as we might wish. According to Holdaway (1994) the last comprehensive examination of Canadian graduate studies was a survey conducted by the Canada Council in 1978.

The lack of current and accurate information about completion and withdrawal from doctoral programs is not limited to Canada and the United States. Cude (1991) cites a 1987 survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development which looked at several countries including France, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom and the US and found that “systematic data on non-completion – the extent to which students beginning doctoral training eventually fail to successfully write their thesis [sic] – are scanty” (p. 1). So, on the one hand, while we have much statistical data about doctoral students, there continues to be a need for more comprehensive statistical information that is collected and shared in a more systematic way.

There are several reasons that might explain the absence of a research focus on doctoral retention and attrition. One plausible explanation is that most institutions lack the necessary resources to conduct longitudinal studies and/or a systematic method for tracking doctoral students. A further explanation is that data about doctoral students are not easy to collect. Some of this difficulty relates to the idiosyncratic nature of doctoral study itself (Tinto, 1993). It is not always easy for institutions to determine whether doctoral students who withdraw do so with the intent to return, to transfer to another program, to seek

temporary employment or to withdraw permanently. Even when such information is sought, the method used to collect these data can bear significantly on the results.

McKeown, MacDonell, and Bowman (1993) suggest that the exclusive use of exit surveys in the form of questionnaires yields information that should be treated only as provisional indicators. In the absence of personal exit interviews in which students are able and willing to be forthright about their reasons for departure, attributing one's leaving to finances, for example, may serve as a way of 'saving face' during a difficult period of transition and such reasons may not accurately reflect students' own understandings about their reasons for departure. Even when institutions are able to generate such data, if the rate of attrition is as high as researchers have suggested, it is unlikely that such information would be made public.

However, statistics about doctoral progress alone, cannot tell us the whole story. These data provide much information about current trends in higher education but they do little to provide explanations about *why* these trends are occurring. To address to some of these 'why' questions it is important to understand the nature of the doctoral experience as it is understood by students themselves. To date, very few studies have examined any aspect of the doctoral process from the student perspective and it is this gap in the research literature which the current study is intended to address.

### The ABD Phenomenon

Some researchers have begun to examine the ABD phenomenon (all but dissertation) to understand the many reasons why students are not completing their degrees. In a 1983 study, Jacks, Chubin, Porter and Connolly used 40 minute telephone interviews with 25 ABD students in different disciplines who left their programs after 1970 and had been out of school for about ten years. Of those interviewed, 21 were men and four were women who had been enrolled in doctoral programs between 1967 and 1971. Interviewees ranged in age from 37 to 46 years with a median age of 39 years. When interviewed, all of the former students gave multiple reasons for leaving their programs (Table 13).

An important finding with implications for this study was that often the respondents began the interview by providing a 'stock' explanation for their withdrawal. Jacks et al. found that as the interviews progressed, this first explanation was not necessarily the most significant from the respondents' perspectives. This would suggest that interviews which extend over a longer period of time would be more likely to yield richer data. Two of the

most frequently cited reasons for withdrawing from their programs were the financial burden of obtaining a degree and poor working relationships with advisors and/or dissertation committees. In reference to the latter, Jacks, et al. (p. 81), in their concluding remarks write:

it may be that formal training is only as effective as the informal support system that faculty and peers provide, and in some programs, for some people, such support is never provided. Abuse of imbalances of power, such as between a student and his or her Ph.D. adviser is possible and warrants some form of protection and redress for the student.

Table 13

Reasons for Leaving Doctoral Programs

<u>Reasons for Leaving Doctoral Programs*</u>	<u>% of Respondents</u>
Financial Difficulties	44
Poor working relationships with advisor and/or committee	44
Substantive problems with the dissertation research	36
Personal or emotional problems	36
Receipt of an attractive job offer	32
Interference of paid work with dissertation work	28
Family demands	24
Lack of peer support	20
Loss of interest in earning a Ph.D.	12

Note. \* N = 25; more than one reason may be listed.

From "The ABCs of ABDs: A Study of Incomplete Doctorates" by P. Jacks, D. E. Chubin, A. L. Porter and T. Connolly, 1983. Improving College and University Teaching, 31(2), p. 74-81. Copyright by The Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, Heldref Publications. Reprinted with permission.

Hanson (1992) examined literature on ABD students in the field of communication and made a number of observations:

1. Barriers to degree completion included a range of factors including:
  - health problems;
  - perfectionism, procrastination, compulsiveness;
  - role conflict, family obligations;
  - financial problems, job related pressures;
  - inability to deal with independent learning situations;

- lack of focus in choosing a research topic, too casual ideas about research, interpretation of data, developing appropriate methodology;
  - leaving the university, discontinuity of attendance, off-campus dissertation;
  - inaccessibility of advisor.
2. Female students were more 'at risk' than their male counterparts:
    - overt discrimination, the absence of faculty role models, restrictive administrative policies, the lack of support facilities for non-traditional students and social pressures outside the university all contributed to the attrition of women at each rung of the academic ladder (The Executive Board of the Graduate School at the University of Michigan);
    - despite increased enrollment rates for women graduate students, the number of degrees granted continues to be higher for males than females.
  3. Barriers to women graduate students were both 'internal' (Stryker et al., 1985) and 'institutional' (Hite, 1983):
    - women have a negative perception of themselves as scholars – a belief that is shared with men (Adler, 1976; Bolig, 1982);
    - parenthood has a stronger negative effect on degree completion for women than for men (Moore, 1985).

Hanson concludes her paper by making a number of suggestions which are directed to 'at risk' students, for dealing with the types of issues likely to be encountered in a graduate program.

Nerad and Cerny (1993) conducted a study at Berkeley to examine the issue of low completion rates and lengthened time to degree and found six major patterns for students in the humanities and social sciences who had experienced longer than usual times to degree:

1. These students spent excessive amounts of time polishing their master's theses;
2. The students over prepared for their oral exams, often spending from six months to a year in isolated preparation;
3. They spent excessive time, from one to two years identifying and focusing on a dissertation topic and developing a proposal and they seemed to lack clarity about the process and expectations;
4. They had difficulty making the transition from being a 'class-taking' person to a 'book-writing' person and felt lost during this transitional phase;
5. Students who took a longer time to degree had different conceptions of the process: they viewed the stages of course work, orals, and proposal writing more as hurdles to be surmounted and discrete phases rather than as steps leading to the completion of their dissertations;
6. These students felt a lack of support at both the departmental and faculty levels throughout the different phases of their programs.

After examining both institutional and field-specific factors that contributed to increased time to degree Nerad and Cerny (1993) found that students had shorter times to degree and lower rates of attrition in programs that were more cooperatively oriented and carefully mentored students, treating them more like junior colleagues (Table 14).

Table 14

Institutional and Field-Specific Factors Determining Time to Degree

	<u>Short Time/Low Attrition</u>	<u>Long Time/High Attrition</u>
Research Mode	Apprenticeship Teamwork Laboratory	Individualistic learning Solitariness Library
Program Structure	No MA/MS required Qualifying exam includes proposal	MA/MS required Qualifying exam does not include proposal
Definition of Dissertation	Annual evaluation Test of future ability to do research	Sporadic evaluation Contribution to existing knowledge
Departmental Advising	Faculty mentoring Departmental advising	Absence of faculty mentoring and departmental advising
Departmental Environment	Sense of community, students treated as junior colleagues, student participation in department administration	Factions among faculty, students treated as adolescents, no student participation in department administration
Research Money	Many Sources	Few sources
Type of Financial Support	Research assistantships Fellowships	Teaching assistantships Loans
Campus Facilities		
Housing	Affordable	Expensive
Child Care	Available	Overcrowded
Office/Meeting Space	Available	Overcrowded
Transportation	Efficient, affordable	Slow, expensive
Library	Long hours, year round	Short summer hours
Job Market		
Postdoctoral	Many openings Good salaries	Few openings Low salaries
Academic		
Industry		

Note. From "From Facts to Action: Expanding the Graduate Division's Educational Role" by M. Nerad and J. Cerny, 1993. In L. Baird, (editor), "Increasing Graduate Student Retention and Degree Attainment." New Directions for Institutional Research, No. 80, 1993. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Reprinted with permission from M. Nerad and J. Cerny, "From Facts to Action: Expanding the Graduate Division's Educational Role." Copyright 1993, Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers. All rights reserved.

Tluczek (1995) identified factors associated with the ABD phenomenon that hinder completion of the dissertation. Tluczek surveyed 64 successful doctoral graduates (22 men and 42 women), 15 ABDs (6 men and 9 women) and 28 dissertation committee members. Among the primary findings that differentiated ABDs from successful doctoral graduates (SDGs) were:

1. SDGs were more likely to complete course work and candidacy requirements within three years of admission to the program; ABDs took four to seven years to complete these requirements;
2. SDGs were more likely than ABDs to indicate that the doctorate was either indispensable or important in terms of future career plans;
3. SDGs were more than five times as likely to have decided on their final dissertation topic prior to completion of the required research methods course;
4. Nearly half (46.7%) of the ABDs changed their dissertation topics while working on their degree whereas only 12.5% of the SDGs changed their dissertation topic two or more times while working on their degree.

Following administration of the survey, Tluczek conducted telephone interviews with 5 volunteers selected randomly from each of the 3 groups. Interviews focused on personal attitudes and beliefs toward the dissertation and the dissertation process. Interviews with respondents from the 3 groups unanimously revealed a significant difference between SDGs and ABDs related to students' levels of motivation and the priority students place on the dissertation. This finding also was evident in survey responses: whereas 42.2% of the SDGs stated that the doctorate was either indispensable or important, only 26% of the ABD respondents thought the doctorate was indispensable. Early identification of a dissertation topic was also thought to be related to student progress. Students who chose dissertation topics later in their programs were also more likely to switch topics whereas those who chose topics early in their programs were less likely to change topics. Early identification of a dissertation topic was found to be directly related to the number of times a topic was changed and was thought to be a key element in predicting time to degree.

Among the most significant obstacles to completing the dissertation that were identified by the ABD group were:

- Lack of motivation and/or self-discipline;
- Demands associated with the student's job;
- Lack of sufficient research skills;

- Poor relationship with chairperson;
- Problems associated with selecting and narrowing a topic;
- Insufficient structure in the dissertation phase.

Tluczek (1995) concluded with recommendations directed to students and institutions. Among her recommendations to institutions were:

1. the need for identification of the magnitude of the problem of attrition by establishing an adequate data base of information about attrition;
2. the need to review admission procedures, evaluation criteria and selection processes;
3. the need for institutions to define the purpose, approaches, requirements and scope of the dissertation and to communicate this information to incoming students;
4. the need for a dissertation research seminar for beginning students to facilitate integration of the various stages of the doctoral program;
5. the need for an additional structural component to the research seminar such as an individually assigned mentor or alumni who is not a member of the student's committee;
6. the need for strategies to improve relationships between students and their advisors including (1) the identification by both students and faculty of those factors that have a positive influence on the dissertation process and (2) the organization of doctoral advising workshops.

Among the recommendations directed to students Tluczek suggested that students should:

1. be aware of the relationship between motivation and degree attainment and develop a complete and thorough understanding of their motivations to complete the degree;
2. have a better understanding of the requirements of the doctoral program prior to their first course;
3. develop a complete plan of work for every stage of their program;
4. build academic and social support networks;
5. identify potential dissertation topics as early in their programs as possible; and
6. educate themselves about the best strategies for selecting a dissertation advisor.

In examining the ABD phenomenon, these studies have identified a range of factors to explain why students may not be completing their doctorates or may not be doing so in a

more timely matter. Broadly categorized, these include both institutional practices and social and personal factors, each of which will now be considered more closely.

### Institutional Practices Influencing Doctoral Progress

Among the most influential institutional practices that influence degree progress are those related to research funding and financial support, advisor/advisee relationships and mentoring, and departmental factors.

#### Research Funding and Financial Support

In recent years the availability of funding for higher education in Canada has been influenced by two major factors (Slaughter and Skolnik, 1987). The first was the passing of the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements and Established Programs Financing Act in 1977 which resulted in the decline of the real per student expenditures for postsecondary education. The second factor has been the slowed economic growth in most provinces that resulted in half the provinces spending less on postsecondary education than they were receiving in transfer payments from the federal government.

In addition to the general reduced funding of universities by the federal government, the distribution of research money through the three major funding agencies, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and the Medical Research Council (MRC) is disproportionate to the enrollment across fields of study. In Canada, more students and more women enroll in the social sciences, humanities and education. About 60% of all university researchers in Canadian universities work in the social sciences; yet the humanities and social science divisions receive only 12% of the total federal funds available through the three federal councils (Yeats, 1991). The distribution of financial resources to specific fields such as mathematics and engineering potentially limits the financial resources available to women since they enroll in these fields in much smaller numbers (Ploskonka, 1993). The gendered nature of the academy is perpetuated through these practices by male-dominated funding agencies and through practices that consistently promote men's work in research journals and ignore women's concerns (Dagg and Thompson, 1988). It is through these mechanisms that men continue to define the subjects that are acceptable to study and which methods of research are preferred, and frequently, women's activities and beliefs are excluded and/or judged to be inferior when they differ from what is commonly accepted practice.

Similarly, in the US, more than half the doctoral students in the physical and life sciences and in engineering reported that university sources provided the primary means of financial support (Ries and Thurgood, 1993). Berg and Ferber (1983) found that although men and women in the sciences were equally likely to receive financial support, those in the sciences were far more likely than those in education to receive assistantships and fellowships. They also found that the degree completion rate was substantially higher for those who received assistantships and fellowships than for those who did not receive such awards. Given that adequate financial resources also have been directly linked to improved time to degree (Baird, 1990; Nerad and Cerny, 1993) the funding practices associated with various disciplines may explain, in part, the longer times to degree in the humanities and social sciences and, hence, for women.

Furthermore, even when funding is directed toward the female fields of study women are less likely to benefit. For example, in 1985-86, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded 797 research projects worth more than \$24 million, but only 8% of these awards involved women as individuals or as a group (Dagg and Thompson, 1988).

Lack of adequate funding causes students considerable anxiety (Vartuli, 1982) and may influence registration status (part-time versus full-time enrollment) and employment patterns among women graduate students. Not surprisingly, Gillingham, Seneca and Taussig (1991) found that increasing the number of hours spent on academic work decreases the time to degree and conversely that decreasing the number of hours spent on academic work increases the time to degree. Women who must seek part-time employment necessarily have fewer hours available to devote to academic work. Although increased debt loads that students incur through accumulated loans also are thought to contribute to doctoral students withdrawing from their programs prematurely (Stager, 1989) women doctoral students are more likely than men to be self-supporting (Ries and Thurgood, 1993) and those who seek part-time employment may run a greater risk of increasing their time to degree.

### Mentoring and Advisor/Advisee Relationships

Women doctoral students' interactions with faculty, particularly their advisors, can have a significant impact on their feelings of well-being, their academic progress and their production after graduation (Heinrich, 1990).

Phillips-Jones (1982, in LeCluyse, Tollefson and Borgers, 1985, p. 411) defined a mentor as an “influential person in the student’s graduate program who significantly helps the student reach a major goal.” Lipschutz (1993) further distinguishes between advising and mentoring suggesting that offering academic information and counsel is characteristic of advising and that mentoring extends beyond these activities to include behaviours such as providing timely and constructive feedback, conveying respect for students’ ideas, demonstrating concern for their professional welfare and treating students as colleagues rather than apprentices. Defined as such, Lipschutz suggests that mentoring involves activities like publishing, developing grant proposals, presentation of conference papers, conducting workshops and helping students to obtain academic positions. “The mentor acts as a guide, teacher, critic, and sponsor” (Braun, 1990, p. 192). Tinto (1993) has suggested that the role of the mentor may be particularly critical during the final writing stage of the doctorate.

Consequently, persistence at this stage may be highly idiosyncratic in that it may hinge largely if not entirely upon the behavior of a specific faculty member (Tinto, 1993, p. 237).

And indeed, Tluczek’s (1995) findings support Tinto’s argument. Although her study was not restricted to women, Tluczek found that a poor relationship with one’s advisor and insufficient structure during the dissertation phase were among the six primary obstacles to completing the dissertation. Since women “are much less likely than their male classmates to feel confident about their preparation for and ability to do graduate work” (Hall and Sandler, 1982, p. 10) the opportunity for such a mentoring relationship may be that much more critical to women’s success.

For women, such mentoring relationships are rare (Heinrich, 1991). The small number of women faculty who are available to mentor graduate women means that women are far less likely than men to have a same-sex mentor and receive the kind of encouragement and support they need to progress academically and professionally (Breslauer and Gordon, 1989). Braun (1990) found that having a same-sex mentor was far more important to women than to men.

The men have grown up together, have played, learned, and competed together. They share certain language, traditions, and understandings .... When these professionals choose protégés or apprentices, they look to fledglings in whom they can see a reflection of themselves .... Thus, in an organization that operates by way of sponsorship and support, the women students are more likely to be left to struggle on their own (Fox, 1995, p. 229).

However, the nature of the mentoring relationship may be more important to women's progress than the actual gender of the mentor. Heinrich (1991) identified three approaches to mentoring relationships which she characterized along lines of gender. A masculine approach to mentoring was characterized as high in task orientation with a tendency to handle conflict by direct confrontation. A feminine approach to mentoring was characterized by an over-emphasis on the interpersonal dimensions of the relationship and the avoidance of conflict at all costs. A preferred approach to mentoring, described as androgynous, was characterized by a balance between the task and interpersonal dimensions of the relationship as well as a sensitive approach to the use of power for the benefit of the student rather than the advisor. Heinrich found that women who had relationships with androgynous mentors felt professionally affirmed and were more productive after graduation.

Braun (1990) found that some advisor/advisee relationships can result in a number of negative outcomes for both advisor and advisee. Relationships that become destructive or exploitive can act as powerful inhibitors to women's academic and career progress. Lipschutz (1993) recommends giving mentoring equal weight with teaching and research and ongoing evaluation of mentors to remedy some of these problems.

#### Departmental Factors

Baird (1990) also examined departmental factors that were associated with longer times to degree using a national data set collected by the National Research Council. His findings indicated longer times to degree in what he called the 'problem-finding' disciplines (e.g. French literature, art history) than the 'problem-solving' disciplines (e.g. chemistry, biochemistry). He attributes these differences to the clarity and degree of agreement with respect to the central paradigms within the two types of disciplines. He offers a number of alternative explanations for the difference including the increased likelihood of women to interrupt their studies, the fact that older students may be attracted to some disciplines more than others and may have added family responsibilities, and lastly, he suggests that 'faster' disciplines have more assistantships and research opportunities. In his conclusions, Baird (1990, p. 369-385) indicates that while some studies have focused on students' educational and personal situations to explain increased time to degree, "an equally plausible source of spurs and hindrances to the completion of doctoral study is to be found in departmental policies and practices." He concludes by suggesting that "the factors most strongly associated with the variation in the duration of doctoral study suggest the importance of an emphasis on scholarship and the resources to implement that emphasis."

The importance of the learning climate on women's feelings of positive self-regard and educational progress has received much attention in recent years (Hall and Sandler, 1982). There is strong evidence to indicate that sexual harassment continues unabated in graduate education and that women doctoral students are more likely to experience harassment than master's level students (Morris, 1989). Hall and Sandler (1982) documented a range of attitudes and behaviours that create an unfriendly climate for women, undermine their confidence, sap their motivation, dampen their academic and career aspirations and, ultimately, impede their progress. Faculty attitudes were found to have a profound effect on women. They found that men faculty tend to view women primarily as sexual beings and tend to affirm male students more often than female students and that this often has the effect of reinforcing negative stereotypes held by male students. The lack of encouragement from both male faculty and peers, the lack of collegial relationships with faculty members, and stereotyped views that hold women to be less competent than men academically, all contribute to the stress experienced by women (Berg and Ferber, 1983; Hite, 1985). Lipschutz (1993) has suggested that, for too many students, racism, sexism and humiliation characterize students' encounters with faculty. The decreasing representation of women as they progress through academic ranks is thought to be symptomatic of these discriminatory practices within higher education (Hanson, 1992).

Evidence of the pervasiveness of this differential treatment of women graduate students was reported 25 years ago when Creager (in Holmstrom and Holmstrom, 1974) found that more women than men had considered withdrawing from graduate school and that a larger proportion of women than men reported that the absence of emotional support and encouragement had caused them considerable stress that interfered with the completion of their graduate work. In their own large-scale study, Holmstrom and Holmstrom found that faculty availability and attitudes toward women were important factors in student satisfaction and performance and that 1 in 3 women doctoral students reported that the negative attitudes held by the faculty contributed to their emotional stress and decreased their commitment to remain in graduate school. Hite (1985, p. 21) reported that "women in all fields of study at the doctoral level perceived less support from faculty than did their male peers" and concluded that women may interpret this lack of support as evidence that faculty perceive women as not having the ability or motivation to succeed academically and that these perceptions serve to discourage women unnecessarily. She further recommended that the "informal and formal policies of graduate schools and individual programs of study

need to be reevaluated for signs of intentional and unintentional biases against female students” (p. 21).

### Academic Issues

A range of academic issues and concerns that influence degree progress are also related to departmental and teaching practices and to mentoring. Typically academic problems related to the completion of the doctorate are dealt with in books that offer advice and suggestions about ‘how to’ write proposals or complete a dissertation (see Locke, Spriduso and Silverman, 1993; Rudestam and Newton, 1992; Sternberg, 1981). And while no single study has been found that specifically examines these issues a number of studies have identified some of the academic issues that are factors in students’ withdrawal from their programs. These academic concerns include:

- lack of clarity about one’s research goals (Nerad and Cerny, 1993; Tluczek, 1995);
- a general lack of clarity about the dissertation process and the expectations (Nerad and Cerny, 1993; Tluczek, 1995);
- the inability to focus on a research topic (Hanson, 1992; Tluczek, 1995);
- inadequate research skills to develop appropriate methods and interpret data (Hanson, 1992; Tluczek, 1995);
- substantive problems with the dissertation research (Jacks, Chubin, Porter and Connolly, 1983).

As Tluczek (1995) has suggested, a dissertation research seminar can help beginning students to demystify the doctoral process. Such a process that provides students with opportunities for ongoing questioning, discussion and feedback about issues that are of concern to them can contribute to the clarification of students’ goals and expectations and thereby enhance student progress. To simply attribute problems that students encounter with the doctoral process to poor motivation, poor research skills or other deficiencies in student skills is a highly questionable practice. While students may well enter doctoral programs with the ability to develop the skills required to complete the doctoral process it is unrealistic to think that course work alone will be sufficient to convey this knowledge. Departments that provide this kind of structured guidance through student seminars respond not only to the critical needs of students; they can contribute indirectly to reducing the pressures placed on individual faculty members in their role as advisors and mentors.

## Personal and Social Factors Influencing Women's Progress

Early childhood socialization practices and educational experiences as well as social class are factors that can fashion life-long attitudes that women hold about themselves and their capabilities. As well, the beliefs and attitudes that others hold about women are reflected in others' expectations of women and in daily interactions and relationships through overt and covert behaviours. As researchers, we know very little about the way in which these complex social and personal factors might interact with institutional practices to shape women's doctoral experiences. Five factors that may have particular influence on women's doctoral experiences include gender stereotyping, social class, self-selection, role conflict and age discrimination.

### Gender Stereotyping

Early childhood socialization practices reflect society's continuing endorsement of separate gender roles for boys and girls. Boys are more likely to be encouraged for their independence, exploration and achievement whereas girls are more likely to be rewarded for cooperative and nurturing behaviours and discouraged from active play and independent activities, either through premature or excessive intervention (Lips, 1995).

Educational practices in elementary and secondary schools also play a significant role in reinforcing gender stereotyping (Berg and Ferber, 1983; Hall and Sandler, 1982). Curriculum materials and activities often reflect boys as active doers and girls as passive, invisible or incompetent; teachers tend to teach boys more than they do girls and are more likely to give boys individual instruction; boys tend to be rewarded and praised for academic performance whereas girls are more likely to be praised for their appearance and conduct; girls who are less compliant or who do not conform to traditional physical stereotypes of femininity are more likely to be viewed as less competent and are more likely to receive lower grades (Lips, 1995). Gender differences in mathematics performance, though not distinguishable in elementary school children, become quite visible at the secondary level and are linked more closely to gendered patterns of socialization than to any ability differences that might be attributed to gender (Lips, 1995). Breslauer and Gordon (1989) have suggested that the reduced representation of graduate women in the life, natural and applied sciences is the result of a pattern that begins in elementary school when girls are less likely than boys to continue the study of science and mathematics as they enter secondary school. Lastly, unlike adolescent boys who grow up expecting that someone else will care for their needs and look after the home while they pursue educational and

career goals, adolescent girls grow up knowing they must balance their roles as primary caregivers and homemakers with their desire for an education and that focusing on either will diminish opportunities for pursuing the other.

### Social Class

Bellamy and Guppy (1991) have suggested that the influence of social class continues to play an important role in determining who attends university. They point out that in Canada, participation in higher education has always been greater for those who come from high-income families. Children of parents who have undergraduate degrees are three times more likely to attend university than those of parents without degrees. Evidence that social class may impact more strongly on the education of women than men is indicated by the over-representation of women in community colleges whose parents also tend to have lower levels of education.

### Self-Selection

In addition to the social and economic barriers that influence women's decisions to pursue higher education, there is also evidence to suggest that women have less confidence in their academic abilities and therefore may have reduced educational expectations of themselves in comparison to men (Hall and Sandler, 1982). Adler (1976) has suggested that a more stringent self-selective process may exist among women. She writes "women seem to share with men the belief that females are less competent and perhaps less able to undertake or succeed at professional work than are males" (p. 201). Adler further indicates that women frequently hold negative views of themselves as scholars, question their intellectual capabilities and perceive themselves as less capable than their male counterparts, and that therefore women are less likely to seek graduate education or aspire to an academic career path. Kaplan (1982) also found that a more intensive self-selection process may influence women's educational decisions and suggested that this may explain in part the higher GPAs and academic scores often reported in the literature among women who choose to pursue higher degrees.

### Role Conflict

Women also are likely to experience greater conflict than men in dealing with the role expectations society places on them to marry and raise a family. In the academy men with families are thought to be stable and mature, but women with families are considered

to be less dedicated and less promising by faculty (Caplan, 1994; Feldman, 1973). This conflicting message and the demands placed on women's time in fulfilling the multiple responsibilities of academic scholarship and family cause undue emotional stress for women (Hite, 1985). Many women experience feelings of divided loyalty with regard to family and academic demands and often feel they must do twice as much and work twice as hard to achieve equal standing with their male counterparts. Bellamy and Guppy (1991) have observed that, in both the US and Canada, since the end of the Second World War, the ages at which women marry and have their first child are increasing. This would tend to suggest an increased interest on the part of women in advancing their education in preference to marriage and family. However, Baird (in Adler, 1976) found a larger proportion of females among older students than among younger students. Both these indicators may reflect the double-duty burden that women experience in attempting to raise a family and pursue their education.

#### Age Discrimination

Older women applicants to graduate school find that they are accepted less frequently than younger applicants and often they are asked to justify their reasons for wanting to pursue graduate study as older students (Kaplan, 1982). Kaplan also reported that older women are less likely to apply for financial aid in the fear that doing so will diminish the likelihood of their acceptance and they are less likely than younger women to receive research assistantships. However, women, regardless of age, are less likely than men to receive research assistantships and more likely to receive a larger share of teaching assistantships (Solmon, 1976). Older graduate women students who had raised families and had held responsible jobs were less likely to experience feelings of respect normally accorded those with good employment histories and a majority (82%) of older students reported that they did not have collegial relationships with faculty (Feldman, 1974). Older women who pursue graduate education often find it difficult to be taken seriously and they are frequently discouraged by patronizing attitudes directed toward them through overt and covert behaviours (Hall and Sandler, 1982). Despite these kinds of experiences, Kaplan (1982) found that most older women were seriously committed to their education and concerned with achieving competence in their field.

Factors described in the above literature that have been found to be potential influences on women's doctoral experiences can be summarized within eight categories (Table 15). These factors include institutional and departmental factors, faculty and committee relationships, academic, social, financial and personal factors as well as

Table 15

Factors that Influence Students' Decisions to Withdraw from Their Programs


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Institutional	lack of funding in the 'problem finding' fields lack of teaching and research assistantships in some fields of study
Departmental	poor departmental climate: lack of support and collegiality lack of program structure
Faculty/Committee Relationships	inaccessibility of faculty lack of feedback, encouragement lack of same-sex mentors, especially for women incompatible or poor quality mentoring relationship
Academic	lack of clarity about one's goals, the process and expectations lack of focus in choosing a research topic poorly developed research skills difficulty developing research design difficulty interpreting data lack of task focus; ineffective use of time failure to publish, present conference papers factors associated with the 'problem-finding' disciplines
Social	lack of peer support difficulty working in isolation gender bias; age discrimination harassment
Finances	leading to part-time enrollment and part-time employment
Personal	change of goals/priorities health self-selection; experiences that undermine self-confidence failure to develop self-image of a scholar attitudinal: perfectionism, procrastination, compulsiveness
External/Competing Factors	an attractive job offer role conflict: family and/or job demands

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competing factors that are external to the program. Any of these factors, either individually or in combination, may increase the length of time required to complete the doctorate and diminish women's persistence and, ultimately, their progress through the ranks of the academy.

### The Leaking Pipeline

The decreasing representation of women as they progress through the ranks of academe provides indisputable evidence to indicate that a 'leaking pipeline' or funnel effect exists for women (Caplan, 1994).

As faculty, women are segregated in the tasks they perform, the places they teach, the fields they occupy, and the ranks they hold. Across each dimension (task, place, position) women receive lower rewards (Fox, 1985).

Women doctoral recipients are more likely than men to face a higher rate of unemployment (Tuckman and Tuckman, 1984); they are less likely than men to be hired by academic institutions (Dagg and Thompson, 1988); when they are hired they are more likely to be found in medium- and lower ranked graduate institutions (Feldman, 1974; Fox, 1995); and across all ranks, they tend to be paid less than men (Caplan, 1994). In the US and Canada, the proportion of women faculty being hired in universities remains smaller than the proportion of women doctoral recipients (Caplan, 1994). Women who find employment in academic institutions are more likely to be employed in part-time and non-tenure track positions where they generally carry a greater load of undergraduate teaching responsibilities than men, have fewer benefits, less job security, and fewer opportunities, including time and access to financial resources and clerical help to conduct their research (Fox, 1995). Even in predominantly female disciplines, women faculty are not well represented. In Canada, two-thirds of the graduate students in education are women but women represent only 26.5% of the faculty; in social work where the majority of students is also women, 61% of the faculty and 91% of the full professors are male (Caplan, 1994). These data (see Table 2) would suggest that despite policy changes in recent years that promote the hiring of women, women Ph.D.s have not been hired in the same proportion as they graduate.

Despite increased representation of women in recent years, in both the US and Canada, women's numbers decrease significantly as they progress through the academic ranks. Women represent a much smaller percentage of tenure-track faculty than men (Dagg and Thompson, 1988) and they hold significantly fewer positions in the higher administrative ranks of the academy (Bellamy and Guppy, 1991). In the US in 1991, women represented 47% of all instructors, 40% of assistant professors, 28% of associate professors, and only 15% of all full professors (Fox, 1995). This shrinking representation

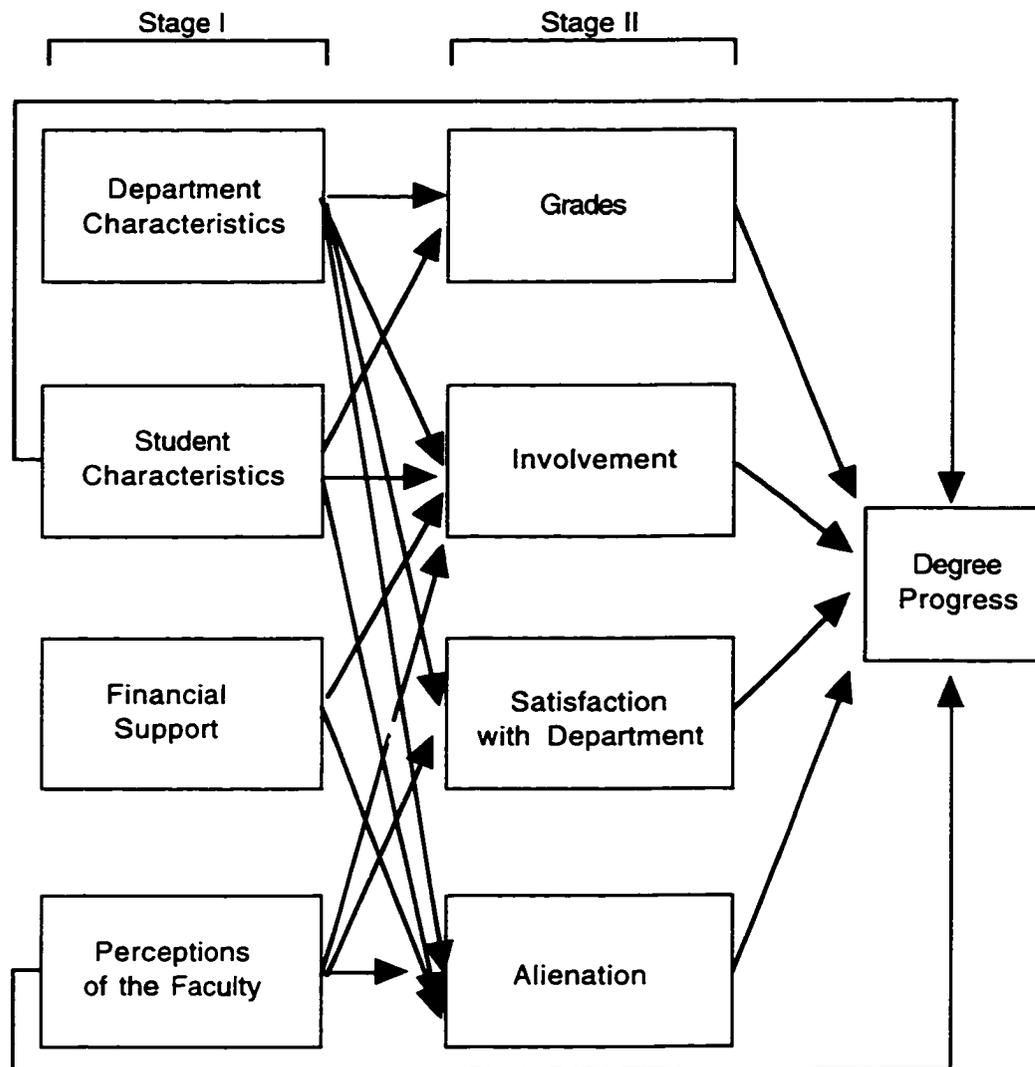
of women provides strong evidence that women's academic careers do not flourish to the same degree as those of men (Clark and Corcoran, 1986).

The increased time to degree, the unacceptably high rate of attrition from doctoral programs in both Canada and the US as well as persistent gender divisions in the academy within traditional male fields of study are factors within doctoral education that contribute to this leaking pipeline. If administrators and educators are to institute changes that will reverse these trends, then new practices must be implemented which accurately reflect the complex interaction of institutional, social and personal factors that are shaping the educational experiences of today's doctoral students.

### The Need for New Models of Doctoral Persistence

Previous research on factors that influence retention has focused primarily on undergraduate students (Tinto, 1993). Despite the high rate of attrition at the doctoral level as described by Tinto and others, few studies have examined issues relating to doctoral student retention or degree progress (Girves and Wemmerus, 1988; Tinto, 1993) and our knowledge and understanding of doctoral education therefore remains limited in a number of respects. Tinto developed a theoretical model of undergraduate student dropout behaviour and his work has provided the foundation for much of the subsequent research in undergraduate retention (Cabrera, Nora and Castaneda, 1993; Girves and Wemmerus, 1988). According to Girves and Wemmerus, the major focus of undergraduate research has been to examine the retention between first and second year rather than degree completion per se. Despite Tinto's (1993) suggestion as to the similarities between undergraduate and graduate theories of persistence, the maturational differences on entry and the differing nature of commitment demanded by the baccalaureate and doctoral degrees would make it unlikely that undergraduate models of student retention, based on transition from first to second year, would provide an appropriate lens for understanding doctoral degree progress.

The work of Tinto (1993) and Girves and Wemmerus (1988) constitutes the most noteworthy efforts to date, in contributing to a theory of doctoral persistence. The model of graduate degree progress developed by Girves and Wemmerus (1988) is characterized by two stages (Figure 2). The first stage is characterized by four sets of variables including department characteristics, student characteristics, financial support and student perceptions



**Figure 2.** Conceptual Model of Graduate Student Degree Progress.

Note. From "Developing Models of Graduate Student Degree Programs" by J. E. Girves and V. Wemmerus, 1988. *Journal of Higher Education*, 59(2), p. 166. Copyright by the *Journal of Higher Education*, Ohio State University. Reprinted with permission.

of their relationship with the faculty. In their model they expected the Stage I variables to affect the four intervening Stage II variables: grades, involvement in one's program, satisfaction with the department and alienation. The four intervening variables of Stage II are taken from Tinto's model. Grades and involvement are related to his concept of academic integration, and alienation and satisfaction with the department are related to his

concept of social integration. Two Stage I variables were added to the model, the student/advisor relationship (depicted in the Girves-Wemmerus model as 'perceptions of faculty') and financial support, since they were conceptualized as most significant in distinguishing between the graduate and undergraduate experience.

Girves and Wemmerus (1988) tested their model by surveying 486 students who had first entered graduate school in 1977. The sample was drawn from 42 departments in 12 different colleges. For purposes of analysis, the survey sample was divided into two groups representing master's level and doctoral level students. Of the 324 master's level students, 78% (253) had completed their degrees by the fall of 1984 in comparison with only 53% (85) of the 162 doctoral level students. The difference in completion rates for these two groups was found to be statistically significant. The model was refined by using a simple correlation of the variables with degree progress and then removing all the variables that were unrelated to either level. A new model of doctoral degree progress (Figure 3) emerged based on various degrees of significance among the variables.

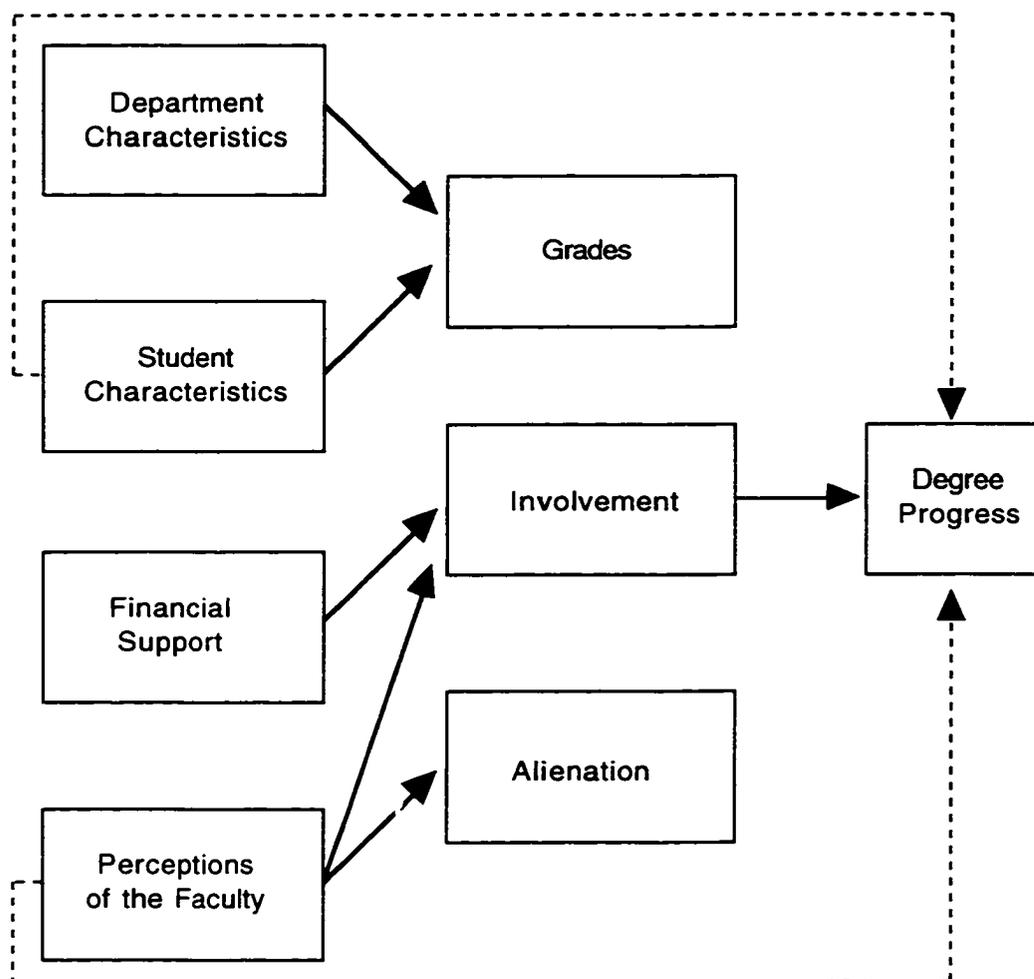
In their analysis, Girves and Wemmerus found that grades did not influence doctoral degree progress. They hypothesized that this finding might be due to the fact that doctoral students are selected from a more restricted pool of applicants than master's students and that variance in grade point average at the doctoral level is about half that at the master's level. They further suggested that other scholarly activities such as performance on qualifying exams and the ability to conduct independent research may be more influential than grades in degree progress at the doctoral level.

They also found that involvement in one's program, as a function of financial support and student perceptions of their relationships with the faculty, was related to doctoral degree progress. However, "the doctoral level department characteristics and perceptions of the faculty contributed to degree progress over and above involvement in one's program" (p. 180).

A further finding of this study was the critical role of the doctoral advisor. "Being treated as a junior colleague by the advisor accounts for much of the variability in degree progress ... the set of student/faculty relationship variables is powerful enough to indirectly predict doctoral degree progress through involvement as well as to directly predict progress" (p. 185).

Financial support is also related to involvement in one's program at the doctoral level. Not surprisingly, students who received teaching and/or research assistantships were more likely to become involved in their programs and earn degrees. Students who engaged

in employment outside the university were less likely to become involved in their programs.



**Figure 3.** Empirical Model of Doctoral Degree Progress.

**Note.** Solid lines represent significance at the .01 level; dashed lines represent significant at the 0.5 level.

From "Developing Models of Graduate Student Degree Programs" by J. E. Girves and V. Wemmerus, 1988. *Journal of Higher Education*, 59(2), p. 179. Copyright by the *Journal of Higher Education*, Ohio State University. Reprinted with permission.

In their concluding remarks, Girves and Wemmerus emphasize that beyond the need to recruit students, there is a need to "create environments that are conducive to degree completion for those students we do recruit" (p. 188).

Tinto's (1993) theory of doctoral persistence is centered around the concept of graduate communities. Specifically, Tinto submits that graduate persistence is "shaped by

the personal and intellectual interactions that occur within and between students and faculty and the various communities that make up the academic and social systems of the institution” (p. 231). The communities which influence doctoral persistence are to be found both within and external to the institution itself and Tinto suggests that the influence of these intersecting communities changes over time as students progress through various stages of the doctoral process. He argues that doctoral persistence, when compared with the undergraduate experience, is both more local and more national in character, the former reflecting student, faculty and departmental programs within the institution, the latter reflecting specific fields of study. As such, both local and national communities expose students to varied traditions and normative orientations. Other communities, those of family and work, are also considered to be external to the institution. Although Tinto recognizes the idiosyncratic nature of the doctoral experience, it is the changing influence of these various communities which forms the basis for his model of doctoral persistence.

Tinto (1993) identifies three overarching stages in his model. The first is a transitional period of adjustment, the second is attaining candidacy, and the final stage is marked, in the beginning, by the development of a proposal, and finally by the defense of the dissertation. Characteristics of these stages are highlighted below.

### Stage I

(A period of transition and adjustment)

- typically occurs during the first year of study
- this stage of doctoral persistence is shaped by social as well as academic interactions, formal and informal, in the university community
- the difference in full and part-time attendance reflects a difference in the degree to which students become involved in the intellectual and social communities in the university
- a period during which the individual begins to negotiate the norms of the department and the field of study; Tinto asks what personal motivation factors might contribute to persistence (aspirations, anticipated benefits of association with field of study) during this phase

### Stage II

(Developing competencies; attaining candidacy)

- involves the development of recognized competencies deemed necessary for doctoral research
- academic and social integration become blurred or less distinct

- faculty judgments as to student competence within the classroom are necessarily conditioned by social judgments arising from interactions beyond the classroom, that is, in hallways and in the academic department

### Stage III

From candidacy to final defense

- this period reflects both the individual abilities as well as the role that individual faculty play as mentors and advisors
- involvement with many faculty shifts to involvement with only a few, usually the dissertation advisor and the committee members
- persistence at this stage may be highly idiosyncratic in that it may hinge largely, if not entirely, upon the behaviour of a specific faculty member
- experiences during this phase are likely to play a significant role in degree attainment, especially in fields where the faculty have a good deal of influence on work entry (i.e., faculty positions)
- external communities (associations in the field of study) gain increased importance during this stage

Like Girves and Wemmerus (1988), Tinto acknowledges the role that financial support plays in contributing to doctoral persistence, but he extends this idea and speculates that the type and timing of different forms of financial support may have differential effects on degree progress. Tinto argues that limited financial resources during the early stages of the degree process may have an indirect effect on persistence by lengthening the time to the attainment of candidacy. During the latter stages, the effect may be more direct, by limiting the time that is available to devote to research and writing. He suggests that the type of financial aid that is available may have a similar effect: on the one hand, that teaching and research assistantships may be more effective in promoting involvement during the early stages of the doctoral program than during the later writing phase of the dissertation when research and teaching activities are more likely to serve as distractions; on the other hand, fellowships and scholarships may more appropriately support students during the latter stages of the degree by freeing them to focus on their own research.

As the studies examined herein have illustrated, researchers have identified a range of factors including institutional and departmental practices, financial, social, academic and personal issues that are thought to influence students' persistence at various stages of the degree progress. However, these studies primarily reflect researchers' understandings about factors that contribute to doctoral persistence. What is absent from much of this

research are studies that examine students' understandings and in particular, the understandings women have of their doctoral experiences and the complex interaction of factors which they consider to be important in contributing to their own persistence. It therefore is critical that those who are most central to this process be given the opportunity to explore and voice their experiences in a way that not only benefits their own development but contributes to an improved understanding by researchers of those factors that influence doctoral persistence.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Research is the “production of a publicly scrutinizable analysis of a phenomenon with the intent of clarification” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 9).

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of women doctoral students’ experiences, the meanings women attach to these experiences, and through this knowledge to develop a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the persistence of women who pursue the doctorate.

#### Design of the Study

We can, and I think must, look upon human life as chiefly a vast interpretative process in which people, singly and collectively, guide themselves by defining the objects, events, and situations which they encounter .... Any scheme designed to analyze human group life in its general character has to fit this process of interpretation (Blumer, 1956, p. 686).

#### Criteria for Selecting Study Participants

It was essential to the design of the study that those who might volunteer to participate met certain criteria. The study was designed to include only those who, at minimum, had attained candidacy in their respective doctoral programs. It was also important to strike a relative balance between those who were doctoral candidates and those who had already completed their degrees. The criteria for including Ph.D. graduates in the study was that they must have completed their degrees within the previous year. The intent was to ensure that recollections of their doctoral experiences remained relatively fresh in their minds. It was also critical that all participants in the study indicate their willingness to engage in active self-reflection and self-disclosure about their doctoral experiences.

#### Invitation to Participate in the Study

In December, 1994, I posted a request to the Women’s Studies electronic discussion list inviting doctoral students and their partners who might be interested in writing to me about their own doctoral experiences, or those of their partners’, to participate in the study. In all, 51 people responded to the request, of whom 46 were women. The 5 male respondents included 4 partners of women doctoral students, but only one doctoral student. Due to the gender imbalance of 1 male and 46 women I chose to focus the study on women’s doctoral experiences.

### Storytelling/Narrative as a Method of Inquiry

In my initial contacts with the 46 women we discussed the nature of the study and their participation as well as processes for maintaining the confidentiality of their identities and the privacy of their communications. Following these preliminary formalities I shared with each of them five broadly focused questions designed to use storytelling as a form of narrative inquiry to simulate an open-ended interview process. In developing these initial questions it was my intent to encourage the participants to write about their experiences with increasing detail:

1. I would like to know what motivated you to do a doctorate ... why you wanted to do the degree in the first place.
2. I'd like to know a little about your background ... how you came to be oriented to your field of study.
3. Regarding your expectations of the doctoral experience, if you think back to the days before you entered your doctoral program, can you describe what the degree represented to you then and what you thought the process would be like?
4. Now that you have progressed to the point you are in your program, in what ways have your views about the degree and the degree process changed?
5. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, the story of your doctoral experience, giving particular attention to the critical events and challenges you have faced and the way in which these events have influenced your academic, professional and personal development.

Following an initial period of correspondence, five women expressed interest and curiosity about the study but declined to participate further due to other commitments and/or a lack of time. Six other women who initially stated an intention to write in detail describing their experiences did not continue to correspond. Of the 35 remaining women, 27 wrote describing isolated events or turning points in their doctoral experiences, but for various reasons, did not choose to correspond in further detail. The 8 remaining women agreed to formalize their long term commitment to participate in the study by signing letters of informed consent; ultimately, only 7 of the women followed through with this commitment.

As each of the women's stories progressed I responded to their notes, asking questions to probe for additional information, either in the details of the events they described or in their reflections about their experiences, for the purpose of seeking further

clarification of my understandings. These exchanges were a continuing process. I anticipated that some women, particularly in the initial stages, might wish to write about their experiences without having their stories interrupted or distracted by conversation. In this regard, it was my intent to be a good 'listener' – that is, I made every effort not to 'talk' or 'write' over the participants' voices; as much as possible I encouraged participants' to tell what was meaningful to them about their experiences without introducing issues I thought might have been important; I used their own language in my responses rather than terminology of my own. I anticipated that as the storytelling progressed some participants might wish to assume a more conversational mode of interaction. In balancing my roles as listener and conversationalist I made every effort to be guided by the women's individual preferences.

#### Duration of the Study

In the year between December, 1994 and December, 1995, these seven women corresponded regularly with me about their doctoral experiences using electronic mail as the primary method of communication. The individual transcripts of our communication ranged between 100 and 200 or more, single-space typed pages.

#### Women's Responses to the Use of Electronic Mail

Five of the 7 women were quite comfortable communicating by electronic mail. Three women expressed some concern about the privacy of the electronic medium. One woman took the initiative early in our correspondence to verify my connection with the university by telephoning and leaving a message for me in my department office; she was satisfied that I was who I claimed when I sent her a response by electronic mail asking about the nature of her inquiry. Two women had concerns about the privacy of electronic mail with regard to some aspects of their doctoral experiences and while both used electronic mail for some of our correspondence, they chose to send some of their written communications via regular surface mail; one sent hand-written accounts of some of her experiences; the other sent some of her reflections about her experiences to me on a floppy disk.

#### Rationale of Storytelling/Narrative as a Method of Inquiry

The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives (Bologh, 1984, p. 388).

Whereas structured interview formats aim to capture “precise data of a codable nature in order to explain behavior within preestablished categories ... [the unstructured interview] is used in an attempt to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 366). Unstructured interviews have the advantage of situating any prior conceptions held by the researcher in the background and giving priority to the participants’ own conceptions of their experiences. The disadvantage of an unstructured interview format is that lack of a specific focus may tend to produce a great deal of material that may not be closely connected with the research. When time is at a premium the unstructured interview may not make the best use of this limited resource.

In using storytelling/narrative as a method of inquiry it was my intention to guide participants, with a minimum of direction, in the telling of their stories, and to encourage deeper levels of reflection and analysis without limiting or restricting their focus. The open-ended or semi-structured interview format that I developed is situated between the two extremes of the structured and unstructured interview and although this approach may require a greater length of time than a structured interview, it has the advantage of allowing the participants to raise new issues and concerns that I, as a researcher, had not conceptualized as being pertinent.

This method of inquiry shares some of the characteristics of other research techniques such as oral history and interpretive interactionism. It has been suggested that “often oral history is a way to reach groups and individuals who have been ignored, oppressed, and/or forgotten .... to understand and bring forth the history of women in a culture that has traditionally relied on a masculine interpretation” (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 368). Interpretive Interactionism is said to follow from more open-ended styles of interviewing, but in addition, it adds a new element borrowed from religious usage by James Joyce, that of epiphanies (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Epiphanies are described by Denzin (1989, p. 15) as “those interactional moments that leave marks on people’s lives [and] have the potential for creating transformational experiences for the person.” Through open-ended questioning and gentle probes for deeper reflection, this method of inquiry is intended to create an atmosphere of trust which will allow such interactional moments of insight to emerge from the experience.

Phenomenological interviewing is described by some feminists as an “interviewee-guided investigation of a lived experience that asks almost no prepared questions .... Feminist phenomenological interviewing requires interviewer skills of restraint and listening as well as interviewees who are verbal and reflective” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 21)

The method I developed can be thought of as a feminist phenomenological process insofar as it begins with women's experiences and relies heavily on the participants' willingness to write extensively about their experiences. Interviews began with open-ended questions that were intended to provide a broad structure for the participants' stories. As I received their stories, I developed further questions using the participants' own language, to garner additional detail and clarification of their meanings and intents.

The method of interviewing was to follow the language and the logic of the person's thought, with the interviewer asking further questions in order to clarify the meaning of a particular response (Gilligan, 1982, in Reinharz, 1992, p. 42).

In most instances the questions I posed arose directly from the information presented to me by the participants. In some instances, particularly in the latter stages of inquiry, my probes, which I embedded in the context of their stories and our written exchanges, were based on a series of questions which I formulated during the pilot study (see Appendix E, Intermediary questions 6-21). For this reason it was necessary to engage the participants in repeated interviews, or ongoing conversations, about their experiences. I encouraged them to digress in directions of their own choosing and to ignore questions of mine which they felt were not important to their experiences. Using this approach it was my intention to maximize each participant's control over her own story and not direct the participants' stories in ways they might otherwise not intend or wish.

Multiple interviews are likely to be more accurate than single interviews because of the opportunity to ask additional questions and to get corrective feedback on previously obtained information .... Multiple open-ended interviews are well suited to understanding how a woman develops her ideas. They can be done, however, only among interviewees who have time to invest in the process (Reinharz, 1992, p. 37-38).

The benefits to both researchers and study participants in using electronic mail to conduct research and, in particular, to construct personal narratives are mixed. Electronic mail facilitates communication between individuals who are separated in both time and place and thus allows me as a researcher to communicate with study participants who, otherwise, I would have been less likely to meet face-to-face. This distance between the researcher and the researched can affect participants differently. For some, control over their participation in the study is maximized by remaining at a distance from the researcher in the familiarity of their own milieu, by having complete control over what they choose to communicate and by having the opportunity to participate at their own convenience or even withdraw from the study at a time of their own choosing. In contrast, those who might prefer the intimacy of face-to-face contact with the researcher can find the absence of social

cues in electronic communication to be unsettling and may be less inclined to participate in such a study. The use of electronic mail to conduct this kind of research creates a new kind of relationship between the researcher and the researched in which both become bound by the emotional intimacy that emerges from sharing very personal experiences while at the same time we remain relative strangers according to the traditional conventions of interpersonal relationships.

The speed of electronic mail, though sometimes slowed by busy networks, typically facilitates exchanges that seem to be instantaneous. When two individuals communicate synchronously the interaction can resemble the conversational turn-taking of verbal exchanges. Asynchronous exchanges, on the other hand, provide individuals with the opportunity to reflect on their thoughts to a greater degree than they are able to in face-to-face communication.

This method of inquiry has a particular advantage over telephone and face-to-face interview methods. As Jacks, Chubin, Porter and Connolly (1983) discovered when using telephone interviews, the initial responses given by interviewees were not necessarily the most significant from the respondents' perspectives. The extended duration of the current study and the repeated exchanges with the participants over a one year period allowed time to earn the participants' trust and to probe for additional meanings as well as to obtain clarification of my own understandings.

A further advantage of electronic mail is the resulting transcript which provides an artifact of the conversation that remains in its original form and is accessible to both sender and receiver for continued reflection and elaboration. For researchers this transcript eliminates the time and cost of transcribing taped conversations. However, the transcript is limited to 128 text characters and reflects a narrow spectrum of communication. Absent are the normal cues associated with face-to-face communication including non-verbal gestures, pauses, hesitations and the tonal qualities of voice. Experienced users of electronic mail develop strategies to compensate for this reduced availability of social cues. Emoticons such as the horizontal smiley face, [ :-) ] and the wink [ ;-) ] are often used to communicate mood or emotion. Some will interject bracketted expressions of intent to clarify meaning as in the following example:

I liked your comment about wanting to prove that you were "smart enough (or bull-headed enough)" to complete the degree! <grin>

Sometimes the asterisk [ \* ] or the underscore symbol [ \_ ] is used to add emphasis to particular words or phrases:

Nobody else has mentioned this and I'm \*sure\* every one of us has gone through it...

Needless to say, when you follow an act like that, as I did all through my school years, you are constantly compared (by teachers and parents) to your older (and, by inference, \_smarter\_) older brothers.

None of these strategies compensate completely for the reduced availability of social cues when using electronic mail. However, the opportunity for participants to review and reflect on what has been written does serve as an important trade-off to this limitation.

### The Role of the Researcher

Multiple interviews characterize much feminist research perhaps because multiple interview research helps form the strong interviewer-interviewee bonds some people define as characteristic of feminist research (Reinharz, 1992, p. 36).

In structured interviews, particularly survey interviews, the traditional role of the researcher as interviewer has been one of an interested, but affectively detached observer who plays "a neutral role ... on the one hand, casual and friendly but, on the other hand directive and impersonal" (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 364, 367). However, in recent years feminist researchers have questioned whether such objectivity is even possible. Feminists also have questioned the underlying assumptions, ethics and authenticity of an interview paradigm that reflects masculine traits like detachment to the exclusion of feminine traits such as sensitivity and emotionality (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 367; 370). LeCompte (1993) has suggested that "positivistic science imposes a false distance between researchers and the researched by mandating that the researcher maintain an artificially impersonal stance toward the people studied" and that this detached perspective results "in data that present a partial and therefore false, and an elitist and therefore biased, reality" (p. 11-12). LeCompte suggests that authenticity is achieved, not merely by attributing a sense of genuineness to the quality of the narrative, but that authenticity is reflected in the relationship that exists between the researcher and the researched. She argues further that authenticity cannot be achieved when those who are researched are placed in a position that is subordinate to that of the researcher.

The poststructural remedy to the positivistic canon of conventional science is to overturn old dichotomies between research/practice, author/text, subject/object, knower/known, method/procedure, and theory/practice (LeCompte, 1993, p 12).

LeCompte presents a new paradigmatic role in which the researcher serves as the mediator between two silences, the silence within and the silence without. In the latter case, the silence without, the researcher's role can best be understood as mediating between

those in power and those who are silenced and oppressed by that power – as LeCompte (p. 10) describes it, those who “have been deprived of voice without their consent.” This has been the traditional perspective of critical and feminist researchers as mediators between the powerful and the powerless. It is the former case, mediating the silences within, which may be viewed as characteristic of a new research paradigm. These silences within occur at two levels as LeCompte describes them: among peers or research participants, and within themselves. From this perspective LeCompte views the researcher’s role as that of a mediator who assists participants in giving voice to their own thoughts and understanding to the events and circumstances in the larger context of their own lives. She suggests that the power to name and describe this reality resides first and foremost with those who have been silenced and that this step is pre-requisite to the second phase which transcends awareness and empowers the oppressed to engage in activism: “someone in the equation, someone other than the researcher, has to want to change the situation, take action, and define the change as both possible and worthwhile” (p. 15).

I see this as my role as a researcher: to serve as a mediator in the ‘outering’ of these inner silences and to make visible these silences to those in positions of power who might otherwise not see or choose to know them. This I call,

— breaking the silence —

My interview style emphasizes the importance of developing rapport with the participants. It is reflective and, with appropriate cautions, self-revealing. I used the language of the participants so as to avoid naming their experiences for them. Through active listening – through written responses that actively engaged their issues and ideas – I made every effort to provide an atmosphere of engagement and trust which allowed participants to develop ideas and construct meaning, to share attitudes and feelings which typically are not quantifiable and usually are missed in survey and structured interview research.

British sociologist Ann Oakley posited a contradiction between ‘scientific’ interviewing requiring objectivity, and feminist research requiring openness, engagement, and the development of a potentially long-lasting relationship. She advocated a new model of feminist interviewing that strove for intimacy and included self-disclosure .... Guiding this new model was a proposed feminist ethic of commitment and egalitarianism in contrast with the scientific ethic of detachment and role differentiation between researcher and subject (Reinharz, 1992, p. 28).

I anticipated that participants might wish to introduce new questions of their own and that they would request personal information about me or information about the

progress of my study, either or both of which I openly shared with them. I also anticipated that the interview process would evolve in such a way that the narrative assumed a more conversational character. While my own self-disclosure served as a model of openness to aid in building trust with the participants, the degree to which I disclosed information about myself was not without risk to the participants. Regardless of my intent as a researcher, participants in a study may not always receive a researcher's self-disclosure in a constructive way. Many feminists argue that "researcher self-disclosure during interviews is good feminist practice .... [but] there is no single feminist perspective on researcher-interviewee relations and self-disclosure. Rather there is an openness to numerous possible meanings of these phenomena" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 32, 34). It has been my experience in online conversations that both the timing and the degree of self-disclosure is critical. It cannot occur too early in terms of each participant's readiness to receive it without running the risk of overshadowing or even interfering with the participant's story; nor can it be delayed much beyond the participant's own need to know without causing participants to feel as if they are being exploited or 'used' for research purposes.

Ethical questions are heightened in feminist interview research because feminists try hard to avoid perpetuating the exploitation of women (Reinharz, 1992, p. 27).

The risk to participants regarding premature self-disclosure on the part of the researcher is well illustrated in the following passage by Bombyk, Bricker-Jenkins and Wedonoja (1985). As one interviewee wrote about the interviewer's self-disclosure:

Personal sharing on her part (where she was from, what she has done, some of her own views) was triggering off in me a self-censoring process. I began to notice myself stereotyping her and second guessing what she would want to hear and not want to hear based on my perception of the information about herself .... She was giving me ... personal information as a way of equalizing the relationship and revealing herself as I had been revealing myself, yet it seemed more out of her need to self-disclose rather than my need at that point to know about her. At that early stage of the interview, I felt like I first needed time to establish myself within the role of participant before moving towards more of an interactive sharing.

Fortunately, the interviewee notified the interviewer:

Once I voiced my concerns ... I was able to influence the process and it contributed to my sense of safety and trust. The fact that [she] was responsive to my concerns and took time within the interview process for ongoing feedback made a big difference in creating an atmosphere that facilitated self-exploration and self-disclosure. As the interview progressed, I was delighted to learn more about Mary and to have a dialogue about some of the topics ... I began to see how it was unrealistic to think that such a relationship within a brand new situation like this would be able to be "instantly" created - as some of the guidelines of feminist research seem to suggest - without some form of a developmental process and adaptation to the unique needs and concerns of the individuals involved (Reinharz, 1992, p. 33).

One of the interviewers, Bricker-Jenkins, wrote, "Thanks to feedback from respondents ... I have learned to 'pace' my interactions and look for cues from the participant as to readiness to know more about me" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 33).

### Interpreting the Stories

#### About Grounded Theory

Consistent with the perspectives reflected in critical feminist theory, grounded theory requires an 'interpersonal interaction' on the part of the researcher with both the data and the participants in the study. The researcher must not only observe the participants but must observe self-behaviour and so make visible one's own preconceptions, values and beliefs (Hutchinson, 1988). In the context of grounded theory, this concept of juxtaposing one's own understandings is referred to as 'bracketing'.

The most critical aspect of grounded theory which differentiates it from other qualitative research methods is its emphasis upon theory development (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Theory is said to be grounded when it emerges from and generates explanations of relationships and events that reflect the life experiences of those individuals, groups and processes we are attempting to understand. Denzin (1978) describes four functions that all data serve in contributing to theory development: research data initiate new theory or reformulate, refocus and clarify existing theory. Grounded theory is considered to be particularly appropriate when little is known about a topic and there are few existing theories to explain a particular phenomenon (Hutchinson, 1988). Hutchinson also indicates that grounded theory is to be understood as a form of social criticism. This characteristic of grounded theory parallels important characteristics of a critical feminist perspective as discussed earlier and for this reason and those described above grounded theory was thought to provide the most appropriate method for data analysis in this study.

#### Grounded Theory Method

Grounded theory is qualitative in its philosophy of science, its data collection, its methods of analysis, and its final product offers a rich and complex explanatory schema of social phenomena .... [it] is a form of social criticism; it does make judgements about identified patterns of social interaction (Hutchinson, 1988, p. 126).

The method of grounded theory involves specific procedures which, when applied appropriately and with vigilance will result in theory that is rigorous and well grounded in

the data. Criteria for ensuring the quality of grounded theory will be discussed following a description of the procedures involved in developing grounded theory.

The first procedure, data recording, may be thought of as a pre-analytic step of the grounded theory method. The immediate recording of data is said to be essential to the successful generation of grounded theory (Hutchinson, 1988). According to this criterion, the methods for recording data in this study are particularly appropriate. Using written narrative in the form of electronic mail, the participants in this study actually recorded the data themselves. This leaves little room for error in the original data set.

Data coding represents the first phase of data analysis. Hutchinson (1988) describes three levels of coding in the grounded theory method. Glaser (1978, p. 57) describes a set of three questions that should guide the open coding (level one):

1. What is this [sic] data a study of?
2. What category does this incident indicate?
3. What is actually happening in the data? What is the basic social psychological problem(s) faced by the participants in the... scene?

Open coding describes the action and behaviour of the participants.

The analyst compares incident to incident with the purpose of establishing the underlying uniformity and its varying conditions (Glaser, 1978, p. 49).

Such a description of coding is applied readily to an 'observed' setting. In the case of written narrative where storytellers are describing their own experiences, this concept of coding must be also include expressed thoughts, beliefs, feelings and described events and relationships. Hutchinson suggests that open coding, the coding of each sentence and each incident, should be used to develop as many codes as possible to ensure full theoretical coverage and to prevent the researcher from imposing any preconceived impressions on the data. "These beginning codes, no matter how conceptually primitive, quickly start theoretical sampling and constant comparisons of incidents. How relevant these concepts are to the basic problem and basic social process becomes a question of further analysis" (Glaser, 1978, p. 45).

Data coding at levels two and three is intended to elevate the data to higher levels of abstraction (Hutchinson, 1988). Level two codes typically represent categories that describe the level one codes.

The analyst continues to code and ... compares the concept to more incidents (Glaser, 1978, p. 50).

For example, in a message in this study one of the participants described herself as an overachiever. This occurrence of 'overachiever' was coded as level one. At a more abstract level, level two, this construct represents her academic self-concept. I then began searching the data for other occurrences and representations of academic self-concept. This particular construct developed in the following way.

- Level 1: overachiever
- Level 2: academic self-concept
- Level 3: identity (relationship with self)

Level three codes represent theoretical constructs derived from the data in combination with academic knowledge and knowledge acquired through praxis.

... while the first and second type of comparisons [continue] throughout the study, the analyst also compares *thirdly concept to concept* with the purpose of establishing the best fit of many choice of concepts to a set of indicators, the conceptual levels between concepts that refer to the same set of indicators and the integration into hypotheses between the concepts, which becomes the theory (Glaser, 1978, p. 51).

The *constant comparative method* is central to the data analysis in generating grounded theory. Using this method all the sample codes generated at each of the three levels are compared repeatedly within and between each other until the basic properties of a category or construct are defined. "Comparative analysis forces the researcher to 'tease out' the emerging category by searching for its structure, temporality, cause, context, dimensions, consequences and its relationship to other categories" (Hutchinson, 1988, p. 135). Additionally, it is appropriate and desirable to compare the data categories and constructs that emerge between various groups of participants in the study. In this way the process of constant comparison is intended to generate a theory rich in detail.

Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes ... data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop ... theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal (Glaser, 1978, p. 36).

*Theoretical sampling* begins during the data collection phase of the study and involves searching the transcripts for emerging categories that characterize the narrative and seem significant. As constructs are derived from the data repeated theoretical sampling can be used to increase the depth of focus and to ensure consistency; that is, to ensure that data are gathered in a systematic way for each category (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

"Theoretical sampling is ... used as a way of checking on the emerging conceptual

framework rather than being used for the verification of preconceived hypotheses” (Glaser, 1978, p. 39). Saturation is achieved when all the data fit into the established categories and no new categories emerge from the data.

The essential relationship between data and theory is a conceptual code .... There are basically two types of codes to generate: substantive and theoretical. Substantive codes conceptualize the empirical substance of the area of research. Theoretical codes conceptualize how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into the theory (Glaser, 1978, p. 55).

Theoretical sampling and constant comparison reflect cyclical processes which are fluid and flexible, but at the same time they ensure that the analysis is planned, rather than haphazard, and well grounded in the data. Through this process a core variable or basic social psychological process is identified which explains most of the variation in the data. “The core variable has three essential characteristics: it recurs frequently in the data; it links the data together; and it explains much of the variation in the data” (Sherman and Webb, 1988, p. 133). By relating this core variable to the various levels of codes already identified, the critical factors emerge and provide the basis for writing about the theory.

#### Ensuring Rigor and Empirical Grounding of the Study

Just as the grounded theory method of analysis is not applicable to experimental studies that seek to verify hypotheses, neither should the criteria for scientific rigor derived from positivistic origins be applied to the grounded theory method. Positivistic notions of validity, reliability and generalizability cannot be applied in the same way to qualitative research. Nonetheless, there must be some criteria by which the quality of grounded theory research can be evaluated. Sherman and Webb (1988) identify six such categories including the degree of fit, functionality, relevance, modifiability, density, and integration.

The degree of fit is described as resulting in codes and categories that are derived from the data and not forced. This lends credibility to the study in that the appropriateness of the fit can be easily understood by others not directly involved in the study. “Since most of the categories of grounded theory are generated directly from the data, the criteria of fit is automatically met and does not constitute an unsatisfactory struggle of half fits” (Glaser, 1978, p. 5). Glaser (p. 5) suggests that “it is important to constantly refit [categories] to the data as the research proceeds to be sure they do fit all the data they purport to indicate.” Although Sherman and Webb do not use the term ‘functionality’ per se, this is their intended meaning for describing a theory that ‘works.’ As such, a functional theory explains variation in the data and the interrelationships among the constructs in a way that

produces a predictive element to the theory. They further describe a quality theory as one that possesses relevance related to the identified core variable or basic social psychological process. Relevance evolves through the emergence of a core variable from the data in a way that is neither forced nor concocted and is a result of the researcher's theoretical sensitivity to the milieu. Relevance is verified through the immediate recognition by the participants in the study of the importance of the phenomenon – a form of recognition that sometimes has been described as the “ahhh haaa” phenomenon. The fourth criterion of a well-grounded theory is its ability to reflect and accommodate the fluctuating nature of the phenomenon being examined. As such the theory must be flexible and modifiable. The fifth criterion is density. A theory is said to be dense when it “possesses a few key theoretical constructs and a substantial number of properties and categories” (Sherman and Webb, 1988, p. 138). The last criterion described is that of integration. A systematic relationship between the constructs and propositions is thought to ensure an appropriate fit into a tight theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 254-256) also put forth a series of questions which they view as appropriate criteria for examining the empirical grounding of a study. These questions are as follows:

1. Are concepts generated?
2. Are the concepts systematically related?
3. Are there many conceptual linkages and are the categories well developed? Do they have conceptual density?
4. Is much variation built into the theory?
5. Are the broader conditions that affect the phenomenon under study built into its explanation?
6. Has process been taken into account? (explanations that describe change must be linked to the conditions that caused it)
7. Do the theoretical findings seem significant and to what extent?

The criteria described by Glaser and Strauss (1968), Sherman and Webb (1988) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) provide a sufficiently broad perspective from which to evaluate the quality of a grounded theory. Perhaps one additional criterion that would lend credibility to the theory is a measure borrowed from other qualitative research genres, that of auditability. The provision of an audit trail provides evidence for the way in which

processes are carried out and decisions are made, thus making the process both visible and verifiable to others who might wish to closely scrutinize the theory.

### Ensuring Narrative Rigor

Striving for and attaining narrative rigor requires a lens through which one views and understands a phenomenon and a method to ensure the completeness of the process. Both processes are central to the role of the researcher.

LeCompte (1993) identifies two elements, double description and double consciousness, which she describes as providing a theoretical frame for conducting research on silence. She uses the analogy of binocular vision to describe the concept of double description. Monocular vision, she suggests, can produce only a unitary vision. In contrast, binocular vision “involves seeing a phenomenon with both eyes so that, in effect, the researcher has two or more descriptions rather than one” (p. 16). Double description involves a blurring of the boundaries between ‘subject’ and researcher, sacrificing the clarity of a unitary description and meaning for a vision that reflects greater depth and diversity. Double description is rooted in double consciousness – a collaboration with and embracing of the other

in ways that change researchers and those they study so that their destinies are inextricably linked and shared. Such consciousness must transcend the self-consciousness customarily called for in critical and collaborative research. It is required for the ethical presentation of personal narrative because the researcher’s notes usually constitute the only data, construction of reality, text to be interpreted, or story to be told (LeCompte, 1993, p. 17).

These concepts of double description and double consciousness, as described by LeCompte, share some of the same qualities as those concepts which Lincoln (1993) considers to contribute to narrative rigor: scrutiny, persuasiveness, isomorphism, and authenticity. Lincoln suggests that narratives (both sought and presented) that reflect fidelity (validity) and rigor must fulfill the criteria of these four elements. She argues that narratives must be persuasive, not only to research and policy communities, but most importantly, to those whose lives they represent and, therefore, that narratives, particularly co-created narratives, are subject to the scrutiny of those who are researched. The criterion of internal validity is reflected in the construct of isomorphism and suggests that narratives will reflect a closer one-to-one correspondence with the lives of the researched. Lastly, isomorphism, in combination with a narrative that conveys the appropriate ‘feeling tone’ of the represented lives, is thought to reflect authenticity. As such, the “range of mood,

feeling, experience, variety and language” portrayed in the narrative should create for the reader, a heightened sensitivity to the lives of the researched.

## The Pilot Study

### Selecting Participants for the Pilot Study

On December 18, 1994, I posted a request to the Women’s Studies electronic discussion list (WMST-L) inviting doctoral students and their partners who might be interested in writing to me about their educational experiences to participate in the study. In all, 55 people responded to the request, of whom 46 were women. The other nine respondents included partners of women doctoral students and male doctoral students. Five women withdrew in the early stages of the pilot study, primarily due to other commitments and lack of time and six others who intended to write more extensively also did not continue to write. In all, 35 women continued to write to me about their doctoral experiences between December 1994 and the end of February 1995.

One point is worthy of mention. The letter inviting participation in this study (Appendix B) included the following statement: “It is my purpose to understand better, the many personal and professional issues that may impede completion of the doctorate in a timely fashion.” This phrasing may have attracted participants who were particularly conscious of factors influencing their progress. However, as discussed earlier, because women do have longer times to degree than men and because women’s completion rates are lower than men’s, it is important to understand not only the factors that enhance student progress, but those factors that impede progress and ultimately may influence Ph.D. completion rates. As Lipschutz (1993, p. 70-71) points out completion rates in the range of 50% are difficult to justify from both an economic perspective and in terms of program effectiveness.

Without addressing the question of how many Ph.D.s American universities should be producing, we can nonetheless insist that more than 55 percent of those admitted into doctoral programs should receive the degree simply on the basis of the commitment of personal and institutional resources that Ph.D. study implies ... Moreover, as faculty and graduate deans seek the financial resources from government, foundations and the private sector that graduate education will need to sustain its quality over time, they are being asked to justify their completion rates .

Electronic mail provided the primary method of communication. Generally the women seemed to be comfortable communicating with electronic mail. Only three women expressed some concern about the privacy of the electronic medium and two of them chose

to share some of their experiences through written communications via regular surface mail. One woman took the initiative to verify my connection with the university by telephoning and leaving a message for me in my department office; she was satisfied that I was who I claimed when I sent her a response by electronic mail asking about the nature of her inquiry. Printed, single-spaced, my correspondence with the 55 respondents fills four 3-inch binders.

### Initial Exchanges with the Women

In my initial contacts with each of the women we discussed the nature of the study and their participation as well as processes for maintaining the confidentiality of their identities and the privacy of their communications (Appendices D: Human Subjects Research Consent Form, and E: Protection of Human Subjects). Following these preliminary formalities I shared with them five broadly focused, open-ended questions as a way to help them begin describing their experiences (see Appendix C, questions 1-5). As the women wrote to me I read and responded to their notes, asking questions to probe for additional information, either in the details of the events they described or in their reflections about their experiences, and to seek further clarification of my understandings.

Very early in our correspondence some of the women expressed curiosity about who I was and what my personal interest was in conducting the study and I openly shared this information with them answering any questions they put forward. I attempted to match my responses to the degree of detail the women seemed to be requesting. Other women seemed less curious about me and my motivations and have been more intensely focused on telling their own stories.

### About the Women Respondents

Of the 46 women who responded initially, 10 had completed doctorates with six receiving their degrees in 1994. Thirty-five women were registered in doctoral programs in the United States and one was registered in Canada. All 35 had completed their candidacy exams, had defended successfully the preliminary oral examination, and were actively engaged in the dissertation writing phase of the doctorate. None of the women had pursued degrees in non-traditional fields of study; all pursued doctorates in the arts, humanities and social sciences. The respondents included single heterosexual women, single mothers, married women with children and grandchildren, married women without children, and two women who identified themselves as lesbians.

### Preliminary Findings

In their stories the women described a range of experiences in connection with their doctorates; some experiences were self-affirming; others were undeniably injurious to the women's well being. Among the 10 women who wrote most extensively about their experiences, despite their concerns and self-doubts, as best I could tell, I was convinced that each one of them was a 'finisher.' The women were goal oriented and persistent, some to the point of stubbornness, and willing to sacrifice other important personal needs to achieve their goals. Generally they saw themselves as capable individuals willing to "risk oneself at something that is important."

### Feedback from the Participants

Preliminary themes emerging from this pilot study were presented at a paper symposium at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in San Francisco on April 20, 1995. The theme of the paper focused on the challenges facing contemporary women doctoral students. In preparation for the conference several drafts of the paper were shared with the women participants to obtain their feedback. They made many helpful suggestions at various stages that improved the final paper in important ways and none of the women indicated that the ideas expressed were less than representative of their experiences. Three sample responses are included below.

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Bobbi:

Thanks for sharing the aera paper. It really is moving and frustrating and uplifting and horrific and ... well, too close to home!  
Karen

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Bobbi.

I read the paper and it is an impressive piece. Much of the historical info was not new to me, as I have had a couple of history of higher ed and history of women in higher ed courses, so the stats were not new. However, you summarized the material more succinctly (and usefully) than most writers. I assume that much of this will also form your lit review for the D?

The section where you started talking about the women's experiences, though ... that's where the whole piece comes alive. Up to that, it's a useful--but let's face it, typical--academic piece. The background is necessary to understand the current situation. But it was amazing to me, as a participant and also as a reader, that the voices of your participants not only mirror and support each other so well, but also mirror the

statistical and historical data. And do so in a much more interesting and intense way than any table, trend line, or standard deviation ever could!

I found myself reading the paper and exclaiming out loud. Keith was making dinner and would come into the living room each time I did so to see what it was that had engendered the reaction. Several times I said out loud, "Thank God, I thought it was just me!" It was very interesting-and heartening!-- to see that several other participants had similar thoughts and experiences during their doctoral program. While you're going through it, you feel so alone ... it's tough to imagine or realize that others have had many of the same experiences (or perhaps even worse) and also felt that there was no light at the end of the tunnel.

Maybe you should develop a new course for doctoral students ... before they graduate, they have to go through a "debriefing" to ensure that they will be able to survive and thrive after the process is over?!

Well, as I've said before, I've really enjoyed and learned from this experience, and I am happy to see that you have been able to put my thoughts and those of the other participants to such good use. Only wish I could be there to clap for you at the session! Have a great time!

Sarah

---

Bobbi,

I just got through reviewing the second/final draft of your paper. WOW!!!!!!

When I was reading through Barbara's story when you sent me the more preliminary version I started to cry. So I had to stop reading and finally managed to get through the whole thing this afternoon.

My reaction today is that I wish I could march into my dept and impress upon the faculty there that this is a real issue. The faculty at my university have been confused and incredulous of our complaints about not being supported financially and/or intellectually/emotionally (morally?).

Well, I'm probably not going to do that. But it has been striking to me to understand that what I have experienced and some of my friends is a phenomenon that is present (at the least) across the whole of the humanities. I don't feel nearly so alone.

I am realizing that I have little fear of the final oral defense because there hasn't been one in so long; only three that I can think of in my 6 years affiliated w/ this institution. But no horror stories from the three. So that's promising.

I will be sharing what you've written about with several of my friends, many of whom already know about my participation in your group because I have thought it to be so interesting and so necessary. I will mostly discuss it with them but I know a few may ask to see the paper. I hope you don't mind if I forward it. I realize that there is a risk involved in distributing not yet published work. But I won't pass it to anyone I don't trust and wouldn't pass my own work to.

Thanks for doing this study, Bobbi. I am impressed with what you've sent me. Please be proud of this work. I am proud of you and of my participation and ability to help you.

[insert sound of tremendous applause here]

many smiles,

Tracy

### Implications of the Pilot Study

The pilot study proceeded very much the way I had anticipated it would. However, two minor changes in procedure were thought to be useful for the larger study.

1. I had thought that integrating my 'questions' into my responses to the women's stories would be the most effective way to engage them in a dialogue about their experiences. This strategy worked very well except with a few women in the very beginning stages of the pilot study. Some of these women were probably anticipating a more structured or formal approach such as a questionnaire and when I embedded the initial questions in my replies to them, some women did not recognize them as being part of the study. Three or four of them responded to these notes and then asked when the study was going to begin. I quickly adjusted my approach with subsequent respondents so that the initial questions were numbered and clearly distinct from other conversation in my notes. This seemed to work well and thereafter, when I embedded my questions in my responses to their notes and the participants were able to follow the exchanges quite easily. My initial purpose in embedding the questions in my notes (as opposed to explicitly structuring them as questions to be answered) was to personalize my responses to the women. However, a more structured format, at least in the beginning stages of our exchanges, seemed to be preferable.
2. I thought that some demographic information about the women would be helpful in contributing to individual portraits of the participants. There seemed to be no easy way to integrate questions about age, for example, into the conversation. Therefore, I developed a short biographic questionnaire for the women to complete that addressed issues such as baccalaureate and master's degree completion dates, registered time in degree programs, time out of program, part-time employment, number and ages of children, etc.

From among the 35 original women respondents, I invited 7 women who had continued to write with the greatest detail and clarity about their doctoral experiences to formalize their long term commitment to participate in the study by signing letters of informed consent. Criteria for inviting the women to participate in the study included their willingness: (1) to continue written exchanges with me about their doctoral experiences, (2) to see the project through to the end, this involved the willingness to maintain contact with

me until I had written the final chapters of my dissertation and to provide me with ongoing feedback about my work. While I recognize that this group of seven women necessarily is not representative of all women doctoral students there is, nonetheless, much we can learn from the experiences they recount herein.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DOCTORAL EXPERIENCE: WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDINGS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study has been, first, to understand the nature of women's doctoral experiences and the meanings they attach to their experiences and, second, to extend our knowledge about the ways in which the meanings women attach to their doctoral experiences can enhance our understanding of women's doctoral persistence.

This chapter provides a comparative analysis of the meanings women attached to the various stages of their doctoral experiences. A demographic portrait of the study participants is presented, followed by individual background portraits of the seven women. The next three sections of the chapter examine: (1) the women's preconceptions of the doctoral experience, including their motivations for pursuing the doctorate, career/degree aspirations, factors that influenced their choice of institution/program, and finally, the admission process itself; (2) the meaning women attach to various stages of their progress, including course work, candidacy, the dissertation phase and the final defense, as well as advisor and committee relations; (3) lastly, this chapter examines women's perceptions of the post-degree experience. The final section in the chapter examines more general reflections the women had about their experiences that were not tied to specific stages of degree progress.

#### A Demographic Portrait of the Study Participants

A demographic portrait of the seven women who volunteered to participate in this study is presented in Tables 16, 17 and 18. At the start of the study in December, 1994, the women ranged in age from 28 (Tracy) to 50 (Helen). Maggie, Zoe and Helen were married with children. Both Zoe and Helen had children in high school and/or college and Maggie had a pre-schooler. Of the three women with children, only Zoe has completed her doctorate.

Tracy, Denise, Camila and Sarah were not married at the start of the study. Both Denise and Camila had partners throughout the duration of the study and Camila married in the spring of 1996. Sarah had been divorced twice prior to beginning doctoral studies and was partnered up until six weeks prior to her final defense. Tracy was involved in two different relationships during the course of this study.

Sarah and Helen completed undergraduate degrees in 1979 and 1967 respectively. The remaining five women completed their undergraduate degrees between 1982 and 1988 (inclusive) (see Table 17). All the women began their master's degrees between 1984 and 1989; all but Denise completed those degrees between 1986 and 1991.

The women in this study entered doctoral programs in U.S. universities between 1988 and 1992, inclusive (Table 18) and at the start of this study in December, 1994, all the women had, at minimum, attained candidacy. Two women, Sarah and Zoe, had completed their doctorates within the previous four months (Table 18). Camila completed her degree during the study and Denise completed her doctorate in the spring of 1996. At the close of the primary phase of data collection in December 1995<sup>1</sup>, Tracy, Maggie and Helen were continuing work on their dissertations. The broad fields of study in which the women in this study conducted their research included the arts, humanities and education.

### Background Portraits of the Women

The following portraits of the seven women provide background information that serves as an important context for understanding their doctoral experiences. Text excerpted directly from the women's correspondence appears in block quotations and has been modified in three ways. First, I replaced each occurrence of an ellipse (...) in the women's text with a dash. Without this modification to the text it would otherwise be impossible for readers to differentiate between ellipses that were part of the women's text and ellipses that represented deliberate omissions I made from the text.

The second change I made to the women's text was to replace straight quotation marks characteristic of electronic mail with 'curly' (smart) quotes; this change was made for the sake of consistency throughout the document.

Third, while all original stylized or unconventional spellings in the women's original notes were retained, I corrected typographical and spelling errors that are characteristic of informal written correspondence via electronic mail. This was done for a number of reasons: first, as the women read drafts of this document to ensure that I had accurately presented their views, ideas and experiences, some requested that I correct the typographical and spelling errors, just as they would correct such errors in drafts of their own work; it was important to me to honour these requests and present the women's

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<sup>1</sup> The data collection period ran from December, 1994 through December, 1995. Because I maintained contact with the women in this study beyond this period, I was able to include some information about the women's progress, notably, Denise, who defended and graduated shortly after the data collection period had concluded.

writing in a way they felt was representative of them. Second, the spelling and typing errors neither added to the meaning of the women's stories nor presented any basis for interpretation of the women's experiences. Third, in some quotations a high frequency of errors resulted through the repeated use of one or two consistently misspelled or incorrectly typed words and as I read through drafts of the document it was my experience as a reader that the traditional practice of inserting '[sic]' after every error was, in many cases, very distracting. Aside from these modifications, the quotations from the women's original correspondence remain unchanged.

What follows are brief descriptive portraits of the backgrounds of each of the seven women who volunteered to participate in this study. These portraits provide an important context for understanding the many facets of their doctoral experiences.

Table 18

Graduate Education of the Study Participants

<b>Graduate</b>	<b>Tracy</b>	<b>Camila</b>	<b>Denise</b>	<b>Maggie</b>	<b>Sarah</b>	<b>Zoe</b>	<b>Helen</b>
Yrs bet BA-MA	1	3	2	2	4	2	22
MA Major	French	Education	Theology	Perform. Arts	MBA	Sociology	English
MA Start-Finish	89 - 91	91 - 93	85 - (1)	84 - 86	83 - 86	89 - 90	85 - 87
MA Start Age	23	29	25	24	25	36	40
MA Finish Age	25	31	(1)	26	28	37	42
MA Months FT / PT	23 / 0	21 / 0	22 / 0	20 / 0	0 / 37	24 / 0	0 / 32
Reg'd Yrs to MA	2	2	(1)	2	2.5(2)	2	2
Yrs bet MA-PhD	1	0	—	2	3	1	5
PhD Field	French Lit	Education	Amer. Studies	Perform. Arts	Ed. Admin.	Sociology	English
PhD Start Age	26	31 (3)	31	28	31	38	47
PhD Start-Finish	92 - 97	91 - 95(3)	91 - 96	88 -	89 - 94	91 - 94	92 -
Yrs BA fin-PhD strt	4	3	8	6	15	4	25
PhD Months FT / PT	51... / 0	30 / 0	52 / 4	20 / 73...	12 / 48	48 / 0	9 / 39...
Months MA to PhD	74...	51	82	133...	97	72	80...

(1) Denise completed all coursework toward her MA but did not complete the thesis.

(2) In the spring and summer of 1983, Sarah took several prerequisite courses. She began her MBA degree in the fall of 1983.

(3) Camila was enrolled in a combined MA/Ph.D. program.

Table 17

Undergraduate Education of the Study Participants

<b>Undergraduate</b>	<b>Tracy</b>	<b>Camila</b>	<b>Denise</b>	<b>Maggie</b>	<b>Sarah</b>	<b>Zoe</b>	<b>Helen</b>
AA Degree	—	—	78 - 80 <sup>(1)</sup>	—	—	—	—
BA Major	French	History/PE	Communication	Perf arts/Psych	Psych/Pre-law	Psych/Soc	English
BA Start-Finish	85 - 88	81 & 85 <sup>(2)</sup> - 88	81 - 83	78 - 82	75 <sup>(3)</sup> - 79	82 - 87	63 - 67
BA Start Age	19	23	21	18	17	29	18
BA Finish Age	22	26	23	22	21	34	22
Reg'd Yrs to BA	3	7	5	4	4	5	4

- (1) Denise began an Associate of Arts degree in 1978 while still in high school. She completed the two-year AA degree in 1980.
- (2) Camila entered the University of Buenos Aires and took five years of History but did not graduate because she did not take three final exams. In 1985 she entered Phys Ed and in 1988 received teacher certification.
- (3) In 1975, Sarah left high school following her junior year to attend university.

Table 16  
Demographic Portrait of the Study Participants

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Tracy</b>	<b>Camila</b>	<b>Denise</b>	<b>Maggie</b>	<b>Sarah</b>	<b>Zoe</b>	<b>Helen</b>
Date of Birth	11/1966	12/1962	11/1960	2/1960	7/1958	7/1953	4/1945
Current Age	29	33	35	36	38	43	51
HS Diploma	1985	1980	1979	1978	1976	1971	1963
Marriage	single	single	single	1985	single	1971	1965
Age at Marriage	—	—	—	25	—	18	20
Children	0	0	0	1993-f	0	1972-m 1974-f 1977-m 1978-m	1973-m 1977-m
Deaths during PhD	1992 mother	—	1994 grandmother	1995 father	—	1991 father	1993 father

## Sarah

Sarah recalled the precise moment when, after seeing the movie “Cries and Whispers” with a friend, she decided at age 13, that she would one day earn a Ph.D. She had no idea what the movie had been about, but she remembered telling her friend, “You know, some day I’m going to earn a Ph.D. in Psychology and then I’m going to watch that movie again and see if I can’t figure out what the hell was going on.”

Sarah left high school at the end of her junior year and entered the college program at a branch campus of her state university system. At the end of her first year in the state system she also received her high school diploma and then transferred to a private university where, in 1979, she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in psychology and pre-law. It was not until 1983 that her interest in how people work within organizations led her to take a number of pre-requisite courses for admission to a part-time MBA program at another institution in her home state. She began the MBA in the fall of 1983 and completed the degree in 1986. Three years later she began her doctorate, taking one course each in the spring and summer before beginning full-time study in the fall of 1989. She completed four years of full-time study before moving to part-time status in her last year. She successfully defended her dissertation in September, 1994, three months prior to the start of this study.

Sarah describes herself as someone who comes from pioneer stock who is an extrovert, an overachiever and “a little more obsessive-compulsive about work and school than other people.” She grew up as the youngest and only girl of three children and throughout her school years she was compared constantly to her older “and, by inference, *smarter*, older brothers.” As will be discussed, Sarah’s gender and the constant comparison to her brothers helped to shape both her self-image and her concepts of achievement. In turn, these factors had a significant influence on her doctoral experience.

Sarah is twice divorced, both times during graduate school. The first divorce occurred just after she began her MBA; the second, just after she entered the Ph.D. program.

My first husband was an alcoholic who was also somewhat threatened, I think, by my grad work. I don’t know why, as he was an intelligent man and he was himself enrolled in law school at the time. However, we married too young (I was 22, he was 23) and the alcohol just got to be too much. Husband #2 was a nice guy--I thought--who turned out to be a sociopath (just my professional opinion). In retrospect I realize that I probably married him on the rebound. Dumb move! Anyway, he became involved with his secretary (I found all this out after the fact) and three weeks after I started the doctoral program he said he wanted to split up because I “Just didn’t meet his needs” or understand him, or some such bullshit. He later married the secretary.

Sarah, now 38 years old, holds a permanent administrative appointment as the Director of Admissions at a prestigious four-year college in the mid-west U.S.

### Tracy

Tracy, 29, is the youngest of the seven participants in the study. Her path to the doctorate began in high school at an all-girls' private college preparatory school where most of her teachers had Ph.D.s.

The teacher I loved most had a PhD in English, taught Shakespeare and had a pretty significant influence on my life. Oh yeah, the teacher was also a woman. Anyway, higher education was something that I considered to be fairly normal coming from that environment. Going to college was very much taken for granted after a college prep program like I was in.

Tracy graduated from high school in 1985 and continued her education at a private university in her home state in the southwest U.S., switching majors several times, but always keeping foreign language study as a minor. Eventually she chose this as her major and completed her undergraduate degree in 1988.

During her undergraduate program Tracy had three influential professors, one man and two women, who strongly supported her interests in graduate school. She lost touch with both of the women when they took positions at other universities; however, she continues to work with the one male professor since they share a common interest in foreign language literature.

Throughout Tracy's childhood her father had been determined to send his children to college, something neither he nor his wife had done and, like Tracy, her brother also attended a single-sex college prep school. However, despite what she describes as "similar initiations into the academic world" she and her brother approached their undergraduate education quite differently.

... my brother who should have become an engineer and made big \$\$, smoked dope through most of college and played a lot of guitar. It took him 7 years to get a Bachelor's degree. I on the other hand who should have met a handsome business major in the cafeteria, gotten engaged and had a nice successful marriage with children by now decided that college was the coolest thing ever and made a career out of it. I think I have already discussed my disillusionment etc. in other letters but that is a separate issue than this.

Tracy described how her parents responded to her brother's difficulties and to her own success in university.

My brother not finishing college was a big problem for my mother and father. They also paid a lot of attention to his grades .... my brother got hell from my dad for slacking off in school because that somehow represented failure in performance in his future job as well .... I basically got ignored where school was concerned. I always made good grades and no one really worried about my major in college which was foreign languages. I took this major after changing other majors several times ...

In 1989, Tracy entered the M.A. program in foreign language literature at a public institution in her home state. At the time Tracy experienced her choice to go to graduate school as a rather rebellious move on her part – “a feminist gesture and a gesture of independence.” She didn’t see herself as wanting to get married or start a family during her early twenties. “I was paying for everything myself and doing what I wanted to do whether anyone liked it or not.” However, after finishing her Master’s degree in 1991, things changed. She had gone to graduate school to become a teacher and, indeed, she had “learned a lot about teaching” but she was unsure of her commitment to academia and undecided as to whether she wanted to pursue a doctorate.

Tracy decided to go to abroad for a year to teach English, to improve her language skills and to reflect on her future. She saw the move as yet another “gesture of independence” – but one that “didn’t receive too much resistance” from her mother. By this time her mother was becoming used to the idea that her daughter was travelling a different path than the one she had imagined.

When Tracy returned from overseas the idea of a Ph.D. was still ‘very much in her blood.’ She knew it would be something she would enjoy and she still wanted to pursue a teaching career. However, Tracy’s parents supported her educational pursuits only to a certain point. In Tracy’s eyes, their notions of what going to college was about had little to do with earning a doctorate. And, in fact, Tracy’s mother was very opposed to the idea that she might pursue yet another higher degree, in part, because she didn’t really understand what it was all about and because she thought it would take her daughter far away from home. She and her mother “had big fights” about this and according to Tracy, her choices were often a big disappointment to her mother.

My mother and I often argued about the nature of a woman’s role in society. My mother was not a feminist and was in fact quite against me calling myself a feminist. She was the most blatantly discouraging figure in my family and I believe that is because she saw me as forsaking the role of wife and mother for a life of studying, a rather consuming career, and especially one which was going to take up the years of my life when I would seem most eligible to get married and start a family.

Although Tracy’s father didn’t get involved in these arguments Tracy didn’t think he really understood her desire to pursue a doctorate any more than her mother had. Despite this she

describes her father as “fairly supportive” and he hopes that eventually she will get a job since employment and economic stability have always been very important to him. In turn, Tracy has found that these values have influenced her own attitudes about employment and economic stability.

While Tracy was growing up, her father had worked overseas supervising the maintenance of a major oil refinery and although he made enough money to send both his children to private school and later to college, she describe him as being “as blue collar as they come, complete with wanting a better, easier life for his children.”

... after 9th grade ... I had to continue high school back in the states. The company paid for a percentage of the tuition for private school or paid a stipend depending on what was less. So I applied to prep schools I wanted to go to and then went to my preference of schools depending on where I was accepted. So I ended up going to an all girls school with very high academic standards by my own choice. But prep school was what everyone did in the circumstances and it was supported by my mother and father who saw this as a way to ensure their kids would go to college-- their idea of a ticket to a better lifestyle than they had themselves ...

Tracy described many of her friends in university as also coming from working class backgrounds and they often talked among themselves about what it was like to have parents who weren't familiar with higher education – about having “to cope with the novelty of their career choice given the values with which they were raised.” She experienced her parent's “working classness” as a lack of understanding of most intellectual and artistic endeavours.

[My father] wins a prize for success I guess. I'm just not sure it turned out how he expected. I know it didn't for my mother who was always confused about my choices in becoming a PhD. My father is not actively unsupportive like my mother was .... My mother was very active in expressing her disappointment with my choice to go to grad school and to always want to travel somewhere else because I was never doing what she perceived that it took to get married and have a family.

As Tracy wrote about her experiences of ‘growing up working class’ she noticed that she seemed to equate the role of ‘mother’ with family and the role of ‘father’ with work. She often talked with her friends in university about their experiences of growing up ‘working class’ and how these experiences stood in stark contrast to the backgrounds of their university professors who seemed “to take upper middle-class to aristocratic values for granted.” Tracy described the space in which she lives between these worlds –

There is an uncomfortable distance sometimes  
between the ground on which we stand and  
the p'ace we are trying to reach ...

When Tracy and I first began to correspond in December, 1994, she was 'ABD' and just beginning to write the first chapter of her dissertation. In December, 1995, at the data collection period of this study concluded, Tracy had shifted the focus of her study somewhat, had rewritten the first chapter of her dissertation and was revising chapter two. In mid-March of 1996, Tracy submitted the second chapter to her advisor – 'who loved it' – and in April, she began writing the third chapter.

### Camila

Camila was born in Argentina on Christmas Day, 1962. She first contacted me about participating in the study just six days before her 32nd birthday and her letter began:

Dear Candidate Smith<sup>2</sup>,

I am a grad student. I have finished my course work, I have passed my orals, I have defended my proposal. I have collected my data, I am currently writing my dissertation. I am exhausted.

Camila's parents separated when she was still in pre-school and her mother raised both Camila and her older brother as a single parent. Learning to read came as naturally to her as breathing and from kindergarten onward, Camila excelled in school, both academically and socially. From early childhood she was both strong-minded and an independent thinker and she 'took no bs' from anyone. It was this rebellious, out-spoken side to her personality that she often thought was a target for the anger and discrimination that others directed toward her.

Camila's family struggled financially after her father left and she remembers 'having to measure every coin they spent.' Despite the economic stressors, Camila's family had strong ties with the intellectual elite in Argentina. Camila's mother had pursued her undergraduate education in the United States, and both Camila's uncles and her grandfather, who "lived in a huge old house with a fantastic library and other fantastic places," were connected with the intellectual elite. Her grandfather was "very well known in academic circles" and had been a professor at the same university where Camila first pursued an undergraduate degree in history. He taught there for many years and rose through the ranks to become first, Dean and later, the Rector, a role similar to that of university chancellor. These associations gave her a sense of privilege in academic circles that she experienced with a degree of ambivalence.

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<sup>2</sup> Smith was my family name before I married.

it was sort of funny for me because i knew deep down i was privileged [e.g., by my grandpa having one of the most complete and big libraries AT HOME (his house was always like my house for us) that i had access to all the time, etc.] ... i was somehow feeling a mix of embarrassment for having such a privilege and yet knew i could use it when/if needed.

However, Camila was not ambivalent about her disdain for the wealthy upper class in Argentina.

the only [class] that i ... also did not have a lot of exposure to - is high class people. in argentina they can be nasty and i hate it. truly.

Camila's formative years were influenced significantly by growing up under the repressive atmosphere of the Argentinean dictatorship, and even by age 10, Camila "understood socialism and anarchism and 'la derecha' [the right wing values]." Growing up in such a repressive atmosphere as well as her family's involvement with political activism served as catalysts for her own self-image as a rebel.

Camila also described how her family life contributed to the growing rebel inside her. She referred to a book called "Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A thousand plateaus" in which the authors, Deleuze and Guatari, used the term, 'rhizomatic', to develop a concept of multiplicity (in contrast to causality or linearity) that Camila found useful in describing her upbringing. A rhizome is a plant with perishable stems attached to a perennial root that grows horizontally along the ground. Like the Morning Glory that is so pervasive on Canada's west coast, you can tear the stems off at the surface but the plant continues to thrive underground.

my family is a sort of rhizomatic entity. in a way, because there is so much going on at the same time and relationships are not necessarily linear---but they have a system of their own. this is part of my rebel side i think because i did not grow up in a simple, "normal" system. my mom got together with my dad and he already had 2 kids who lived with him. then my brother and i were born and we lived all together until i was three or less than three.

Camila also described this concept of multiplicity as an important aspect of her sense of self and she described to me what seemed to be her holistic approach to life.

i like to do sports and i like to read and i like to paint and i like music and i like to talk and i like languages and the sort. this is a hard side of me too: it is hard to see things in a one way sort of way and i have a hard hard time adapting to convention. i can't concentrate easily in things that are mono-chromatic so to speak; i come in colors.

In 1980, Camila graduated from a typical "bachillerato" program – a five year secondary school program from grades eight through grade 12 – in which there are no

electives, only required subjects. Since Spanish is her mother tongue, Camila studied English as a foreign language for three years during the bachillerato program.

After completing the bachillerato program Camila entered the University of Buenos Aires and took five years of History. These five years reflected a very turbulent time for Camila as she struggled to survive the blatant repressive presence of the dictatorship on campus. She described the use of intimidating instructional techniques, police guarding the doors of the institution, police infiltration of the student movement and curricula that were “reactionary and fascist.” She described hundreds of people as “going missing from the history department.” She wrote,

i saw the worst things happening during those years and i think i was scared but i didn't wanna admit it.

Studying in this atmosphere took its toll on Camila. As she neared the end of her studies, she felt increasingly alienated from the university culture and was “fed up with all the bs around studying in the university.” Ultimately, she decided to leave the university before writing three of the final exams that would have enabled her to graduate.

In 1985, Camila entered the Physical Education program at the Instituto Nacional de Educacion Fisica and four years later earned her teaching credential that enabled her to teach physical education in kindergarten through college. Despite successful completion of her teaching credentials, Camila has long harbored regret about her decision to leave the University of Buenos Aires without her degree in hand, a decision which she has come to understand as a form of self-sabotage.

i guess i am a drop out who completed everything did all the work in normative time worked part time at the same time participated in student movement etc. etc. etc. but boycotted herself at the end.

While on the one hand Camila described herself as having a very solitary nature, she finds that often she is approached by others to make friends and she frequently finds herself surrounded by people. She enjoys having other people around and although she describes herself as adapting easily to all kinds of environments, she finds that the presence of others makes those transitions easier.

Music was an important part of Camila's support system while growing up in Argentina.

music was surely part of my support system growing up in such a terrible environment i think one of the things that was surely terrible was a kind of schizophrenia developed around there: all kinds of horror stories happening and all of us denying them at the same time. i know this is a psychological mechanism found in many other cases of

stress [denial] but it is very damaging too. the military rule had slogans and other mechanisms to make us believe everything was fine. it wasn't.  
 but even me who knew people in jail  
 whose mom's cousin is a disappeared  
 whose sister's friends [my sister is 9 yrs older than i am] were involved in political  
 activisms [and some of them vanished after a while]  
 even a person like me  
 was confused. of course i was young very young but still.

Camila also described a side of herself that she doesn't like.

i can be cruel and i hate this side of me. i usually get cruel if someone messes up with me. but once it's happened, i have a hard time letting go. i get sort of "righteous" and i want to pursue "justice" [obviously what I consider just!] and it is very hard. i get sort of stuck and i get so stubborn that it kind of hurts. i sometimes get sort of lonely in my crusades. i get hard as a rock and i can be, i think, insensitive. but i have analysed [british spelling] my actions many times and i know i do get like this when i perceive a lot of harassment.

When Camila first contacted me in December of 1994 about participating in the study she was in the final stages of writing her dissertation. She successfully defended her dissertation in the summer of 1995 and accepted a position as lecturer at the same institution in which she earned her Ph.D.

#### Denise

Denise, now 35 years old, had been a very good student in high school. Growing up in the mid-west, she attended a Catholic high school from which she graduated in 1979. During her senior year she began taking concurrent classes at the local community college and by the end of 1980 she had completed an Associate of Arts degree.

Then I stopped and worked full time at a discount store that I'd worked at part-time since I was sixteen. I was engaged at the time. When we suddenly decided to postpone the wedding I started checking into colleges without telling anyone in my family. When I'd made a decision I told my mother. (My father died the summer I graduated HS.) I went away (2 hours from home) and finished my BA in two years.

As an only child growing up in a working class neighbourhood, Denise is the first in her family to earn a university degree.

Growing up I didn't know people went beyond bachelors degrees.

Her father had finished high school but he had little interest in furthering his education. He worked on the railroad when he was young, but an injury when Denise was three years old made it impossible for him to continue working there and after that he worked in autobody repair.

He used to criticize people who were in college, especially if they stayed there very long. He thought you learned on the job by doing, not by reading. He died when I was 18.

Denise's mother never finished high school. She had lived on her own from the age of 12 after her mother died, and married Denise's father on her 16th birthday. When Denise was little her mother worked full-time in restaurants and at other odd jobs that included selling Avon products, door-to-door sales and working in fast food restaurants. Only after Denise had earned her BA, did her mother earn her GED (Graduate Equivalency Diploma).

I don't think they expected me to go to college, but they also weren't against it. I did well in school and my mother was accepting that I might go to college. I think they mostly expected me to get married and have kids. My mom always said she just wanted me to be happy. But in her world that translated into marriage and kids for a female. I don't have a sense of other expectations. I worked at a discount store through high school and college. I did that partially because all female members of my family had been waitresses and I resisted that.

In 1981, with her Associate of Arts degree in hand, Denise returned to university to complete her undergraduate education at a public college in her home state. In 1983 she completed a baccalaureate in Communications with a major in radio and television and a minor in journalism. She then pursued full-time volunteer work through various church-related service groups. At the end of her first year of service work, Denise took the Graduate Record Examination, but ultimately decided to do another year of volunteer work instead. In the Spring of her second volunteer year, Denise decided she wanted to study theology so she could get a better job doing the same kind of justice work she'd been doing for two years as a volunteer. She was accepted at two institutions and chose a program on the west coast where she entered a master's program in Theology in 1985.

I came from a working class family, was the only one to graduate college and had never heard about or considered graduate school until my first volunteer year. By the year I entered grad school, everyone from my first volunteer household (7 of us) were all graduate students (3 lawyers, 3 MSWs and 2 seminarians). Don't misunderstand, we weren't all that religious, but a sense of justice was a large component of what brought us together .... I entered seminary (I prefer to refer to it that way because even though it was a scholarly program that I was enrolled in, it's assumed in my former faith tradition [Roman Catholic] that only men go to seminary) after two years of full time volunteer service.

Denise thought that pursuing a graduate degree would enable her to gain employment similar to the kind of volunteer work she'd been doing under the auspices of the church but with the advantage that it would be like a regular job, a career, something her family could better understand. She also saw the degree as a way to gain a certain level of respect. Denise was getting passing grades, As and Bs, in her program and she

“rationalized that even Bs were very good grades” since, unlike many of her colleagues who already had master’s degrees in theology and philosophy, she’d never had any previous courses in those areas.

But in the second year of her studies Denise “slowly entered a rather deep depression” that ultimately led to her withdrawal from the program.

I had a back injury which was part of it, but I had also begun to realize I was fighting a losing battle. I was in an ivory tower and they were going to cut my hair. I was never going to be allowed to walk on the land again. I speak of this metaphorically because what was happening was hidden from sight. I was losing my faith as I learned more and more (a common enough phenomenon), but as a woman there was no gift or glory at the end to replace the space that faith had occupied, no reason to continue. I gradually realized that though we were learning feminist, process, and liberation theology I wouldn’t be able to tell anyone else. Basically, I was to learn but not share my knowledge. I was told repeatedly, “the people in the pews simply aren’t ready for this.” To a degree that was true, but it was also devastating. As part of the depression I reduced my course load. I dropped class after class. I cut back everything I could to still be “on schedule” if I wanted to finish. That was something like 4.5 hours my last semester when I’d been carrying at least 12 hours a term.

Added to the loss of faith that Denise experienced were two other factors that influenced her decision to withdraw from the program. The first factor related to the hidden rules with respect to her own program, or as Denise put it, the rules that state “what you don’t ask specifically, they won’t tell you.”

Denise described herself as entering seminary without adequate skills to pass the foreign language requirement, which as she understood it, meant taking a written exam. In the middle of her second year, after struggling and doing poorly in courses in two private programs, she feared she wouldn’t be able to pass the written exam. Only then did she discover that there were several other methods of meeting the language requirement. One of those methods was to take two years of language at UC Berkeley, “just down the block at no additional fee – and with no written exam.” However, by the time Denise learned of this, it was too late and she “felt cheated! Big time!”

Denise described herself as having “a real language phobia.” In high school she earned As in Latin but felt she “never learned ANYTHING because of bad instruction and a change midstream.”

Language carries a lot of baggage and fear for me. So when I learned that I’d been inadequately informed, I felt mistreated and abused. My degree was within grasp. Writing a thesis didn’t scare me, but I wouldn’t finish because of the language and I felt that wasn’t my fault. I felt if they’d told me, I could have done it.

The second factor that eventually led to Denise’s withdrawal from the seminary related to differences in the way Denise perceived the mentoring process was being

experienced by her male and female colleagues. Denise recounted a number of different situations in which several women students were discouraged from pursuing their ideas for research while male students with similar ideas were being encouraged to see what they could do with their ideas.

The women masters students were being told that their ideas were really more dissertation ideas, too large. They should narrow the focus, change the subject ... The comments about women's theses' ideas being "too large" were pretty much made in private one-on-one meetings with faculty members ... But it was a Catholic seminary and the faculty in question were celibate Franciscan priests. I also knew several males whose ideas were praised. Not all of the males were going to Catholic seminary. But there seemed to be a pattern. I did know women who eventually finished and finding the right advisor was an important piece of the puzzle for them.

There weren't many women faculty in general. Yet our student body was over 50% female when I was there. The discouragement process didn't happen in classrooms much as I recall. I do remember some of the young Jesuits being somewhat belligerent, oppressive, arrogant in class, but the faculty didn't really support that behavior. I felt relatively confident in the classroom even though I had much less education in the field than most of those I was studying with. For example, I'd never had a philosophy class even as an undergrad and many of my fellow students had masters degrees in philosophy.

Denise was discouraged from pursuing topics she was interested in on two different occasions with two different faculty. She became "extremely depressed" and reduced her course load to only the essential classes. Ultimately, she "dropped out of the program with only the thesis and the language requirement remaining."

I asked Denise if she thought the discouragement she experienced was systematic or the result of just a few faculty.

I think it was built into the psyche of the whole enterprise. It was hidden beneath all kinds of pretty rhetoric about the changing role of women. It's not that the faculty didn't believe their rhetoric, they just hadn't considered the real life consequences. I saw them display why it would be impossible for me to fulfill the role I had envisioned for myself in the church. If they couldn't make the transition, how could others possibly follow?

I also asked Denise if she experienced similar kinds of discouraging attitudes toward her research from the male students and although she hadn't, she pointed to the power differences between students and faculty as an explanation, in part, for the faculty's actions toward the women students.

... I really didn't see the male students enact this attitude toward women. But as I say, it was in what was done not just said and the students didn't have the same power the faculty did. So most everyone talked a good progressive, almost if not feminist line, but those with the power didn't act on that line. Where they acted, where they lived, they were still holding more traditional lines.

Denise's decision to leave the seminary came about rather quickly. She had applied for a couple of jobs and quickly accepted an out-of-state offer, even though another job in the area was almost assured.

It just seemed right to get out. And the job was in line to some degree with what I'd imagined doing with my masters so it wasn't a complete and immediate abandonment. In fact, the job was with a Franciscan organization. I broke down crying during the interview when they asked how I would deal with church hierarchy. Though I thought at the time that had blown it, I believe it was actually one of the elements that led to my hire.

Denise had spent a total of 22 months as a full-time student at the seminary before withdrawing from her program. When I asked her how this experience might have affected her sense of her own abilities she wrote that she "thought there was something wrong with the picture not with me."

For the most part it didn't affect my sense of my own abilities. I thought the church, the human or male (mis)guided church didn't realize what it was missing. It seemed that not only in me but in many of the women I knew, the church could have had a powerful and loving force that it refused to accept because of our gender. I saw it as their loss. I saw it as my loss too. Don't get me wrong. I still have heavy therapy to do on this subject someday. I still cry easily when those times and images are evoked. But I didn't question my gifts or abilities.

In 1991, four years after Denise withdrew from her master's program, she entered a graduate program in the southwestern U. S. She successfully defended her dissertation in the spring of 1996.

### Maggie

When Maggie recalls her high school years in the northwest she remembers herself as a "shy introvert with low self-esteem" – this despite being valedictorian of her 1978 high school graduation class where she had studied in a pure science-track program.

I never dated. I was told I was ugly and stupid.

After graduating at age 18, Maggie entered the veterinary science program at the state university.

When I entered the world of college, suddenly people were interested in me. I became entwined in relationships with men that weren't very positive. I believe now a great many of my decisions regarding relationships were based on 'not hurting their feelings.' I was never abused physically or emotionally, the relationships just didn't 'feel right.' I also was not promiscuous or a party animal. I invested a great deal of energy and ultimately pain in these relationships which drew me from my studies. I also just couldn't get my studying together leaving me to doubt my ability to do scientific work. Plus, once those grades drop there is no turning back.

Maggie had difficulty focusing on her chemistry and biology courses and felt insecure about her performance in these courses. She began to experience the competitive nature of her classes as increasingly incompatible with an emerging sense of her 'self.'

I had come from a pure science background and found myself continually plagued with a great sense of competition, self-imposed as well as outer influenced. My definition of 'self' as intelligent was only linked to the sciences ... I could not focus on my chemistry and biology courses. I also hated the stress of performing in these classes ... Although I believe I think very logically and scientifically, I believe the freedom of expression in the arts was where I needed to be to discover (if you will) the real me.

Maggie became more unhappy with her grades and at the end of her second year she decided to "jump ship."

I didn't feel like a failure. I just felt I needed to close the door on that attitude about intelligence. I needed to change direction.

Maggie transferred to a program in the performing arts but she hadn't begun performing until age 19 in her first college class. She had never intended to be a professional performer. Her primary interest focused on the historical and philosophical dimensions of performance and she "fully embraced the discipline as an integral part" of herself.

I love the ideas that [it] generates and stimulates. I believe it is through [this field] that my critical thinking skills have excelled. It has matured me and given me great satisfaction.

She was an academically trained performer and lacking both experience and a professional background, her new department was less than thrilled to have "such a fledgling" in its midst.

The department was very subtle. I felt they tolerated my presence in classes. Even though I became active in many of the performances and did my course work, I never got the impression that they took me very seriously. I can't actually recall a specific incident other than my distinct feeling that if I wanted to get anywhere, I needed to go to another school.

Feeling somewhat alienated from the department, Maggie opted to participate in a student exchange program and transferred to another college in the east.

As it turned out, that first year was very good for me. I learned many basic things and got a good introduction into the field. Transferring was the best thing for me to do.

Maggie completed her undergraduate degree in 1982 with a major in the performing arts and a minor in psychology. She had hoped to pursue the therapeutic aspects of performance after completing her degree but finances were limited and she returned home

to the northwest. She took a two year hiatus from her studies before moving to the west coast to pursue a master's degree in the performing arts. She married during this time and after 20 months as a full-time student Maggie completed her master's degree in 1986. Although she felt her work had helped her to establish some maturity in her training, she never felt like she "really belonged to the program."

It was as if I felt I really was not worthy of the education. Of course, I was still a relatively young performer with a few performance experiences behind me ...

In 1988 Maggie entered her doctoral program in the southwest U.S. as a part-time student and she worked full-time to support herself and her husband who was enrolled in full-time studies. During those first years Maggie's position at the university library was their primary source of financial support. Maggie has worked full-time throughout her doctoral program, including her year of residency in 1991-92. She wrote comprehensive exams over the Christmas break in 1992 and learned shortly thereafter that she was pregnant. In the spring semester of 1993, Maggie took two courses and prepared for her preliminary orals – all while continuing to work full-time. Maggie developed toxemia and the baby was born prematurely in the late summer. Both mother and daughter had a long recovery in the fall. Because of health complications Maggie spent most of the next year recuperating from the birth and working on her dissertation proposal. The proposal proceeded more slowly than she wished and it wasn't until the spring of 1995 that Maggie submitted her proposal to her advisor. Her advisor was pleased with the proposal and told Maggie she could now take it to the rest of her committee and begin to address the Human Subject Committee requirements. Maggie's proposal was given a conditional approval in May and by December, after the first review, Maggie had also received approval to proceed with her study from the Human Subjects Review Committee. Although Maggie continues to present conference papers and remains active in her field, finances and her relationship with her advisor, as will be discussed, have been significant inhibitors to her continued progress.

### Zoe

Zoe is a 43 year old mother of four who successfully defended her dissertation at a public university in the mid-west U.S. just three weeks before offering to participate in my research study. Zoe followed a non-traditional path toward completion of her doctorate. She calls it "living life backwards." Raised in a small, traditional, mid-western rural community, she had "gone through high school as an academic and athletic standout,

always gaining notoriety” for her accomplishments. She graduated from her college preparatory high school program in 1971. Zoe’s parents had “always expected” that she and her older brother and sister would go to college, complete their undergraduate degrees and find lucrative employment, but they never expected their children to go beyond that. Zoe’s father had only a high school education. Her father farmed rented land during the early years of his marriage and when that drove him to financial collapse he took a number of different positions as a manual labourer. During the later years of his life he worked as a district manager for various seed corn companies in the area.

my father, for all the other faults he had (i.e. the violent temper, the tendency to degrade the family, etc.), was always what i would call a “champion of the underdog” both verbally and in actions: taking food to people who he knew didn’t have any (even if we ourselves were short on it) and speaking up when he thought someone was being socially abused in any way.

Zoe’s mother did complete high school and attended a two-year “common school,” before teaching school for a couple of years shortly after her marriage at the age of 19. When Zoe’s father returned from the war her mother became the “stay-at-home wife and mother of the 1950’s.” A lack of financial resources had always been an intense issue in Zoe’s family and when Zoe reached junior high her mother took various secondary jobs to help with the family finances: housekeeping in a local motel, working in a dry cleaning establishment and clerking in a department store.

Zoe remembered her father, in particular, talking of Ph.D.s with great disdain, calling them educated fools and the implicit message she received from her parents was that, first and foremost, she should have a family and be a good wife and mother. As a 17 year old, from a small town high school, Zoe was “terrified of being thrown into the outside world.” but she also had a home environment that she “couldn’t wait to escape.”

We were \*so\* poor and my parents came to “wear” that poverty almost like a badge-- i don’t ever want to minimize the impact my parents’ messages had on me or on any of my siblings ... we were always told and \*knew\* by what our parents told us that we were “less than” others in our small town (~1000 pop). In fact, our parents told us many, many times that they \*depended\* upon my brother and me to excel-- athletically and/or academically-- because we were “all” they had to show the outside world. So, i grew up embarrassed because of what i didn’t have, embarrassed by my father’s violent and alienating temper, embarrassed because in that small town everyone knew when a bill collector had contacted your family. But-- at least that was “familiar” turf and you knew where you stood and at what level people accepted you.

Just two weeks out of high school, Zoe began her first year of college during the summer session – “a naive 17 year old” who travelled seven hours from home to attend a private 4-year university that had given her a full academic scholarship.

i remember more than anything else wanting to double major in english and speech -- i had a high school speech teacher who really made me believe in myself and my abilities.

Zoe left for university that summer with only the five dollars her parents had given her and when she arrived it seemed like everything her parents had been telling her over the years was correct. All the other girls seemed to have so much more than she did.

i was scared to death that i wouldn't have enough money to make it. And the clothes. i had so few and they were things like blue jean cut-offs and a few tops -- the others had all the matching outfits and closets full of them!!!

What hit me so hard when i went away to college was that the "haves" in my little town of the growing up years didn't hold a candle to the "haves" i was now meeting-- "girls" from families that had \*real wealth\* ... and this \*real\* wealth was so overwhelming for me and created such a standard against which to compare myself-- if i was looked down on in [my home town] by the people that viewed themselves as the elite there just imagine how i "thought" people in this college environment were looking at me .... I \*knew\* then that my parents had been right all along -- that i was not and never would be as good as all the people around me .... i felt like the proverbial fish who had floundered her way \*out of\* the water the others were so comfortable swimming in! .... in many ways our parents are responsible for the high-achieving tendencies you see in both my brother and me-- but, it was a bag of mixed messages as we \*had\* to be high achieving to make up for their own feelings of inadequacy with regard to their financial status-- and we \*never\* did any of it quite good enough for them.

During her first week at school, too frightened to face this new and foreign world all alone and fearful that she wasn't good enough, that she wouldn't measure up, Zoe began to plan her escape from college. And for the first time Zoe admitted something she had never told anyone, not even her husband of 23 years.

it was during my first week at school i began "planning" to get pregnant-- i would have someone to take care of me-- i wouldn't have to face the world alone-- and i could get away from this college environment that was filled with so many that had so much and were so better than me. And, it worked-- within a couple of weeks i was pregnant-- and so she lived happily ever after surrounded by the white picket fence and cooking din din for the beav and the fam every night <dripping sarcasm>.

By the end of that summer, despite devastating morning sickness, Zoe managed to complete six hours of general education credits. And in one of her classes she encountered a professor who taught the introductory psychology course.

i was \*fascinated\* by the material-- i couldn't read enough-- i couldn't study enough, and he made me believe i was good (really good). I knew then that it would never be the English/speech thing-- psych would be my calling. I still remember his name-- Dr. Rowell from texas.

I asked Zoe what it was about this professor that had been so inspiring for her.

I'd never thought about this concretely until you asked the question. he did the same thing i fell in love with Tom for. He was the first person to \*listen\* to me talk about intellectual stuff and show he was interested in what i had to say and that it had merit. The test performances and paper grades were great, but, that's not what interested him. We would have coffee together. Here was a \*professor\* inviting me to have coffee with him and talk with him and he listened and talked back, never with a put down ready, but with questions and responses that \*invited\* me to think beyond what i just said.

It was because of her experience with this professor and this class that Zoe vowed one day to complete her undergraduate degree. However, for the next eleven years Zoe was a full-time wife and devoted mother. She raised four children, until at age 29, she found herself living with a husband who travelled extensively and was experiencing "a tremendous amount of personal growth" while she was at home "stagnating." It was then she decided to return to university to complete her undergraduate degree.

I really felt the need at that time to feel like i had somehow expanded my education since my husband was now traveling worldwide and even though he only had three years towards his own degree he was growing so much and \*always\* came home with these exotic stories of traveling to England, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan -- being wined and dined, the places he saw, the pictures he brought home with him. i felt so small-world and lacking.

Zoe began her new college career with a major in psychology and she loved every minute of it. In her sophomore year she took her first sociology course and before long she declared a double major in psychology and sociology with a concentration in human and social services. She thought this would make her more marketable in the local community after graduation.

The department had a good reputation for "bonding with its students." The students spent a lot of time in professors' offices and the department made great efforts to develop positive student/faculty relationships; because of this, Zoe saw herself as well integrated into the department. She was strongly influenced by one of her psychology professors, also a feminist, who stimulated her interest in gender issues.

My first class was a psych of women class taught by a feminist from a feminist perspective and i will always love her for what she gave me. she challenged me \*as a woman\* to make a mark on the world, at least "my" world.

This professor introduced Zoe to the notion that her own life experience was not all that unusual.

For eons women had sacrificed their own abilities and futures by \*letting\* the men and their careers take precedence over their own and that my degree could be a whole lot more than a "show piece" (keep returning to that phrase, don't i?), that i could get a degree, use that degree, and be something myself apart from the family and spouse and she invited me to challenge just what was going on within my own family and circle of

friends. to speak out about the gendered nature of the western family and how it works to the disadvantage of women and she taught me to demand some rights of my own within that family.

While Zoe sought every opportunity to further her own education, it was never at the expense of the family. She learned quickly how to balance the multiple responsibilities of student, wife and mother and she continued to be actively involved in her children's lives.

in essence, i went for what i wanted, but only by doubling my work and responsibilities. never really \*claiming\* what i needed and what would have made my path easier and i have no one to blame for that but myself .... If i'd tried to do it when my kids were real young, no, there is no way it would have been possible, especially since i was always an hour away from home and with the amount of time i spent driving i was unreachable a lot of the time. Even at the ages they were it was emotionally difficult for me as i always felt i was somehow "neglecting" or shortchanging the kids, compromising them for something i wanted.

In 1987, at the end of five years of study, Zoe graduated, summa cum laude, with a solid 4.0 grade point average and accepted employment with a prestigious social agency. However, she knew even then that her employment would be temporary, that at some point she would return to school for a graduate degree and after only seven months in the work force she was missing the stimulation of the classroom environment. Few of her colleagues at work were interested in what she had learned at university. They were interested in pragmatics, not theory. However, it was her field practice that influenced her choice of sociology as her field of study in graduate school. The systems approach of sociology rather than the individualistic perspective put forth by psychology seemed to Zoe to be a better way to "deal with and explain the reality of individual existence."

Because of her concern for her family responsibilities Zoe applied to just one graduate school. It was only 60 miles from her home and her attendance there would not require her to uproot the family as she began her quest for her master's degree. Despite Zoe's accomplishments at the undergraduate level she never felt well integrated into her master's program.

No one warned me that only "good" students are admitted to graduate school. so i went from being "top dog" at a very small college to being one of the pack at a graduate department in a major big 10 university. quite a bit of cold water thrown on my face with that one! And i immediately slipped back into the familiar thoughts and behavior patterns that had plagued me so many years earlier when i felt i couldn't measure up in the college environment i entered right after high school graduation.

There were other reasons that Zoe felt like a fish out of water in graduate school. Due to illness, she had entered the program a semester later than the rest of her cohort. She also commuted 120 miles a day throughout her entire graduate program which meant she didn't have the same opportunities as other students to socialize with her colleagues. Initially, she and her husband planned that she would commute for the first half of her graduate program and then the family would move closer to the university, but when the time came, they never really made a serious effort to move.

The non-move probably resulted from a combination of factors. It has always been so easy for me to assume guilt for anything, even something I think *might* happen, so it was hard for me to think about moving the family when this whole doctoral thing was for and about me. It would have meant laying claim to something I wanted for myself. And we had never asked the kids to experience a dramatic change so I harbored the fear that if we made the move for me and it turned out to be a horrible experience for the kids I would always be responsible for disrupting and screwing up their lives.

What Zoe remembered most about those early days in her master's program was "being very scared and intimidated." It seemed as if all the self-confidence she had acquired during her successful undergraduate days had deserted her just when she needed it most.

Everyone else seemed so capable of speaking up in the seminars. I found a shyness in myself I had never encountered before. And, as I now look back on it, this "shyness" didn't leave me during the entire graduate experience. Throughout the entire six years I found it very difficult to speak out in the classroom .... the feelings were "queasies" and "nags" that rumbled around my head at all times. The behaviors, hesitancy in the classroom, resistance at being an *active* part of what was going on in this learning context, *fear* (that is perhaps the best descriptor of the feeling part of this) of "exposing myself" as less than my colleagues, diluting the statements I made in papers, exams, and in the classroom, not making the strong assertive statements I would have liked to have made for fear I would put myself out on this limb only to watch it get sawed off from under me .... and yet, even now, I can't say really why I found this to be the case. I don't think there were any "overt" examples of treatment directed at me (or any other student that I can think of) that should have made me so reserved and doubting of myself, yet, that reservation is part of my "reality of experience" as I remember it.

As Zoe progressed through her program she felt less and less affiliated with a specific cohort, in part, because students finished at various times (some had come with master's degrees; others had not) and there were fewer members of her cohort around by the time she finished. In spite of this, Zoe felt more "connected" to her cohort than to any other students she met and made friends with during her program.

Zoe had entered the graduate program with a clear idea of what she wanted as her major and according to all the recruiting information she received, the university had a strong program in this specialization. After she was admitted she found out otherwise.

Surprise!!! They had neither the faculty in place nor the resources to offer this major-something that several of us students encountered after getting into the program.

Zoe declared her major in a different specialization and left her minor to be decided at a later date.

all i ever heard was that it's too bad but that's just the way it is. pretty much i was on my own to even chart my own grad experience with respect to classes, etc. i finally found the chutzpah to do that and managed to get the minor i wanted which i'd been told would be an impossibility.

An older professor who had been at the university for nearly 26 years was the faculty specialist in her major and he became Zoe's primary advisor.

Actually, as i look back on it, we developed a very good relationship-- yet, it also became apparent very early in the experience that he wanted to "shape me in his image" and, the work he had done for many, many years was of little interest to me.

To Zoe, the department seemed very cold and impersonal. She was also older than most of the students in her cohort and she found the faculty did little to encourage any form of personal relationships amongst themselves or with the graduate students although the department did encourage students to find a faculty member to work and to publish with.

i don't know if i was just not assertive enough or what, but this opportunity never transpired for me and the only work and publishing i did with other faculty came after the culmination of my master's thesis.

Zoe missed the supportive kind of environment she'd experienced in her undergraduate program and she missed the kind of encouragement she'd received from her undergraduate professors "who would at least acknowledge that i had some merit and could "make it."

Lacking confidence in her own abilities and still of the mind that other graduate students knew much more than she did, Zoe followed the advice of her colleagues to "take the easiest route," to do whatever was requested of her and get through the "damned program." And she did. Her thesis was a quantitative examination of the different work orientations women bring into a job at the time they enter employment and their expectations about job satisfaction. However, in the end, Zoe completed a thesis project that was of little interest to her – it was a project that she "merely got through" even though she did manage to co-author one publication with her advisor.

yet, as with my thesis, i always felt as if the paper was more "his" than mine and by the time it reached publication i could barely recognize it as my work and my creation even though i am listed as first author.

The seeming lack of connection Zoe felt with her master's level work was shaped, not only by her own lack of self-confidence, but by experiences with two of her committee members, one of whom was her chair. These two committee members had worked and published together for more than 20 years. As Zoe worked with these two committee members she began to feel more and more like she was being "bounced around like a ping-pong ball between the two, each one wanting \*very\* different and often contradictory things" from her work. Then one day in her graduate seminar, her professor and committee member told "a story to the class that went something like this:

Suppose you've worked with a colleague for a very long time, but you've come to a point in your collegial relationship where you see things very differently. But, your professional relationship doesn't allow you to "fight it out" with your colleague. What do you do? Suddenly, one day you realize that there is another mechanism at your disposal-- you have a master's student in common. So, you wage your battles using \*her\*. You have her running between the two of you, you have her dancing like a puppet on a string, but you get your point across to the colleague.

Zoe recalled her reaction at the time.

Well, I left the class in tears, marched into my chair's office, and told him the story and, in no uncertain terms, put him on notice that he, as my chair, was going to assume a leadership role here, work out his professional difficulties with the colleague, and I \*did not\* expect it to impinge upon my progress anymore. From that day on I had no further problems with the other committee member. But, the hell I went through until I "discovered" the hidden agenda .... the game-playing and politics of higher ed are sometimes nauseating, stress inducing, and down right \*mean\* to the student!!! So, there you have my nightly vent-- always has to be something with me, doesn't it? But, there does have to be a better way than what we're currently doing to our students.

Despite such trials, after two years of full-time study, Zoe earned her master's degree in 1990, and in January of 1991, without missing a beat, she entered the doctoral phase of her graduate program in the same department.

### Helen

Helen, born in 1945, is the oldest of the women who participated in this study. When Helen was quite young her mother divorced and worked to support Helen, her brother and her own parents with whom they lived. Helen was raised primarily by her grandparents who she described as very traditional Europeans of Swedish and German extraction. Her grandfather had a sixth grade education, her grandmother, only grade three and when Helen thought about it she couldn't really remember whether or not her grandmother had known how to read. Today, despite having moved a number of times to

different parts of the country, Helen lives in the same town as her mother and typically, they meet once a week for breakfast. Helen described her upbringing as very traditional. Her mother maintains the belief that women should marry and be able to stay at home with their children. During the early years of her marriage most of Helen's friends were the "woman-half" of other couples and she had few role models of women as academics and certainly none with a feminist orientation. To Helen, such roots didn't "suggest graduate study as an appropriate path" for her: to follow after completing her undergraduate degree.

I'd still like, at times, to retreat to a subsistence farm -- part of me grows in the dirt.

After high school Helen completed two years at a small, liberal arts college and then married in 1965. She completed the remaining two years of her undergraduate degree at a midwest university while her husband was working on his Master's degree. In 1967, she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Education with a major in English. Graduate school wasn't among the options Helen considered after completing her undergraduate degree; she assumed she would get a job, which she did, and she supported her husband as he completed, first his master's degree and then his Ph.D. in mathematics education.

I wanted to be (and it was a decision I was comfortable with) a full-time mother and housewife (shades of my own mother's often voiced wishes that she had been), and have several more children (we had only one more).

In the years subsequent to completing her undergraduate degree Helen took a number of graduate classes at different institutions in education, history, and science and technology and raised two boys who were born in 1973 and 1977. In 1982, they moved to a small midwestern town where they live today. They chose the town, in part, because it had a graduate school Helen could go to. However, she delayed her entry to the graduate program for two years so she could teach at a parent-run school where she and her husband had enrolled their two sons.

In 1985, Helen entered a course work master's program in English with the idea that she would teach post-secondary English when she finished. Her long term plan was to teach only long enough to support her two boys through college and then quit. Helen was a full-time student throughout her master's program and she completed her degree in 1987 at a state university in the U.S. midwest. The intellectual range of her scholarship is reflected in the titles of the approved papers submitted as part of the requirements for her degree:

Generalization of the Feminine Character in Three Authors of Metafiction  
Absent Fathers. Unorthodox Daughters: Literary Prediction of Recent Psychological Observations.

“Mathematics and Eastern Symbolism As Unifying Images in Emerson’s ‘Circles.’

After completing her master’s degree Helen made the decision that she did not want to pursue a Ph.D. She had given some thought to pursuing a doctorate and had been interested in an interdisciplinary program at one mid-western university. However, she was “turned off” by a double language requirement, convinced she couldn’t be fluent in even one language. Only later, through her friends, did Helen learn that rather than establishing fluency, the language requirement could have been met by taking classes. A couple of years passed during which Helen taught first year composition in a non-tenure track position and she was happy doing that. She enjoyed teaching composition and thought she did it exceptionally well.

I loved it, got good responses from the students, and decided I’d found something I could enjoy doing for another ten years.

However, ultimately Helen had a change of heart about pursuing a doctorate and in 1992 she entered her current program as a full-time student. She first completed her course work and the year of residency and then wrote her comprehensive exams in the summer of 1994, followed by her preliminary orals in the fall. In mid-May of 1995 she submitted her dissertation proposal which was approved by her committee. She returned to the university full-time during the 1996-97 academic to finish writing and to defend her dissertation.

### Women’s Understandings

#### Motivations and Aspirations for Pursuing the Doctorate

Why do women choose to pursue a Ph.D.? What are their motivations and what aspirations do they associate with the experience? While factors that directly influenced the women’s decisions to enroll in a doctoral program were varied, their actual motivations for wanting to pursue a doctorate were surprisingly similar. All the women recognized the degree would give them increased professional flexibility and/or mobility; however, their motivations for pursuing the Ph.D. were related, first and foremost, to their own personal growth and development. The women wrote about their own love for learning, reading and writing, and about the satisfaction that comes from the pursuit of knowledge. They viewed pursuit of the doctorate primarily as both a challenge and an opportunity for personal growth.

For six of the women, the opportunity to teach in a university setting and to facilitate the growth and personal development of others was something to which they aspired. Tracy articulated this desire to inspire others most strongly.

The place I am reaching for is a place where intellectual activity is valued ... one where difference (ethnic, religious, sexual, etc.) is desirable. I see the path to this through education. That's how I have learned about different things, about feminism about politics, about other cultures. I want to open that door to others that's why I want to teach. Perhaps my aversion to the close-mindedness of my family is one of the reasons why I pursue a doctorate.

Only Sarah had a clear idea from a very early age that she would one day pursue a doctorate. However, she had no particular aspirations to become an academic. For her, the Ph.D. felt like a logical extension of her education. She had developed an interest in organizational culture and qualitative research and she thought a Ph.D. would make her more marketable for higher-level positions in educational administration.

It was partly for personal and partly for professional reasons. I decided many years ago that I would earn a doctorate .... Maybe because I have always been an over-achiever. Maybe to prove that I was smart enough (or bull-headed enough) to do it.

At a deeper level, Sarah's motivation to pursue a doctorate was intimately connected with her self-concept. She described herself as someone who comes from pioneer stock, an extrovert and an overachiever who is "a little more obsessive-compulsive about work and school than other people." For Sarah, the doctorate represented an external validation of her intellectual capabilities and her own sense of self-worth – factors that were deeply rooted in her experiences growing up as both the youngest and the only girl of three children.

[My brothers] got all the quantitative inclination in the family -- Needless to say, when you follow an act like that, as I did all through my school years, you are constantly compared (by teachers and parents) to your older (and, by inference, \_smarter\_) older brothers .... So I guess that all also feeds into the degree thing. I had a lot to prove, although most people would never understand that.

Sarah described how being female played a significant role in shaping her view of the world. Her character and temperament – the unique ways in which she responds to roadblocks and to adversity as challenges to be overcome – ultimately may have contributed to her persistence at the doctoral level.

.... You asked why I felt I had a lot to prove in finishing the degree. I guess I've always felt that, not just about the degree but in general. Maybe because I'm the third of three children and so was always trying to keep up (or measure up) with my brothers. Maybe because I'm a woman. I remember once in 10th grade my geometry teacher told me, in front of the whole class, that I was so dumb I couldn't find my way out of a phone booth. And they wonder why women are math-phobic .... In fact, I think my gender has

contributed more to that feeling of needing to prove myself than anything else. Always the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) intimation that somehow I couldn't/wouldn't or shouldn't do something because I was a "girl." Like somehow the act of reading or breathing or running track or whatever would overtax my delicate constitution and leave me unfit for my "real" duties (making babies, etc.). I was actually told that once by my junior high principal. I'd really like to track all these folks down and show them my degree, but it's not worth the effort. Besides, in their own misguided and twisted way, they probably contributed to my perseverance. Maybe I wouldn't have stayed with the program if I hadn't felt I had so much to show to so many.

Sarah further described herself as someone with a strong sense of "whimsy and irony" and "the most outrageous sense of humor" of anyone she knows. "I am fully convinced that if it hadn't been for my bull-headed compulsion to finish the degree, the 'Groff' background, and my sense of humor, I would never have made it. I would have quit back in '89 when my [second] husband walked out. And my life would have gone on, but not in the same way."

For three women, Camila, Tracy and Zoe, the inspiration and encouragement provided by previous teachers and professors was a factor that influenced their desire to further their education. Camila had not really planned to pursue a doctorate. She had entered a combined Master's-Ph.D. program in the fall of 1991 and thought she would complete the Master's degree and then return to Argentina. However, with her advisor's encouragement, Camila decided to continue her studies in the doctoral program. In Zoe's experience, two male professors in her undergraduate program where she was teaching part-time, actively supported her desire to pursue a Ph.D.

They wrote letters of reference when i applied for admission, helped me with a couple of assignments in grad school when i got "stuck", and kept in contact with me and it was not unusual for me to drop by their offices to chat while i was a grad student. This is how i came back here to teach, because we had kept the teacher-mentor-friend relationship alive they knew at all times how the grad degree was progressing and where i was at in the process.

Tracy's pursuit of the doctorate was also inspired by her previous teachers. In her prep school, she had enjoyed some very close relationships with her teachers who served not only as important role models, but provided her with a lot of support for her intellectual pursuits that she hadn't seemed to get from anywhere else, particularly her family.

In Denise's case, four years elapsed between the time she withdrew from her master's program and her decision to pursue a doctorate – a decision due, in part, to a "very depressing job search" in which she found herself "over qualified for everything that might have paid the bills and under qualified for anything interesting."

A major factor in Maggie's decision to pursue the Ph.D. was the fact that her husband's application had been accepted at a southern U. S. university that also offered a Ph.D. program in her chosen field of study. Had it not been for this turn of events Maggie doubted she would have pursued the doctoral program otherwise. She always knew her ultimate career goal was to teach in a university setting; however, it was only when she inquired about the Ph.D. program and was asked if she would rather pursue a master's degree in fine arts rather than a doctorate that she learned her own master's degree was not a terminal degree.

I felt I had an equivalent of a MFA already, even if it was not considered the terminal degree ... Besides, from her description, the PhD really did not allow for much creative work in the realm of performing. The emphasis was in theory and scholarly inquiry ... I decided since I already had one master's degree, I did not want another ... So, I decided then and there I wanted to do the PhD program.

Like Maggie – Camila, Denise, Zoe and Helen were particularly interested in learning about the theoretical and philosophical perspectives of various domains of knowledge. Camila had worked for seven years as a physical education teacher and she wanted to expand her knowledge and to develop “a broader understanding of educational theories and of teaching and learning in particular.” Zoe believed the systems approach of sociology rather than the individualistic perspective put forth by psychology seemed to be a better way to “deal with and explain the reality of individual existence.” Denise's interests in postmodernism, feminism, multiculturalism, changing epistemologies and chaos theory were a direct influence on her choice of an interdisciplinary doctoral program and her dissertation research.

Helen had not really given much thought to pursuing a doctorate after she completed her master's degree. She had been “turned off” by a double language requirement, convinced she couldn't be fluent in even one language. A couple of years passed during which Helen taught first year composition in a non-tenure track position and she was happy doing that. She enjoyed teaching composition and thought she did it exceptionally well. Then one day, a colleague with whom she shared an office “pitched a grad school flyer” her way and made an off-handed comment about how it would be nice to be able to do something like that. Helen read through the simple, one-page brochure. It described an interdisciplinary program with a long, wide-ranging list of possible areas of study including visual arts, philosophy, composition and cultural studies. Helen “KNEW” immediately that she had to go there – a decision she described as largely “intuitive.” Over the years Helen has come to place an increasing degree of trust in these kinds of intuitive

decisions, believing her choices have “a kind of coherence” that allows her to be comfortable with the long-term results.

Much of the pursuit of this degree -- like much of my teaching -- is intuitive. I've grown old enough to be able to trust this intuition comfortably a good deal of the time .... If it feels right do I go with it? -- often, yes. Depending on what's involved, though, my intuition might be only one of several things I consider.

Maggie, Sarah and Helen experienced a good deal of ambivalence as they anticipated entering academe. For Maggie and Sarah the ambivalence centered around strong feelings of self-doubt about their academic abilities. Maggie reflected on her lack of confidence when she first discussed entering the doctoral program with faculty at her university.

... when I considered the PhD I think I wanted to be a little more hesitant in fully 'entering in.' I didn't know if I could do it, meet the expectations of myself let alone my instructors. I think during my masters I never had a full confidence in my abilities and therefore never trusted them. I entered the first PhD classes the same way. My confidence level was very low ... When I initially discussed the program with several faculty members, I really had no over all idea of what to expect. I was surprised I was even accepted.

I think I entered the program so, shall I say, half-heartedly with the intent of never finishing that it curbed me from putting any meaning or representation to the degree. Perhaps this was intentional on my part to shield me from disappointment if I didn't succeed in the program ...

Sarah had even stronger feelings of self-doubt during her admission interview -- this despite the fact that she held a position as Associate Director of Admissions at a nearby university and had held other similar positions for a number of years. She recalled “being somewhat terrified” prior to the interview. She recalled being forced to defend her then limited exposure to the literature.

In contrast to Maggie and Sarah, Helen is confident about her abilities to do the kind of original work expected of doctoral students. She attributes some of her confidence to the wisdom that comes with experience.

I'm almost fifty -- not ancient, but old enough to have had a fair amount of experience in knowing how I fare in 'real' situations .... I know I can DO the work...

Nonetheless, Helen also experienced a great deal of ambivalence about entering academe. Like Maggie, Helen entered the program with the idea that she might not finish and initially, completing the degree wasn't something she considered seriously. However, unlike Maggie, Helen's interest in finishing the program had less to do with her confidence in her abilities and more to do with an interest in her own learning. Helen was interested in the program just “for the fun of it” and wanted to have a good year as a student.

I'm not much into testing my limits -- the adrenaline (or whatever) rush that comes from 'near-death' experiences (bungee cord jumping, for instance) isn't my style. I could probably 'do' that sort of thing too, but wouldn't unless forced. I'm willing -- and eager -- to \*push\* my limits, though, because I think that's where I learn. But this requires a sense of where I am and where the edge is.

And although Helen has never viewed the degree as a measure of her self-worth, she has wondered whether a fear of failure, or at least making certain she *could* see herself being successful, might have been at the root of her early lack of investment in finishing the degree. Still, Helen isn't sure even yet that she wants the degree and this ambivalence is a topic she is exploring in her own dissertation. Her ambivalence about completing the degree is related to the transformational nature of the experience and to the very notion of what it means to become an academic.

Partly, it is my own struggle with the whole notion of becoming an academic .... a major challenge is my own hesitation to \*become\* a Ph.D. I know it's supposed to change me somehow, but I'm not sure how, and so am somewhat reluctant to go through an initiation not knowing what the outcome will be -- another of the things I'm addressing in my dissertation .... I'm not sure I really like academics .... I wonder whether I'll be an academic I'll like, how the ritual will change me.

Factors that influenced the women's motivations to pursue the doctorate can be summarized in the following way:

#### Factors that Enhance Motivation

- a love for – and the desire to continue and extend – one's own learning, reading and writing;
- a quest for knowledge; the satisfaction that comes from expanding one's knowledge and learning about the theoretical and philosophical perspectives of various domains of knowledge;
- the desire for openness (in contrast to close-mindedness);
- personal growth and development;
- opportunity to challenge one's personal limits;
- the potential for enhanced professional flexibility and/or mobility and more interesting and/or challenging opportunities in the work place;
- the appeal of specific and/or interdisciplinary programs;
- the doctorate represents an external validation of one's intellectual capabilities and sense of self-worth;
- previous teachers and professors who either inspired or encouraged the women to pursue the doctorate.

#### Factors that Diminish Motivation

- self-doubt about one's academic abilities;
- fear of failure;
- the undesirability of testing one's limits;
- fear of and/or unwillingness to seek validation or be judged by external, unknown standards/criteria;

- uncertainty about the way(s) in which one will, or might be, personally transformed in the process of obtaining the doctorate;
- the undesirability of some academics as role-models.

### Preconceptions of the Doctoral Experience

In writing about their doctoral experiences six of the women described some of their preconceptions of what it might be like to pursue a doctorate. For two of the women the doctorate seemed to represent an almost insurmountable challenge – something akin to climbing Mount Everest. Maggie did not seem to have an image of herself as even worthy of being a doctoral student, much less an image of finishing the degree and venturing into the world as a Ph.D.

... I really had no over all idea of what to expect. I was surprised I was even accepted. Furthermore, even though I started the program I never thought I would finish. I left myself open to the possibility of quitting all the time. I reflect now as to whether this was a buffer for me, perhaps a fear of failure was haunting me .... Not that I set myself up to fail. It was the thought of that responsibility that comes along with being successful.

Maggie identified her fear of failure as epitomizing the risk that she might be successful. However, what is less easily understood are the risks Maggie associates with ‘success’ and becoming a Ph.D.

Much like Maggie, Sarah’s preconception of the doctorate seemed like an unending series of obstacles to be overcome – obstacles that were related to her own self-doubt. Self-doubt was her constant companion throughout her doctoral years and even a successful final defense was not sufficient to ameliorate this feeling.

While in Maggie and Sarah’s experiences an extraordinary sense of self-doubt represents one end of a continuum, at the other extreme, Tracy and Zoe held idealized preconceptions of the doctoral experience. Both used the analogy of a “great big coffee shop in the sky” to represent the kind of atmosphere and intellectual discourse they’d hoped to find in their programs.

Tracy wrote of her early expectations:

I think I imagined that it would be a sort of great big coffee shop in the sky kind of experience where everybody was intellectually stimulating and interesting and interested and fun basically. It represented a voyage for me into my adult life, into a career, into a sense of accomplishment and sense of independence. I imagined being surrounded by people that were accepting of my intellectual interests and supportive of my individuality and my politics. I think I imagined that everyone would be politically interested and involved too. Academically I thought it would be like undergrad only where you take classes that are vastly more interesting, more complex and more specialized.

Tracy returned from overseas after taking a year off following her master's degree to contemplate her future. She described the idea of a Ph.D. as something that was still 'very much in her blood.' She thought "doing a dissertation would be about doing something completely new." She knew it would be something she would enjoy and she imagined she would have a great deal of independence in graduate school.

Zoe readily confessed to being both an idealist and a romantic when she reflected on her preconceptions of the doctoral experience:

i had this notion that grad school would offer stimulating discourse and dialogue between students and faculty .... [i had] this mental picture of the "coffee house" atmosphere where minds could go to work and really debate and dig into issues.

Denise was much less idealistic in her preconceptions of the doctoral experience. She had a friend who spent three years trying to write her own thesis.

It took several years of therapy for her to let go of it and move on--degree still incomplete.

And by the time Denise had made her decision to pursue a Ph.D. she was very clear about both the process and her goals.

I wasn't as wide-eyed anymore. I knew what the hoops were and that it wouldn't be easy.

Denise also had the support of a partner "who had made it" and she had many good friends with doctorates. She knew she was smart enough, but she also knew it would be "a matter of not letting 'them' win."

To Helen, the doctorate as a credential, represented "a license to teach, a hurdle perhaps, or hoop." However, with respect to the process, she thought mostly it would be whatever she made of it. In entering the doctoral program she was motivated more by the desire to stimulate and feel connected with her own learning than she was by any desire to acquire another credential.

My own learning is what keeps me alive ... somehow, the notion of fun / enjoyment has to come in.

Helen viewed the doctorate as an opportunity for growth rather than a process of "moving forward" and from the beginning she has been insistent that the experience be an enjoyable and affirming one.

It dawned on me that I could, if you're interested, send you a copy of my proposal -- might give you some idea of how unusual I'm trying to keep my experience in the academy. This whole process of writing a dissertation should be affirming!

The preconceptions of the doctoral experience held by the women in this study range from a seemingly insurmountable challenge accompanied by extreme self-doubt on one end of a continuum, to an idealized and romantic conception of the experience at the other end. From my discussions with the women these idealized conceptions of the doctoral experience may be more closely aligned with the hopes they had about the anticipated quality of their experiences than they were with any real expectations they held about the doctoral process.

#### Factors Influencing Choice of Institution and/or Program

In this study the reasons given by women for their choice of doctoral institution/program fell into three categories:

1. Three women enrolled in doctoral programs at the same institution and program where they earned master's degrees.
2. For two women the location of their husband's employment was the single most important factor in selecting a doctoral institution; one woman who completed her master's program in the same department cited the relative closeness of the institution to home and children as the single most important factor influencing her choice of institution and program.
3. Two women chose specific doctoral programs of an interdisciplinary nature because of the appeal of a wide range of options as well as specific offerings of interest to them.

Three women, Camila, Zoe and Tracy enrolled in doctoral programs at the same institutions at which they had earned master's degrees. Tracy and Zoe entered institutions in their home states. Camila and Zoe entered their respective doctoral programs immediately upon completion of their master's degrees. However, after completing her master's degree Tracy spent a year abroad teaching English, improving her own language skills and contemplating her future. Initially, she was uncertain about whether she wanted to continue her studies at the doctoral level.

For three women, close geographic proximity to their families was the single most important factor influencing their choice of doctoral institution. For both Sarah and Maggie the choice of doctoral institution was tied to their husbands' place of employment. Sarah wrote:

I was married at the time and my husband got transferred .... It was too far to commute, so I applied to [another] PhD program in business instead. I didn't get in. By the time I discovered that, I was working for a different college and ... it occurred to me that \_any\_ doctorate would do if what I wanted was to advance in ed administration (the ads only say "earned doctorate required," they don't specify a field). So I applied to [Midwest State] U's Education program .... They accepted me with open arms.

For Maggie, a major influence on her choice of institution was the fact that her husband's application had been accepted at a southern U. S. university that also offered a Ph.D. program in her field. Had it not been for this turn of events Maggie is unsure that she would have pursued the doctoral program otherwise.

Both Denise and Helen were attracted to specific interdisciplinary doctoral programs because of the appeal of the departmental offerings. Helen was attracted to her department by a long, wide-ranging list of possible areas of study that included visual arts, philosophy, composition and cultural studies. For Denise, the department in which she ultimately enrolled was willing to credit her previous graduate work at the Seminary toward the master's requirement, even though she hadn't completed the degree and this factor made that program more appealing than others she investigated. For Denise such recognition would mean that she hadn't "wasted time" with her previous studies.

### The Admissions Process

For the three women, Camila, Zoe and Tracy, the transition to doctoral programs in the same departments where they earned master's degrees was not experienced as problematic.

Maggie described her experience during a pre-admission meeting with a faculty member who would later become her advisor. It was only during this meeting that Maggie learned her master's degree was not a terminal degree in her field.

I remember my first meeting with my advisor. The day was sunny and I was a little nervous ... I described my position with work and my subsequent schedule ... I had taken my lunch, peanut butter and jelly. She seemed to disapprove of that. I remember discussing my interests to which she inquired if I was more interested in a MFA. I was not since I felt I had an equivalent of a MFA already, even if it was not considered the terminal degree ... Besides, from her description, the PhD really did not allow for much creative work in the realm of performing. The emphasis was in theory and scholarly inquiry ... I decided since I already had one master's degree, I did not want another ... So, I decided then and there I wanted to do the PhD program.

For Helen, although the admission process itself was not problematic, the preparation and arrangements that were necessary before she actually made a commitment to move to the campus were quite complex. It was an orchestrated move that involved the

support and cooperation of the entire family. Despite the fact that Helen was not “invested in finishing” the degree and didn’t “depend on this picture” of herself finishing, she and her family, in fact, had laid out careful plans that would allow her to complete her residency requirement. Helen’s husband applied for a sabbatical from his university and together they visited the campus, a 16-hour return drive from home to a neighbouring state, put their names on the married students’ housing list and met with the chair of one of the departments about the possibility of her husband teaching there for a year while Helen fulfilled her residency requirements. Their older son decided to spend the year studying in England. Their younger son pulled himself out of high school during what would have been his sophomore year and together, the three of them moved to the university. Orchestrating these arrangements, getting someone to house sit and look after their cats while they would be away “was quite an adventure.”

we did a lot of preparing before we made a commitment to go -- not before I applied, but before we finally said “we’re going” .... Having accomplished that, I figured the degree itself would be easy.

In contrast to the other five women in the study, both Sarah and Denise experienced the admission process as a struggle for survival. Sarah was the only woman in the study who described a personal interview as a requirement of the admission process:

The interview day was all right, except that Ben (who would later turn out to be my advisor) was a real pain in the ass. He tried to pin my ears back about “what I read to keep current” (meaning journals, books, etc.) .... I pointed out that in admissions, you tend to work 60 hour weeks, and outside of [a particular journal], I didn’t have time to read much else. I didn’t tell him I had never heard of [that particular journal]. Anyway, the more shit he gave me, the more I tried to give back to him. I noticed that the other faculty members seemed to like that about me. After the interview, I met with a group of current students .... Then I also interviewed for a graduate assistant position. I can’t really remember much else that happened that day, although I seem to recall being taken to lunch at the Faculty Club by the faculty .... The next day (a Saturday) I took the GRE; I was told it was necessary for admission, even though I had taken it years before (and couldn’t locate the score).

Only one day after writing the exam Sarah received a phone call telling her she’d been accepted into the program.

My first thought after hanging up was “So why did I have to take the damned GRE?”

Both the illogic of the admission requirements and Sarah’s perception of the admission interview as an adversarial process that faculty were particularly proud of, were memories that stayed with Sarah long after she had completed her degree.

Denise's experience in gaining admission to her doctoral program was "one huge challenge that almost undid" her resolve to continue. More than a year and a half passed from the time Denise first applied until she was formally admitted to the program. During that time she completed a full year of doctoral level course work and wrote the first of two parts of her preliminary qualifying exams. Denise had applied to an interdisciplinary Ph.D. degree program and requested that her master's degree work from the seminary be used to fulfill the master's requirement. She made this request based on a conversation she'd had with a graduate advisor. Denise documented the sequence of events that contributed her delayed admission:

- In January Denise submitted her application to the Ph.D. program;
- In mid-April she received letter of acceptance into the master's program;
- Around the third week in April Denise called the graduate advisor who explained that she had been admitted to the master's program initially, rather than the Ph.D. program, because her letter of intent was unfocused. The advisor informed Denise that she could request a change of program during the fall semester. Denise was assured that a change in her status would be likely if she did well. Confident in her abilities, she trusted this would not be a problem.

As Denise reflected on these events she realized, in retrospect, that the difficulty and pain she experienced throughout this process was due to her choosing to write in what she described as an "unusual" way – a way that she thinks "was seen as unfocused by those in power." She described the following sequence of events:

- During fall semester Denise met with her graduate advisor who told her she was doing very well in the pro seminar and that she understood from Denise's other instructor that she was doing well in that class also;
- At the beginning of the spring semester Denise's advisor suggested she write a one page letter to the faculty requesting a change in status from MA to Ph.D.;
- In mid-February Denise gave the written request, containing the information from her previous advisor, to her 'new' graduate advisor. Denise also enclosed records of her previous graduate work at the seminary, the grades from her two fall classes – both 'A's, and a description of her anticipated dissertation research;
- In early April, the 'new' grad advisor wrote to Denise informing her that the faculty had agreed that requests for a change in status such as the one Denise had submitted would not be considered until after students had passed the first set of written exams;
- In mid-September of her second year Denise was notified that she had passed her exams. The graduate advisor told Denise she should write a simple two-sentence request for a change in status. Her advisor also cautioned Denise that her request might not be considered until February when other admissions requests were reviewed. She indicated that Denise might be treated as a new student and, therefore, she would be competing for a slot among the 10 applicants who would be accepted into the program.

Denise took the above chronology to another member of the faculty who eventually would serve as the chair of her committee and she presented Denise's case at a faculty meeting. This resulted in a change of status in a matter of weeks. In the end, Denise was left with the feeling that the department had handled the situation incompetently. The challenge this situation had presented had a bifurcated significance for Denise. On the one hand, it left her questioning her sense of 'place' within the program; on the other, it had a counter-intuitive effect of strengthening her resolve to continue.

I also kept good records of the major scandal as you could probably tell from this chronology. I wasn't going to let them win.

### Ph.D. Course Work

The women in this study identified a number of issues and concerns relating to the course work phase of their programs. However, it should be kept in mind that within the broader context of their experiences all the women, except Maggie, generally experienced this as one of the least problematic and, in some cases, the most enjoyable phase of their programs. This was especially true for Sarah:

The classes are by far the easiest part, even when you're taking four at a time!

The factors the women described as influencing the course work phase of their programs can be thought of as falling within two broad areas: the task and relational dimensions of their programs (Figure 4.) Included within the task dimensions of the program are: (1) program requirements and expectations; and (2) status (enrollment, employment and commuter status). The relational dimensions of the course work phase of the program include university relationships (with faculty and peers) and other role demands (partner, parent and elder care). Each one of these dimensions either enhanced or diminished the degree to which the women felt integrated within their programs.

#### Task Dimensions of Course Work

Within the Task Dimensions of the course work phase of the doctorate the issues and concerns that women in this study described as either enhancing or diminishing their progress related to (1) program requirements and expectations and (2) status.

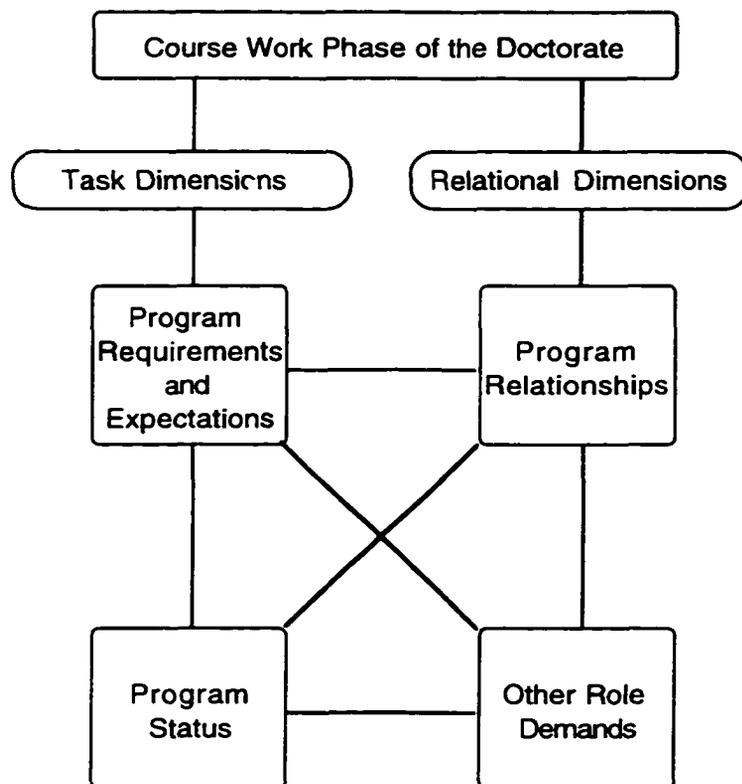


Figure 4. Overview of Task and Relational Dimensions of the Course Work Phase of the Doctorate.

#### Program Requirements and Expectations

Five women, Sarah, Tracy, Zoe, Denise and Maggie, described some of the issues related to course requirements and expectations that influenced their doctoral experiences. Maggie enrolled in a combined master's-Ph.D. program and had credits from her master's program transferred to her doctoral institution. Because of institutional differences in the way credits were evaluated she did not receive full credit for her master's work. As a result, to meet the program requirements for the Ph.D., Maggie took a total of 28 courses, including one workshop and one course she audited. She took 11 courses during the first three years of her program while enrolled as a part-time student, 13 courses during her year of residency and 4 courses post-candidacy. The full impact this course load had on Maggie's health and well-being will be discussed more fully in conjunction with her program status.

Both Sarah and Tracy described concerns with the breadth of the course requirements. Sarah began her course work in 1989, taking one course in each of the spring and fall terms before registering as a full-time student in the fall. She described her program requirements as very loosely structured and, initially, she felt overwhelmed by the freedom of choice she had in selecting her courses and felt she needed more direction. She had never been notified of an orientation for new students, something she attributes possibly to the fact that she initially registered as a part-time student; neither did she receive formal advisement regarding course selections in her first year of study. She simply reviewed course materials and the university catalog and registered for what she thought were the appropriate required courses. Because the calendar stated that full-time residency was established by registering in 10 credit hours of courses per quarter, Sarah registered for four 3-hour credit courses in both the fall and spring quarters of her first year. Only later did she find out that students usually met the residency requirement by taking three courses plus one hour of independent study each quarter. Sarah also worked between 20 and 25 hours a week at her assistantship and carrying the extra course gave her a workload that was heavier than most students, which she described as “something that really hampered my mental health.” She saw the faculty as “particularly proud” that a 3-hour course in her department was at least as much work as a 4 or 5-hour course in any other department. Over time, she came to see the benefit of a more loosely structured program which she described as a “sort of a do-it-yourself project.” She discovered a number of different topics that she loved and was able to construct a program that was uniquely suited to her own interests.

However, there were times when both Sarah and Tracy experienced the course requirements as restrictive. Tracy reflected:

I thought I could indulge myself and take the courses I wanted to etc. But there is a fairly rigorous list of requirements for the doctorate. This only means that some of my intellectual interests must be postponed until I have the time to work on these interests on my own.

Sarah, too, felt constrained by course requirements. By the first semester of her second year Sarah had her full dissertation committee in place and they met that fall to approve the course selections she had outlined for her program. Each member made specific suggestions about courses they thought would be related to her interests. Before they would agree to ‘sign off’ on her program they insisted that Sarah take at least two courses in statistics.

... they thought this would make me a better 'consumer' and a more capable advisor on down the road (their rationale was, how could I advise a student who was doing quantitative research if I didn't understand it?)

However, Sarah had already decided that a qualitative orientation to research more appropriately characterized the kinds of research questions she was interested in.

... so I agreed to be railroaded in two stats classes (which I kind of enjoyed, I just don't happen to be interested in the kinds of questions that are answered by statistical methods). I should have said that it was highly unlikely I would even WANT to advise someone who was interested in quant.-oriented questions).

In the end, one of the statistics courses was never offered and Sarah substituted a different course, but during the negotiation process with her committee she felt as if she'd been railroaded into an agreement in which her interests were not respected.

Like Sarah, Zoe's way of looking at the world seemed to be more closely aligned with qualitative rather quantitative orientations to research. However, she found herself in a very traditional sociology department that had a strongly quantitative orientation and relied heavily on statistical approaches to inquiry and data analysis. To Zoe, this approach seemed to be a rather foreign way of understanding the world. Statistics was also Zoe's "weak suit." While she felt sufficiently confident to handle statistical computations, she was less certain about her ability to understand why and when a particular approach or method might be used; because her ability to 'really understand' what she was doing had always been central to her own sense of accomplishment, her lack of intellectual fit with the program in the department left her feeling as though something about herself was lacking.

I remember making the comment several times that i felt like a fraud-- that i was pulling the grades, but didn't feel as if i were getting and retaining the knowledge i needed and, in many ways, throughout the entire experience i always felt like an outsider in the department.

What stood out most for Zoe was a pervasive feeling that her course work was fragmented.

i still feel as if my education was more of the "hit-and-miss" variety and that my coursework and understanding of sociology, the subject i love, is fragmented and lacks a degree of integration and coherence .... Each course i took seemed to stand independently of all the others i was taking and i never did get the feel that anything i took in the course of my education seemed to "fit" with anything else i had taken. When i raised this concern to my advisor i was continually told that the problems arose from the fact that our department was small, we had numerous faculty on sabbatical, and were just not equipped to offer a sequential set of course offerings like i was proposing.

In contrast to Zoe, Camila had little difficulty with 'intellectual fit' in her department. Her years of schooling in history in Argentina had provided her with a background in research and before entering her doctoral program she was already quite familiar with anthropology and interpretive research methods. She took courses in her doctoral program that examined other research methods but she was uncomfortable with some of the "ethical stances."

so ethnography was natural to me. just before i came to the usa i remember i read the life of a scientist by david l. on bateson's life and loved it. i thought i would be an anthroeducational person of sorts. plus in teaching p.e. i had informally used ethnographic techniques to assess my students: participant observation, note taking, note making, interviews, artifact analysis. it sounds funny--its the truth.

Denise described only one experience that stood out in her mind relating to the course work phase of her program, but it was one that taught her a great deal about herself as well as her professor's expectations of what constituted acceptable academic discourse. During her first year of doctoral work Denise took a class in which students were required to write a midterm exam, a four-page popular culture scrapbook and a major term paper. The midterm exam required students to respond to questions discussing films they had seen in the course. The class was taught by a professor who Denise described as "the most politically outspoken feminist in the department." Denise anticipated this professor would not be strict about the form of her writing. She thought the ideas would be more important than form. Each of Denise's responses on the midterm went a page over the stated limit; they did not have introductions, conclusions or thesis statements. They were explorations of the material. After the exam, Denise was informed that this approach was not acceptable. The instructor had expected students to write "full academic essays." She also informed Denise that as a graduate student, she should not have been concerned about length, but Denise noted that the written instructions had been clearly delineated on the exam: undergraduates – 4 pages; graduates – 6 pages. Although it had been a 'take-home' exam, Denise's experience from 20 years of education told her that her writing style had been appropriate. Her instructor had thought otherwise and the outcome was that the instructor told Denise that she didn't know how to write.

For her second assignment in this class, Denise very carefully constructed each page of the scrapbook with a clear thesis. On this assignment, she received full credit. On the final paper Denise spent a great deal of time and energy constructing a text that resembled "academic" writing. She began by introducing scholars who had written about the theory she was using and then wrote a full introduction, complete with thesis statement.

The body was filled with examples and quotations that supported her points and the conclusion drew the paper to a close.

The instructor graciously admitted that at least this paper was well written. Gosh, thanks. This time I knew what her expectations were. It should never have been a question of my ability to write, rather my understanding of her expectations of writing. She still gave me a B. It wasn't the paper SHE would have written. But then I wasn't one of her favorites and she hadn't told me what to "cover" even though I'd met with her to discuss the paper.

This event made me angry. Very angry! To this day I dislike the professor in question. It's all the more ironic that I was one of her TAs at the time, and I was grading undergraduate exams. I was also running the writing center on campus and tutoring students in a variety of disciplines.

This was an important event in Denise's experience that ultimately shaped her subsequent approaches to writing and influenced her choice of dissertation topic.

After that experience I began consciously pushing at the borders and trying on what I considered rather outrageous written styles to see what faculty would think and to explore how the writing style influences how and what we think.

In summary, issues identified by the women in this study relating to the task dimensions of course work – program requirements and expectations – included the following:

- evaluation of transfer credit;
- the importance of program advisement when needed;
- program requirements: the range of available courses; the degree to which students are permitted to shape their own programs;
- integration of content across courses;
- intellectual fit with the dominant research paradigm in the department;
- clarity of performance expectations in courses.

#### Program Status

Program status is the second element within the task dimensions of the course work phase of the doctorate that women described as influencing their experiences. Issues relating to program status included enrollment, employment and whether or not one commuted great distances to the university on a regular basis. Each of these factors, in one way or another, either enhanced or diminished the women's sense of integration within their programs.

The women in this study who were enrolled full-time and held either research or teaching assistantships and did not commute great distances described more positive

experiences that enhanced their degree progress. With the exception of Maggie, all the women in this study were registered as full-time students during the first year of study and thus fulfilled their residency requirements at the start of their programs. Maggie did not complete her residency requirement until the fourth year of her program.

Maggie began her course work in the spring of 1988. During the first three years of her program she was enrolled as a part-time student and took a total of 11 courses at the rate of two or three courses per semester. She was also employed as a clerk in the university library where she worked an 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. shift and because her husband was also attending school full-time it was her job that served as their primary source of income during most of this period. One benefit of Maggie's employment was the release time she was given to take a class during the day, but to do this demanded a schedule she described as "horrendous." She worked Mondays and Wednesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., as well as a Tuesday shift from noon to 9 p.m. and rotating Saturdays. To accommodate her the one day class she was required to work Thursday evenings as well. She found the schedule particularly hectic since she had to return to work after class. In addition, she taught part-time in the community to enhance her professional skills and to supplement their finances. Maintaining this schedule "allowed little time for anything but eating occasionally and sleeping." As the primary bread-winner she found herself "pushing the boundaries of physical and emotional exhaustion."

I literally remember having crying jags as a consequence of my schedule. I saw little of my husband as he took on night jobs and temporary jobs during odd hours. Weekends were packed from the moment I got up to the moment I finally went to bed.

At times Maggie thought by pushing herself to finish the degree sooner she and her husband could leave the south and move back to the northwest. On less hopeful days she thought she might never finish the degree.

Ironically, throughout the entire course of my study, in the back of my mind, I kept repeating to myself, "Well, I may not even finish this d ..."

The demands of her academic and work schedules had a devastating impact on Maggie's already fragile self-confidence. She described her "quitting escapism" as a "security blanket" that helped her to deal with both "the pain of the loneliness" she was experiencing and "the risk of accomplishment." To Maggie, her fear of failure seemed to epitomize the risk that she might be successful.

Not that I set myself up to fail. It was the thought of that responsibility that comes along with being successful. After all, if I can accomplish working 8-4, class 4-8 and projects 8pm to 3-4 am for two weeks I should be able to do anything, right? This fear

manifested itself in an obsession for perfection and bigger and better papers, projects, etc. I was constantly seeking a better way which often times impeded the progress of my projects and ultimately extended my early morning hours. I developed a drive that I believe has made me a bit neurotic, because even if it is wonderful, I question what more, I look for a flaw and even make them up.

Maggie was the only woman in this study who received neither teaching nor research assistantships during her program. Two women, Sarah and Camila, received research assistantships while Tracy, Denise, Zoe and Helen each held teaching assistantships. The other six women's experiences holding university assistantships will be discussed in more detail toward the end of this chapter.

In addition to enrollment and employment, one woman's status as a commuter student influenced the degree to which she felt integrated in the department and, in her assessment, also influenced faculty attitudes toward her. Zoe was the only woman who commuted long distance – 120 miles a day – throughout her program which meant she didn't have the same opportunities as other students to socialize with her colleagues and she believed her 'commuter status' contributed to some faculty members seeing her as less committed to her studies.

i always got the message, albeit subtly, from the graduate faculty that they, too, thought i was doing this as a whim. maybe shaped by my commuter status since i couldn't be integrated as fully as students living close to the university ... i guess i can't blame them for their perceptions and the messages they gave off, but i do think it "stunted" my progress in the early years of grad school \*and\* i know it "stunted" the goals and aspirations i set for myself with regard to the kind of job i could get and the kind of job they saw me as "wanting" anyway. So, i guess that may account for many of my feelings that i did the grad school thing on my own with little support from faculty.

For these women, program status was an important factor that either enhanced or diminished their sense of integration within the department during the course work phase of their programs. Full-time enrollment, university-sponsored assistantships and living in close proximity to the university were factors the women perceived as enhancing their progress and contributing to faculty perceptions about students' commitment to their studies. These various task dimensions of the course work phase of the doctorate are presented in Figure 5.

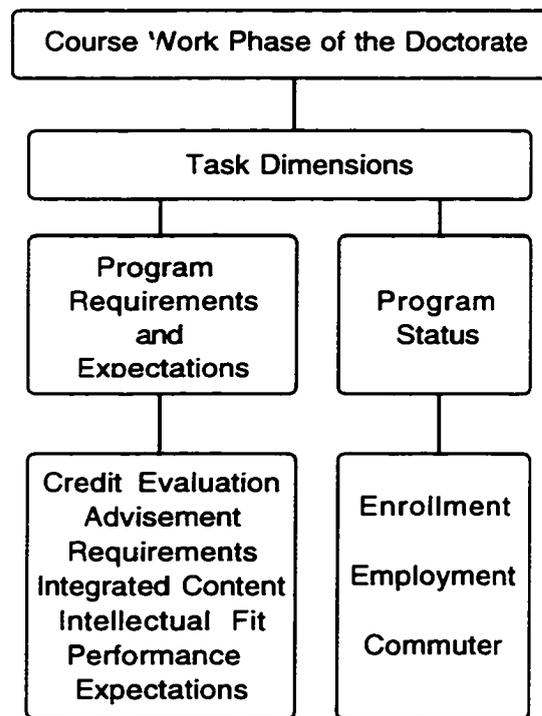


Figure 5. Task dimensions of the course work phase of the doctorate.

#### Relational Dimensions of Course Work

During the course work phase of their programs, the nature of the relationships women developed, both within their programs and outside the university, had significant and varied impacts on their doctoral experiences. The relational dimensions of the women's course work experiences within the university included the department milieu, relationships with faculty and peers and relationships with advisors. However, rather than restrict the discussion of this last dimension, advisor/advisee relationships, to a single context, it will be discussed more fully at a later point in the dissertation. The second category can be framed in terms of the role demands associated with non-university relationships including those of partner, parent and care of one's elders. The relational dimensions of the course work phase of the doctorate are depicted in Figure 6.

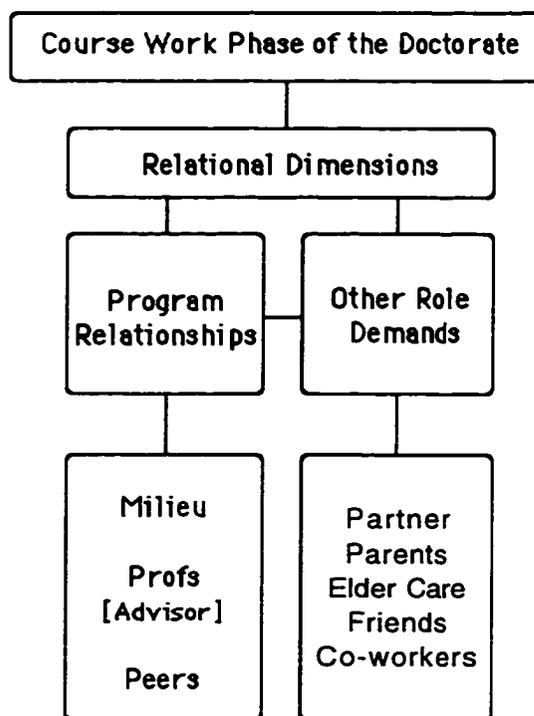


Figure 6. Relational dimensions of the course work phase of the doctorate.

### Program Relationships

Sarah and Helen described some of their instructors' attributes that were important in creating a positive learning environment. Sarah wrote, that with the exception of two individuals her instructors were "very good if not excellent professors who took real interest in their subject and were very fair to students."

I never felt discriminated against or belittled as a woman, and I never heard of anyone having a problem (at least, not in my program) due to their gender, etc. There was never a problem with participation in the classroom (no apparent 'chilling effect').

Helen, more than any of the other women, described her relationships with faculty in the context of some of the substantive issues she was wrestling with in her dissertation research. One of these issues related to the juxtaposition of her previous understandings of history with a newly acquired feminist perspective. One course, "Women in American History," she took "from a friend" just before entering the doctoral program made her realize how difficult it was to set aside her own learned approach to history – through the study of wars, explorers and dates – in favor of a more feminist approach to the subject. She found herself having to "fit the women" into her male version of history. Helen also

described reading one particular book, Women's Ways of Knowing, that had a significant influence on her thinking and her teaching practice.

I had learned very well to speak a second language (masculine, argumentative, debate, all that) but hadn't learned how to talk to women! .... Women's Ways of Knowing locates "separate knowing" ... as somewhat incomplete in comparison to connected knowing. I was euphoric (I've settled down a bit, but not entirely) over WWoK, and was worried about losing women's connected voices in an effort to teach them separate / argumentative style.

Given this shift in her perspective, when Helen was given a teaching assignment, she was having "serious doubts about teaching argument to a class that, predictably, would be 60% women."

Helen also had a long standing "though unrequited" interest in philosophy. As an undergraduate she'd taken a course in philosophy, but found it incomprehensible and eventually dropped it. In her doctoral program, one of the courses she selected was the Rhetoric of Philosophical Debate. However, with the experience of the history course still fresh in her mind, she didn't want to "frame" her "newfound chance to know something about philosophy in a traditional, male framework." She began searching "for something to read about 'feminist philosophy' that would provide a feminist frame."

I could, I thought, then fit in the 'dead white males' while retaining the feminist foundation -- as I'd had to fit the women into my male version of history.

After a number of inquiries Helen was directed to one particular professor.

I walked in during her office hours, briefly went through the story above, and asked if she could suggest something for me to read. She rummaged a bit in her book shelves, pulled out a book that I've since bought and gone back to many times. So in a sense, she was able to listen to me and provide what I needed.

Helen found the faculty in her department to be supportive, open to students' ideas and flexible. Even after she left the campus following her residency one faculty member learned to use electronic mail so He'en could take a course long-distance with her that fall term.

Three women, Camila, Zoe and Maggie, experienced what could be thought of as critical events in their relationships with faculty during the course work phase of the doctorate. These events had varied degrees of influence on the women's experiences.

When I asked Camila whether there were particular people, experiences or events during the course work phase of her program that stood out in her mind as being significant she described an interaction with a professor in a statistics class in which she "told the

professor to his face in front of the whole class” that she didn’t agree with his “manipulative grading techniques.” I asked Camila to tell me more about this interaction.

the first assignment has a question that says “what is your interpretation of the data?” now, i take interpretation to mean: given the data you have, what are the possible ways to read them--explain them? which is what i did. he told me--and graded me down for it--that my answer was wrong. i asked whether i had failed in providing an explanation to what i had done and he said no. thus i said interpreted but not in your way. he didn’t like this. he still graded me down. i stood up in front of the whole class--big lab and 35 people in them- and talked for 3 or 4 minutes non stop about what i thought about it. he interrupted my talk and i said “don’t interrupt me i haven’t finished” and he turned pale. i was stressed out but finished with what i had to say. he didn’t like it.

Camila noted that because of this incident she since had acquired a somewhat legendary reputation in her department. She went on to add:

someone told me that “i was a legend” because of this event ... now it turns out to be that i do like math and he did everything thru math which to me is a big mistake if you are explaining basic stats techniques. i pointed this out too but i enjoyed the math approach so to speak also.

In part, Camila attributed this conflict to cultural and ethnic differences.

i think i was too straight forward for the american culture to take it. the professor is korean which made things really difficult because we were both foreigners in America.

Camila recalled “locking horns” with the same professor on the first day of class. He put a problem on the board and told the class that he was going to explain it.

as a matter of fact, the first day we already had {we had already} locked horns because he puts a problem up and says he is gonna explain it and i looked at it and calculated roughly with no formula cos i understood it and raised my hand and said “this is a way to do it” and he got sort of very uncomfortable because he wanted me to let him go thru the formula and explain it etc. etc. etc. and when i provided my answer all he had to say was that my method was not accurate because you could not calculate to the last decimal (which was true, he was right on this and i knew this myself too--that was not important to me). so his response was an anal retentive approach and i remember thinking “this should be interesting.” well believe me it was. by the 3rd project i went to his face and the ta’s face and told both of them that i had triple checked every single answer and i did not want any i meant any points taken from my project. they did not take any. that was also amazing to me: they seemed to respond to threat. it was bitter and i felt pain in my stomach.

I asked Camila whether the ‘legendary’ interaction with this professor had influenced how other faculty in the department related to her – or had influenced their expectations of her, in particular, those of her advisor. I wondered if she thought she might have broken some unspoken rule by questioning the professor and his classroom procedures.

at the end of the course i wrote a 3 page evaluation of the course and turned it in and signed it. my classmates said to me i was committing suicide. i was not and i knew it. the chair called me to the office; actually, i had said all of us should do something like this because all people complained about him. of course out of 35 only 3 did and one of them cos she was an officer in the student assoc and i felt she felt the pressure to do it. the third person is my boyfriend and he was as pissed as i was. when the chair called me in she also called the other two in her office and we had a nice talk and she said we were right. she said so and she also ensured and i know this for a fact that the next quarter things went differently and she also made recommendations based on our recommendations to the next year of stats teaching. so we did change things. the other professors thought i was mean i think. 2 of them told me to my face. one though told me he thought it was good that i had done this. and the chair took action. so i think we were right. i went to talk to the other stats professor and made sure he also understood what i had to say cos they were bragging about how they were coteaching and yet they used totally different criteria for everything: for teaching, assessing, giving tests etc. so i went into his office and asked to talk with him and told him what i thought. i also said the textbook was the worst choice for stats beginners and said this should not be used. they did not use it after that. i am tired of writing. i ll get back to you later.

I asked Camila why she hadn't felt, as had some of her colleagues, that she would be committing academic suicide by openly expressing her dissatisfaction.

i think i felt like i usually do that stating what i think is important and may lead to change. it did in this particular circumstance. i think i must have known inside my head that change was possible and that the chair would listen to me or our requests as she did ... i think that i have been used to doing these kinds of things since i was young, a junior high student or so. and in . . . much more repressive context. so there i went. as we pointed out some other times though, this society is pretty anal and repressive anyways--under the cover of democracy and equality. it turns out to be difficult.

Camila recalled having many memories of "telling things to people's faces and being put down or being discriminated against or being targeted as a 'problem' by others."

i think this somehow happened to me in the grad network when i raised the issue of pretending to accept or not accept people who were not yet in. i hate that kind of logic.

Camila went on to describe how she felt both her gender and her outspokenness contributed to her being targeted as a problem by others.

in argentina i was the president of a cooperative of workers and then i went on to be the president of a federation of cooperatives. as you can see, it was a high responsibility job. i was a woman and i was young and i was a PE teacher. i dealt with discrimination all the time and i used also to tell it like it was. however, in argentina, this is more common. i was able to do a lot of work with a lot of people so i know i have "relatively" good social and job-related skills. we accomplished a lot of things in those years so this is evidence of what i say. i noticed, however, there and here in particular, that young women in leadership positions are usually given a lot of BS. i also noticed that when a woman is strong and tells it like it is, she is immediately catalogued of men-like behaviour. i had consciously stepped out of leadership positions here though i did a LOT of work for the students' assoc and for the school in general etc. this also created friction with some people who did not like me saying what i thought. same thing applies with my adviser.

Zoe's relational experiences in the course work phase of the doctorate had a mixed influence. On the one hand the task dimensions of the course work intensified her passion for social issues and she became much quicker to speak up and argue for the oppressed. She became less concerned about the material pleasures in life and more concerned about real change that makes the world a better place to live. These experiences influence both the nature of her friendships and her image of herself. While she has always seen herself as introspective, she now sees herself as even more reflective than she used to be with "little patience for false persons" and she prefers to associate with "those who are real and authentic."

However, the interaction of the task and relational dimensions of Zoe's experiences during her course work seemed to have a mixed effect. In the classroom environment Zoe found scant attention given to "stimulating critical thinking and discussion among the students." To her the faculty members seemed "typically more concerned with "shaping" the student to his/her particular mindset and belief system" and the students seemed to align themselves accordingly.

Most of the students themselves were so consumed with concerns of continued funding and "competing" with one another for these scarce resources that few relationships were formed. And, those that were formed tended to align themselves along faculty interests (each student allying with the particular ontology and specialty area of the faculty he/she worked with) so, there was at all times an inherent division among the students based upon this.

Zoe felt as if she was surrounded more by competitors and superiors than she was by colleagues.

We, as graduate students, were always reminded (by both action and subtle means) that we were the peons. we had not yet reached the level where we were taken as credible and serious scholars.

Throughout the course work phase of her doctoral program Zoe continued the 120 mile commute each day to take courses and to fulfill her teaching assistantship in the department. And in addition to raising her children and maintaining the home front, she continued teaching part-time at her former undergraduate institution. After two years, the stress of balancing these multiple roles and responsibilities began to take its toll on Zoe.

But, did i stop? Did i tell anyone that things were really ganging up on me? Heck no! I had never learned to tell anyone that i "couldn't" do something. i just kept plugging away.

For Maggie, whose self-confidence entering the doctoral program was shaky at best, a seemingly innocent remark by a professor in her first doctoral course was the only

trigger needed to catapult Maggie into a “deep depression.” Maggie had found the first course very interesting and the final project integrated concepts the students had been working on that semester. Maggie was crushed when, after her performance, the professor told her she was “getting stronger.” Maggie showed a video tape of her performance to a friend whose response was to laugh, though no humour had been intended. Maggie was devastated. She had no friends to turn to. They were still so new in town and her husband was preoccupied with his own studies. She had no one to turn to for comfort or support.

I was experiencing such depression at work that it was all I could do to shelve a book.

Unbeknownst to her professors, the stress and depression Maggie experienced that first semester was aggravated by a pre-existing thyroid condition which had been treated previously with medication. When Maggie and her husband had left the northwest her physician had wanted her to go off the medication for a period of time to test the level of thyroid in her system and to determine whether it would work on its own. The longer Maggie was off medication, the worse her depression became. Eventually complications set in and Maggie underwent outpatient surgery. Thereafter, she was able to resume her medication but it took some time before Maggie was able to recover physically and climb out of her depression and her loneliness and insecurity about returning to school seemed to prolong her recovery.

As part of her course work, Maggie also took a science course which she felt drew her back into “old patterns and hyperbehaviors” reminiscent of her early undergraduate years. She found her “old sense of competition coming back” and she hated it. Often quiet in her classes, Maggie questioned her own abilities constantly.

Reflection, doubt, and many questions were continuous with me.

At the same time Maggie’s husband was struggling with his own self-confidence and although he’d always been supportive in the past, the strain began to take its toll and he and Maggie questioned their relationship endlessly.

Maggie took other classes she enjoyed more; she learned a great deal, but working full-time, she found the workload very heavy. However, many times Maggie found her advisor was patient and supportive of her development.

The theory class was an eye opener for me and I gained a great deal from it. It required a great deal of reading and writing but my advisor was very patient and nurturing in helping me. She gave me a good direction for my papers.

Other instructors were supportive of Maggie as well and were quite flexible about some of the program requirements. Maggie described one summer session as a “blessing” because she was “allowed to do an independent study” in lieu of a core requirement.

The instructor was very thoughtful and available for me. She worked with my schedule and I submitted a presentation to the class. I wondered how others felt about this arrangement but I did not mention it to very many individuals. Those in the class seemed supportive.

The demands of Maggie’s work and academic schedules left little time for socializing and while many of her colleagues tried to include Maggie in some of the departmental social events, there was usually little time left in a day for such activities. Because of this, Maggie’s primary contact with any of her colleagues in the department was a woman who came to work at the library. At first Maggie thought this would work out well, but soon she found herself caught in the middle of a major conflict at work between her supervisor and her colleague.

I remember black days when I just wanted to stay out of the office and roam the collection, shelving etc. It was stressful. I eventually became so tied in to the conflicts between the two that I found myself angry with Doris and feeling very hostile.

As the tension between Maggie and Doris escalated, Doris became increasingly “vicious” toward Maggie.

She would say little things and seem to revel in accomplishing a task better than I. Unfortunately, I got pretty caught up in it and in turn became paranoid in class. I never said anything but my self-confidence was becoming very weak. She had time to devote to many classes a week and performed in a local community company. I took one class a week, tops. Anyway, at our first seminar where we were to be tested, I tested a little higher than her in one of the grades. She looked at me and said “I guess I shouldn’t even teach should I?” Needless to say, this entire competition like thing between us was carried over into the work area. It was hell. I know I did not make it easy for Doris many times. There were a couple of instances where I found an item that she could not locate. It would infuriate her. I became paranoid of even getting close to her desk. She was very territorial .... As Doris performed more and more, she gained more confidence and I always would put myself down in classes to build her up. It was a difficult time. I did not handle it well. Instead of directly confronting Doris in some way with her behavior, I reacted. And since I know my way of reacting is in the passive/aggressive style, often the silent treatment, I could not cope .... A lot of Doris’s stress also came from her writing of her dissertation. She was forever trying to graduate. She did graduate in 1992, after many false alarms and disappointments. She was also having trouble with her boyfriend a lot.

In the summer of 1991, Maggie took a full course load, working until four o’clock, attending classes until 7 p.m. and spending most of her evenings and well into the early mornings completing her projects.

I enjoyed this class but experienced some doubts about myself and felt quite isolated at times. My advisor was teaching the class and often had me sit up front of the class or right next to her. This was her way of helping me to feel more confident in the class. I appreciated her interest and she was aware of my schedule, in fact, she had scheduled the class purposely during this time that I might be able to attend. I know she respected my efforts and knew of the extreme difficulty it was for me to keep up. At least the studio schedule had lightened up by then so my evenings were free. The next class was an enjoyable one for me. It was the last class I took in which I felt totally relaxed and free. I felt my final project was insightful and invigorating. This project I wanted to try and publish someday.

As her course work progressed Maggie gained increasing confidence from her accomplishments.

It took me awhile to believe in myself and stretch myself in my projects and ideas. I remember particular accomplishments in my Curriculum class, Summer 1991, with several projects that really impressed people, but although that was rewarding, my greatest reward was in finally recognizing the quality I was producing. I became engaged with ideas and enjoyed working with them, manipulating them, and applying them. My thoughts were never at rest.

After three years as a part-time student, as Maggie entered her year of residency, she made a serious commitment to complete her degree.

I decided that I needed to hit things pretty hard for at least two years to get through the degree. It was at this time that I made the decision to go for the degree. I remember that summer day sitting in my in-laws home and going over the courses I needed to take etc. It was very overwhelming for me at that time. After I talked with my husband, I decided I had little recourse. The investment of time and I believe my own personal self-confidence level were strong arguments for me to proceed. My husband and I were at a crossroads. He was re-evaluating his direction for a career and was more flexible schedule wise. I was able to devote more time to studies and finishing the degree. I still would work full-time. I remember returning with a firm resolve to finish but with much anxiety over the schedule I was about to embark upon. I believe it was this time that I was officially seeing myself in the capacity of a professional. I had felt good about my performance in classes from the summer and was beginning to envision myself in the role of a promising scholar and teacher.

Maggie described her residency as the "year from hell." In addition to working full-time, she took 9 credit hours (three courses) each semester and audited a particularly difficult class that was taught by her advisor. Each course had its unique demands but the most difficult aspect for Maggie was finding the time in any given day to complete course requirements.

I became enmeshed once again in the old feelings of competition where knowledge was a sport of who got there first. I had to realize that my fear of failure was most pronounced in [that particular] class because I had so much fear in my earlier years, I didn't know if I could cut the class or not ... I was literally paralyzed during exams and lectures. My French class was a breath of fresh air. I enjoyed the cultural enrichment of the language and the class was relaxing, even if it was a lot of work.

Maggie took two courses from her advisor in the fall semester. One was a research methods course. The other was a technical methods class that Maggie had wanted to audit. She had approached her advisor who told her she was more than welcome to audit the class. However, once in the class Maggie started picking up a different message from her advisor.

I don't think she wanted me to take her up on that but I did. I had hoped to attend the class to refresh my skills and take the certification exam. This would count as one of my language requirements. This class is very time consuming because the work requires an intense amount of detail. Anyway, I believe my advisor was angry with me throughout the entire semester. I did not say a word in the class. She did not want to grade my work and often would say things to me in class. I began to get very paranoid about even showing up for awhile but I treated the class as if I had signed up. I even went in to take the final exam. She was surprised to see me and even told me that I didn't have to take the exam. I said, "I know". I think I had earned a degree of respect from her from this. Unfortunately, this class experience was compounded with my research methods class which she was also teaching.

Maggie also described her experiences dealing with the stress she was experiencing in her research methods class. She attributed much of the stress primarily to her own shortcomings.

The other stresser was my research class. Although I love the art of research and the reading I always had difficulty in expressing my research directives. I was extremely paranoid of this class as well. My advisor was teaching it and she is always so wonderful and organized. But perhaps my fear from [my other course] was seeping in to my confidence level with this class because I literally became paralyzed in this class as well. Fear of my performance as lacking. And my weaknesses in writing were definitely coming out during this time. I guess it was like an incubation time, a rather painful one I might add, in sorting out feelings, ideas, and writing problems! I remember my husband taking me for a walk in which he just listened to me cry. The anxiety was incredible. I had never felt quite that suffocated before. I was still at work but felt that I was not up to the demands of the job either.

Maggie also attributed some of her stress that semester, not only to her own perceived shortcomings, but to stress her professor was experiencing.

I think she was angry throughout the entire semester. I believe she was going through a great deal of personal stress and it just came out toward us in class. I remember going to class shaking. I also had problems tackling the questioning process in research and my writing was not clear. Needless to say, she critiqued my work in front of everyone and was less than kind. I remember when my mother visited that semester also, I had to go to class and my advisor was very cold to my mother who also attended the class with me. In fact, my mom sat outside and would not come in. I was really shaky that night because I had also gotten back one of my papers which was not well received. I regret she was so angry that semester. My mom is someone worth meeting. My mom was pretty taken aback with her and asked me if she was always that way. I said, it comes and goes.

Maggie felt the environment her advisor created in the class that semester was, for the most part, not conducive to anyone's learning, neither her own nor that of the other students.

Too bad that when her life is stressed it spills over into her classes. It makes the environment very tense and not conducive for learning. It makes it conducive for fear. I have seen her work hard to help individuals in class and I mean persistently working to engage the student. But when that student continues to miss the point, she turns her frustration loose. I have seen one student paralyzed to even speak after awhile. It is here that no learning takes place. It is here that anguish replaces any possibility of communication. And I know my advisor feels the same frustration and anguish.

Maggie had received a 'B' in her research methods paper that semester. When she saw the grade it caused her "great pain." It had been Maggie's first 'B' in her doctoral program. In her own mind she knew that she "still had not accomplished the necessary writing 'savvy' to present a clear, concise study." However, when Maggie received her final grades she found her advisor had given her an 'A' for the course.

I asked her about it and she said that she felt I was sorting out ideas in the final project and even though it had not come together, my work in the course was excellent. I have always felt her to be very balanced and fair in her analysis of my work. She knew how to encourage me and challenge me.

Finally the fall semester had come to a close.

I remember finishing up my projects and wanting to collapse. It was definitely a stresser. I still remember the feelings of heaviness and suffocating under the pressure of literally spending every minute from the time I got off work to the time I went to bed at night.

In the spring semester of 1992, Maggie maintained a hectic schedule, working full-time, taking three difficult classes and studying for her teaching methods certification at different grade levels. She began speaking out more frequently in class and in the class she was auditing with her advisor, Maggie was "really impressed" with the way her advisor skillfully drew the students out and encouraged them to express their opinions. It was this same semester, after discussing her ideas with her advisor, that Maggie began to develop a new direction for her research. The year of residency had been one of "trying to survive" but by the time it was over, Maggie was feeling more confident about her accomplishments and her potential as a scholar than she had at any time in her academic career.

For Tracy, the task dimensions of the course work were distinctly more time consuming than she had ever imagined as an undergraduate, but she also found it stimulating in many new ways. Tracy experienced a lot of support from both male and female professors alike and, although sometimes she felt like she had to guess what the professors expected or wanted before she would gain their support, Tracy valued their

often constructive input. However, Tracy and her colleagues found the professors to be less supportive of something that seemed too new or different and often they were advised to do something that would “sell” so they could get jobs. Tracy also questioned whether professors’ motives best serve their own, or the students’ interests.

Jobs are really the focus of the ranking profs of the dept. They want us to go out and make them a name it seems. So though I appreciate the advice on marketability, I don’t like feeling so much like a commodity. Original and interesting ideas aren’t always the “coolest” ideas.

For four women, Tracy, Denise, Maggie and Camila, the peer support networks they established during their course work had important and positive benefits.

I think my colleagues have been remarkable in sustaining me at times when I have felt most insecure. The conference I co-chaired ... was a good example. I felt very overwhelmed with it and very insecure. I remember trying to speak to some individuals only feeling foolish. I also felt patronized by some individuals, like, “You’ll come along in time” .... I did get some very good feedback from many people. My colleagues were highly complimentary. They were more than aware of the work entailed and where the spotlight was going. They were very supportive and continue to do so.

Throughout her program Tracy has come to depend on her friends for a great deal of support. When she reflected on the course work phase of her program, it was her friends who stood out as most significant in her experiences. Her friends offered their support for both her learning and personal growth and without this, she said her doctoral experience would have been very different. Now that she has completed her coursework she knows less and less about the other students in the department but she and her friends were convinced that the department was going to “suck” when they leave.

While Denise’s partner and advisor were her greatest allies, a study group that Denise and her colleagues formed in her first semester while taking the pro seminar evolved into a strong peer support network of friendships that lasted throughout her program and beyond. However, the women’s purpose in establishing the support network was motivated less by their love of learning and/or any desire they originally might have had to work together collaboratively and more by inauspicious circumstances in the department at the time. The department had been intending to issue new guidelines for the graduate program. This was delayed for quite some time and when the guidelines were presented to the students, Denise and her colleagues perceived the change in rules, mid-stream, as a threat.

... this perceived “attack” from our faculty assisted us in forming a tight knit little group who studied together and over the course of the next three years, changed the tenor of faculty-student relations to some degree by getting more student involvement

in faculty decisions. I don't mean that we made it "rosie." There are still numerous problems in my department. But because we felt we had to join together, several students from my year have really supported one another. This is a strong influence in my success.

I can't diminish the importance of the study group ... We were all women and we stuck together for the better part of three years as a group. For the first year we studied together preparing for the comprehensive exam that we all had to take. Then we developed into a support group. We celebrated as each of us passed our personal comps 1-2 years later. We got together occasionally to relax. We helped one another through illnesses. We took care of one another's cars, apartments, etc. when we were out of town. We listened. And a few of us shared papers and commented on one another's drafts. A few of us even proofread comps for each other.

I'm still in touch with four of these women. Three of them are at a similar dissertation stage to me and we try to encourage each other.

In addition to this support network Denise had many friends "who have already run the gauntlet and know the ropes" and knowing that the graduate studies office was there to support her in the face of any difficulties she might encounter with the department helped to make Denise "feel more powerful and confident."

#### Other Role Demands

In addition to the demands of course work, employment and program relationships, the women in this study also contended with the demands of other relationships, those with their partners and non-university friends and those associated with the roles of child and elder care.

All the women in this study were partnered throughout most of their doctoral programs, but it was during the course work phase of their programs that these relationships began to change and ultimately would impact their lives in ways they might otherwise not have anticipated.

Three women, Helen, Zoe and Maggie were married and Helen and Zoe had children prior to entering their doctoral programs. Denise and Camila were in sustained partnerships that extended beyond completion of the doctorate. Four of the women, Zoe, Camila, Sarah and Tracy experienced breakups with their partners at some time during their studies and Denise lived apart from her partner throughout much of her program. Maggie was the only woman in the study to have given birth (twice) during her program. Three women, Sarah, Maggie and Zoe, experienced significant changes in their relationships with friends outside the university. The one relationship common to all the women was that first and foremost, they were, themselves, daughters. All of these relationships – daughter (and

in some cases, sister), partner, parent and friend – presented challenges to the women in completing their degrees.

For Sarah, the most significant of these relationships was that with her partners. Her marriage at the time she began doctoral studies influenced, not only her choice of institution, but her self-confidence in her ability to finish her program. Already divorced once from a husband threatened by her entry into an MBA program, her second husband decided to leave just three weeks after she entered the doctoral program.

I remember my first quarter full-time in the doctoral program ... We were using Moore's *Winning the Ph.D. Game* in a seminar class. It was the third week of the quarter and our reading assignment was the chapter talking about relationships and the Ph.D., and citing stats on how many marriages break up due to the pressures of doctoral work, etc. I remember skimming that chapter because I thought to myself, "Hey, no problem here. I'll concentrate on other assignments instead." ... Anyway, two nights after that class, one of my evening classes was cancelled and I was excited because it meant I would get to spend an evening with my husband. Also, we had just had our kitchen floor redone that day--new tile. I was excited about that, too, because it was the first major renovation thing we had done to our house since we had moved. So I was in a great mood, chipper as hell. My husband (boy, does that phrase sound weird now!) came home around 6:30 or so and I plunked down on the couch to talk to him, just like normal couples do, and he informed me that he wanted a divorce. Blam. Just like that.

Sarah eventually became involved in a relationship with a man who left just six weeks prior to her final defense – allegedly because the degree was taking up too much of her time. Sarah and her doctoral colleagues agreed that Ph.D. programs “were hell on a marriage.”

I pointed out that the only people from our cohort to finish thus far were a nun, a single mother whose ex-husband was pretty good about taking the two girls so she could write), and me. Everyone else in the cohort is married; none of them has finished.

Many times Sarah described the isolation and loneliness she felt during her studies – being stuck in the library on a Friday evening while all her friends were out having a good time.

Did you ever see Matt Groening's *Big Book of Hell*? He's a cartoonist. He did several series on various types of hell (life is hell, school is hell, etc.), and one part of the "school is hell" series dealt with grad students. I remember distinctly one cartoon wherein someone is on the phone, from a party, calling someone else who is a grad student. The guy at the party says "hey, come on over. We're drinking beer, playing softball, having fun..." and the grad student says "Sounds great. I'll be there in five years." Which is about right. I've seen this now from both sides of the fence. When I was in school (i.e., actively taking classes) or writing, I know I was probably a lot less fun than I am now. There were many times when Ken would go to a party and I would either meet him there several hours later...or I wouldn't go at all because of studying.

And even when Sarah and Ken were together in the same room there was a psychological absence that enveloped the relationship.

There were countless weekends when he came over to my apartment and spent the afternoon watching TV while I was hunched over the computer in a different room. And then there was what he called my "dissertation face." That was when I wasn't actually writing, but he could tell that all I was thinking about was some part of the dissertation. It was like I was in the same room physically, but not mentally.

For Tracy, the significant relationships during her course work were those with her parents and partner from whom she eventually separated during her program. The very pursuit of doctoral studies became something of a wedge in Tracy's relationship with her mother. Her mother had been opposed even to the idea that Tracy would pursue a Ph.D. in preference to marriage and starting a family. They had huge fights about it and Tracy often thought about how her choices had been a great disappointment to her mother. Tracy's father wasn't as actively unsupportive of her goals. It was more that he just really didn't understand. Two events, the dissolution of the relationship with her partner and, more significantly, the death of her mother in 1992, would impact on Tracy's mental health and her resolve to complete her degree.

Camila was raised by her mother, a single parent, in Argentina and has always maintained close ties with her family despite the miles that separate them. In the third year of her program Camila's mother was diagnosed with cancer and only three weeks later, her brother almost died following a serious sports related accident. Because Camila's family knew she was preparing for her preliminary exams they chose to "protect" rather than inform Camila of these events for some time. When Camila did learn the news from her family the meaning of both her work and the degree itself, shifted significantly in this new context.

when my mom got cancer and my brother got into an accident ... i just shiver when i think about what happened ... both my mom's family and my dad's family [my brother belongs to this family not to my mom's family] did not tell me what was going on right away ... it was the lowest low cos i was far away and the phd seemed totally meaningless ...

A less significant event that occurred about eight months prior to her completion was a visit by her family. She had wanted to spend time with them and she was torn between visiting and completing her writing. She found she didn't really enjoy the visit because she couldn't easily commit the time to either their visit, or her dissertation.

Camila also identified a period in which she was separated from her partner as contributing to her difficulties in completing her degree. They had been living together for two years at the time and just three short months before filing her dissertation Camila moved out – an event she described as being "100% related to her finishing." She thought it had been her own "ambition" and self-centeredness – what she called her own

“stupidity” – that got in the way of the relationship. Ultimately, they did get back together and were married nine months after she completed her degree. Balancing the demands of personal relationships with the time needed to complete the doctorate were challenges that gave Camila cause to reflect on her priorities and, at times, nearly undid her resolve to finish.

Unlike the other women in the study, Denise lived apart from her partner throughout much of her doctoral program. Only after she had completed her course work were they again able to live together. Denise’s partner, also a Ph.D., believed in her ability to finish and was encouraging of her efforts and it was his support that carried her through when she had self-doubts.

For both Maggie and Zoe, the demands of course work, their jobs – Maggie’s job in the library and Zoe’s teaching assistantship – and attending to the care of their children, there was little time left over in a day to maintain friendships outside the university. For Maggie, it was also a factor of living in a new town that gave her little time to make new friendships. For Zoe, the nature of her friendships with others outside the university had begun to change even earlier. Both her undergraduate and master’s work had broadened her perspective on life and her strong identification with feminist issues left her feeling different from the other couples she and her husband had socialized with. She had changed in many ways as a result of her previous educational experiences. She wrote of her ‘old’ friends:

now as i see it i was probably a threat-- for to listen to me would have meant that my friends would have had to question their own lives.

As a doctoral student, Zoe’s friends were more acquaintances – people she met as a result of her active involvement in her children’s lives. Like Maggie and Sarah, she had little time to nurture friendships outside of academe.

Then just two weeks before Christmas in 1991, while Zoe was in the midst of completing her course work for that semester and grading the final 150 papers for students in the classes where she was a teaching assistant, her father died suddenly and unexpectedly.

I remember getting the call that dad had died. it was 7:30 at night, i was sitting in front of my computer desperately attempting to complete a major paper and the call came in. By 9:00 that night i was on the highway headed to my family home with my daughter. I left my husband at home to put together things on the homefront, collect our oldest son who was attending college 3 hours away, and eventually head to [the] western [part of the state] to join me for the funeral.

After her father's death, Zoe's brother assumed responsibility for her step-mother's financial affairs and Zoe assumed the "supportive duties." This entailed numerous trips back and forth across the state to help and spend time with her as she adjusted to life without her husband.

Those duties were with me throughout my graduate school experience. it was only this year [1994] that i failed to make my first trip to be with my step-mother on the anniversary of my father's death. with the dissertation demands, graduation, etc. the fatigue and mental strain were both just too much and for once i said no to the caregiving duties other people asked of me.

When the new semester began in January, 1992, in addition to her regular course load, Zoe had to contend with a number of incompletes she'd taken the previous semester following her father's death. She also had comprehensive exams in the summer ahead to begin preparing for and it was during this period that Zoe began isolating herself.

This was a grueling time for many reasons. i was still dealing with my father's death, providing the emotional support for my now widowed step-mother, taking care of the usual stuff on the homefront, commuting for the coursework (i continued as a full-time student while prepping for comps), and doing the "extra" reading and studying to be ready for the exams. I was working so hard at this time that it was not at all unusual to dream about the material i was reading, wake up in the middle of the night to "self-test" about the material, and keeping some very demanding hours.

Helen's experience was somewhat different from the other women. While her mother hadn't been thrilled with the idea of her daughter travelling several hundred miles away to go to university, Helen did move with her husband and one son so that she could devote her first year to being a full-time student. Helen's husband and son took care of her, looking after the shopping, cleaning and paying the bills and without their support, Helen said, the degree "simply wouldn't have happened." So for Helen, friendships during her year of course work revolved primarily around her colleagues at the university.

I cooked (which was a good relief) and did laundry (which kept me in touch with reality) and read. I took a full load (three or four seminar classes and one credit of pedagogy since I was a first-year teaching assistant) and taught two sections of freshman comp ...

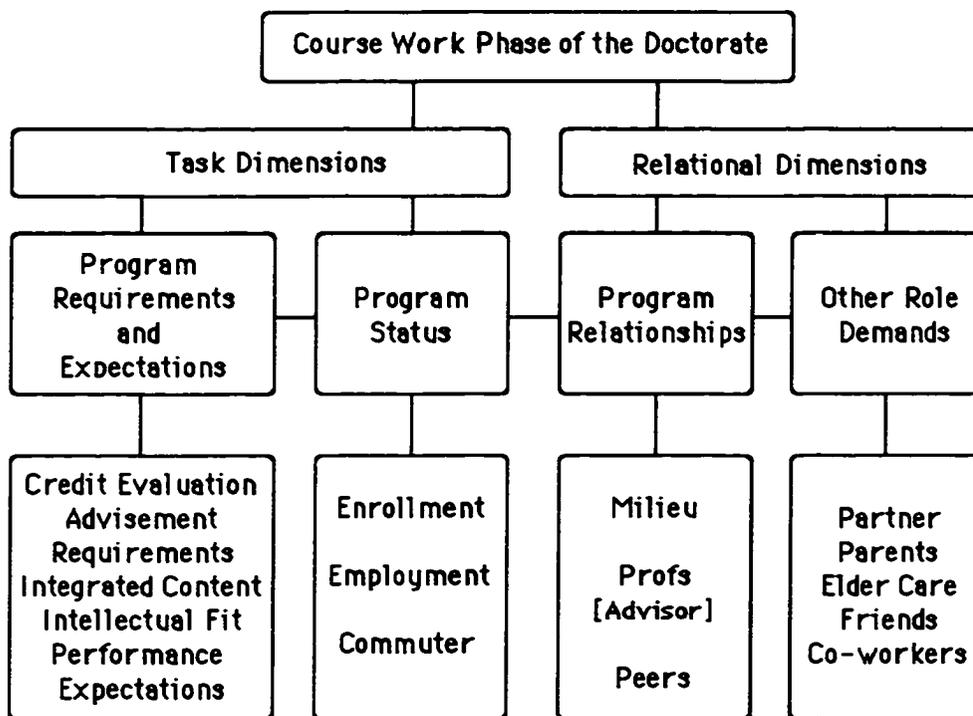


Figure 7. Detailed View of Task and Relational Dimensions of the Course Work Phase of the Doctorate.

### Candidacy Exams

All the women in this study were required to pass exams for admission to candidacy though some spoke of them by different names – prelims, comps, quals, generals. For all the women, the preliminary exams consisted of both written and oral components. Only Zoe described her oral exam as a defense of her chosen topic although Sarah also went into her preliminary exams with a dissertation proposal. Generally the women developed proposals for their dissertations following admission to candidacy.

For Camila, although she did experience a strong feeling of insecurity around her qualifying exams she did not experience them as particularly problematic and barely mentioned them in passing. She wrote exams in three different areas, all related to her research. The most beneficial outcome she associated with the exams related to both learning the content and the opportunity to learn how to write.

Two women, Maggie and Helen, had very positive experiences with their preliminary exams. Four women, Sarah, Zoe, Tracy and Denise, described numerous concerns they had about both the preliminary exams and the policies and practices associated with exams. For at least three of the women, Tracy, Camila and Denise, the oral

exams, in contrast to either the written component of the exams or other aspects of their doctoral experiences, seemed less problematic. For two women, Tracy and Maggie, the period immediately following the preliminary exams was a time of intense personal reflection during which their health, both emotional and physical, was in serious jeopardy and it was then they most seriously questioned their goals, their commitment to academic life and their resolve to complete their degrees.

In Sarah's program candidacy exams usually were written sometime during the third year of a student's program after completing most of the required course work although some students still took a few classes after the exams.

Ostensibly, you should go into [the exams] with a proposal, although the "proposal" could be no more than a basic outline of what you think you will be doing for your dissertation. Then, once you're done with [the exams], you can start gathering data for your research. However, as probably happens everywhere, there are more exceptions to these guidelines than there are guidelines. I know of students who had basically completed their research before doing [the exams]. I know students who had no clue what their dissertation would be, but took [the exams] anyway. You get the idea.

In the three month period preceding her exams Sarah met individually with each of the four members of her committee. Each gave her several titles of books to read in preparation. Sarah described this period.

November, December and most of January were a blur for me. I mostly spent my time cramming for the [exams] and panicking. About two weeks prior to the first day of writtens, I started doing practice exams, where I would sit at the computer and write for 4 hours without notes to get usec to the idea of doing that.

Sarah was scheduled to write the exams in her advisor's office. Each faculty member devised questions for her exams that she wrote for four hours on each of four different days. She found some of the questions on the exams were completely different and sometimes "a bit more off-the-wall" than what had been discussed and she described this period as being on an emotional roller-coaster. I was down, down, down after [those first] questions, then really high after dealing with [the other questions]" but Sarah "managed to survive." Following the written exams, she had two weeks to prepare for orals. It was her understanding that her committee members were to give her advisor some sort of feedback regarding her exams but the day before her orals she discovered that one of her committee members had been out of the country in the intervening two weeks and the other member hadn't even read her exam questions. So she had no idea what to expect at her preliminary oral exam.

One of the deans where I worked saw how nervous I was on the day before [the oral] and pulled me into the conference room for a pep talk. He looked at me and said, "Sarah,

who do you think will be in charge when you get into that room?" I said, "Well, the committee of course." Don looked at me and said, "No, Sarah. YOU will be in charge. When they ask a question, you're in charge. Because you can either answer it or not answer it. You can throw up, pass out, or just give a one-word answer. But any way it happens, you're in charge. So just remember that. And treat the faculty that way. It's your show." I have to give Don a lot of credit; his speech was a helluva lot more motivating than anything I had heard up to that point. When I saw Ben later that day, he basically told me to relax. He reminded me that I wouldn't be taking my orals if I weren't ready. He said a lot of other stuff, too, but all I can remember is sitting in his office and thinking, "Oh my god, I have my orals in 18 hours."

One thing I do remember Ben saying was that a lot of what would transpire in the room during the orals would have nothing to do with me. In effect, it would be the faculty members trying to impress one another--possibly at my expense. He warned me that there would probably be at least one or two times that a faculty member would ask me a question, not because he wanted me to answer, but because he wanted to ask it in front of the other faculty members. Ben said he would probably even do that himself. He made it sound like part of the orals was really some sort of theatre of the absurd. It was good advice, though, and I used it the next day. There definitely were a few occasions when the questions being asked had little or nothing to do with me, my research, my programs, etc.

So there was Sarah in the orals – “just me and five guys.” The fifth member was a faculty representative who was present to ensure that the exam would be conducted fairly.

[the rep] appeared to have some sort of axe to grind. He definitely had some sort of agenda and asked some fairly bizarre questions that I did my best to deal with.

In her orals Sarah first felt as though she was stumbling in her presentation but gradually she began to feel better about her responses.

The committee members sort of engaged each other, too, and so there were a few minutes when it appeared more like a conversation than a test. Don had told me that might happen, and that it was a good sign if it did--it would mean that the faculty weren't too worried about my ability to “be one of them” and thus didn't feel the need to grill me. Even so, by the end of the two hours, I was a wreck. They sent me out of the room while they deliberated .... it must be a unanimous vote; if the faculty rep or any other committee member thinks you blew it, you don't pass.

Sarah recalled a conversation with her advisor the day before her preliminary orals. She remembered him showing her a form that the committee would complete indicating whether the student was a “no pass,” “pass” or a “high pass.” Her advisor pointed out to her that it wouldn't really make any difference whether she got a “pass” or a “high pass” – that in the end, the result would be the same. In his words, “whether you hit it out of the park or just dribble it across the line, it still counts.” Sarah described waiting for the committee to reach their decision.

... there I was, pacing in the anteroom outside of the conference room, where the faculty were deciding my fate, and praying to god that I had managed to dribble it across the line. It was the longest five minutes of my life, up to that point (the time after the

dissertation defense was over was absolutely the longest five or ten minutes in my life!). Then the door opened, and Ben came out to get me. And I just stared at him. Which way had it gone? Then Ben broke into a huge smile and held his arms out to give me a hug and said, "Congratulations. It doesn't get any better than that." And of course I started to tear up. Ben told me that we had to go in, thank everyone, listen to them yak a little, and then he would give me the paper to take to the Grad School. So I went in and chitchatted for a bit. I don't remember any of it. Ben and I went back to his office and he signed the form. He said that [one of the committee members] had initially felt I hadn't done all that well, but [that he had] reminded [him] that his questions weren't all that great to begin with, so my answers were as good as could be expected. [Another committee member] later told me that it was interesting to watch Ben through the process--he said he'd never seen Ben get so protective of a student before. It was almost as though I were one of Ben's kids, according to [him].

Zoe's comprehensive exams were scheduled for the summer over a five week period and these were followed by the defense of the dissertation prospectus as a pre-requisite to attaining candidacy. Zoe's father had died just six months before her scheduled exams and during this period she was serving as her step-mother's primary support system. During this same period as Zoe prepared for her exams, she was completing the last of her course work requirements, including some incompletes from the previous semester; she was also teaching part-time, fulfilling her responsibilities as a teaching assistant, maintaining the home front and tending to the needs of her four children.

Zoe's comprehensive exams consisted of two five-hour written tests and two, 48 hour, take-home exams.

I started out trying to write the take-homes on my computer at home and found the interruptions and distractions were just too much. I subsequently ended up in a room at the Holiday Inn on two separate week-ends as I wrote each of the take-homes required of me. I think this was when I first realized that if I were going to make it through this doctoral process there would be times when I would need to pull away from all other demands and focus solely on the pursuit of the degree. This was my first exposure to the extreme isolation that the graduate experience can entail.

Zoe passed her comprehensive exams and then directed her efforts toward the preliminary oral defense. Her confidence going into the preliminary defense was sometimes shaky. She was still recovering from the death of her father and just a few months before she was to defend, another student had defended his comps and failed. This was the first such occurrence Zoe had ever known and the first failure in her department in many, many years. His defense had come just a few weeks after his own mother had died and he was still attempting to deal with her death. He had wanted to go ahead with his defense but there also had been some pressure from his committee to defend on schedule.

I remember thinking how \*embarrassing\* it would be at all points in the process if I ever had to admit to anyone I had "failed" a defense. And, yet, I knew a couple of folks who did. One that had been the "darling" of the department, but it was because his wife

was *\*very\** good at what she did and would add to the proverbial feathers in the profs' hats. then, once they had her at a point academically where she couldn't back out without losing too much, they failed the husband and effectively removed him from the department.

This was the context in which Zoe entered her own defense – an experience that turned out to be “more than a little undermining” to her self-confidence.

When i got into the oral defense, the “other” theory person was seated *\*directly beside me\** and he had his papers spread out practically in front of me where they were easily readable. At the start of my defense i saw that he had marked one of my responses “conditional pass”-- blew one hell of a hole in any confidence i possessed and from that point on my defense was a nightmare.

Then he accused me (quite pointedly) of cheating on my comprehensive exams, stating that he had “read” one of my responses on another student’s exam previous to reading mine. I was aghast at his statements and confronted it directly in my comps oral defense. But, he maintained his stance. A day or two after successfully passing comps i found the passage from a book this professor had assigned in his theory class that i had used as the basis for the response i had written in my exam. I took the book, with the passage clearly marked, to his office and told him *\*this\** was where i had gotten my information and i took great offense at this suggestions i had cheated. The only response i got from him (no apology for his comments, etc.) was that he *\*did not\** agree with the author’s treatment of the issue at hand. And, he reminded me that the author had been his own teacher and mentor at stanford where he had done his graduate schooling. I told him that was not my problem-- that he and his mentor could work out their philosophical differences, but since he assigned this book in his theory class it only made sense that i had used it as the basis for my answers *\*and\** it made sense that he had seen similar responses on others’ exams. Hence, i “proved” i had not cheated, but never an acknowledgement from him that he had erred in making the claim in front of four other committee member all who sat like stone while the allegations were leveled against me.

Then the professor that had served as my mentor and for whom i had worked for so many years really grilled me. it, however, was more than a “normal” grilling. I couldn't even understand the questions she was asking. and i remember she just kept pushing and pushing even when i asked for clarification of her questions. I later found out two important pieces of information: a) first, she had wanted me to pass “with honors” as it would be a boon to her reputation as a mentor; b) the chair of my committee (who was a well-recognized sociologist and had been there for some 26 years) later told me that he, too, was unable to understand what she was asking. yet, he offered no help or support during the grueling oral defense.

The dragon lady [for whom Zo: TA'd] really went at me because she had a vested interest in me, wanted me to perform like some well-trained dog, pass with honors, and be a feather in her own cap. So, her desires were not so much for me as they were for her own ego. That, combined with the fact that she and my other theory reader, came from two very different universes (they actually got in a “professional disagreement [read: they fought like cats and dogs] during my defense) **THREW ME**. I came out of it crying and i think i cried for three days.

Zoe described the whole experience as “demeaning” and it was several weeks before she regained her self-confidence. She had little opportunity to debrief with anyone

after the exams because the next day she left “for three full days of mommying” attending sports tournaments in which her sons were competing. As had been her experience in the past, Zoe felt her accomplishments being quickly overshadowed by what others in the family were doing. Even her husband hadn’t been able to attend her defense. His frequent business trips precluded his attendance and this troubled Zoe. His absence from critical family events was a pattern that had been repeating itself more frequently than she wished. To Zoe it symbolized an ever-widening difference in their priorities and contributed to the rift in their relationship.

For both Helen and Maggie, candidacy exams were a positive and affirming experience. Like Sarah, Maggie discussed her research interests with her committee and her exam questions evolved from these discussions.

I would say that I am fortunate to have all women on my committee because they were all so responsive to each other as well as me in such a positive tone. I really felt that all of these women were there to see me succeed. I believe to this day that my exams were very impressive and the issues I had to answer to them were minimal.

Maggie had the option of writing her exams at the university during a prearranged sitting, or writing four 25-35 page papers over 4 to 6 weeks – in both cases, working with a set bibliography. She chose the latter option and had four areas to cover including qualitative research methodology; performance education: curriculum analysis; feminist theory and performance; and performance history (19th and 20th Century) and women’s involvement, leadership and change. She arranged to pick up her exams from her advisor just before Christmas and agreed to submit her final papers in late January. She had saved enough vacation time at work to take four weeks off. She had checked out over 250 books from two university libraries and had “amassed a wealth of articles on feminism, postmodernism, pedagogy and qualitative inquiry.”

I knew that for the most part I would not be able to do a lot of research in articles. So I spent the entire semester gathering materials in my general areas of interest. I happened to run across a title in [one] library which dealt with the visual arts, but I found the title intriguing. So, I had quite a few materials on hand when I picked up my exams. I remember picking up my exams on a drizzly December morning. My advisor was cheery and handed them to me in a manila envelope. She had given me long lectures on how she had structured her time for her exams. I guess this was modeled after [the exams in] her [own doctoral] program. Anyway, I decided to go over to the student center and get a cup of coffee and open the envelope. I can still see me sitting there in the student center. It was dead quiet. Everyone was in finals. I sat down and an undergraduate student [in our department] came up and started to talk with me. I remember thinking that I must seem really out of it to her. I had opened the exams and felt pretty overwhelmed. I walked over to my office and showed my boss and Doris the questions. They were pretty sympathetic. I went home and began to plot out the first question.

Maggie felt the research methodology would be her toughest question so she decided to tackle it first. She remembered the article on visual arts and she decided to connect this theme with her own focus on performance. Her advisor had told her that she could tie the questions together in a way she wanted.

Most days Maggie would begin writing at 7:00 in the morning and not finish until midnight or so. Maggie found the process overwhelming and often she felt her lowest as she reached the mid-point of each question.

The process is excruciating and stressful. I remember the apartment, the cats, the dishes, and the stacks of books on the kitchen table. I had decided that I had so many days to study, write and type each exam to finish within the deadline. One morning it was snowing outside. Such a beautiful sight. I had scheduled breaks during the days and occasionally took a few hours off to attend a Christmas party or go for a ride with a friend ... I did take Christmas day off. We went over to some friends for dinner and spent the day visiting with them. It was a windy day, as I remember walking with them and talking, yet my mind was a million miles away. I thought I would never see the end of the exams.

By January, Maggie was down to her last two questions. She had finished her curriculum question quite a few days earlier than expected and was able to begin the last question on history a little ahead of schedule. During her last week of writing while she was putting the finishing touches on her exams and getting them ready for binding, Maggie returned to work at the library. She decided to add a few graphics and "it was a little hair raising at times" but by the time she had finished she felt very positive about her accomplishments.

The high points of my exams were those final moments. The finished product looked great. I was convinced that I had set a standard.

Maggie's husband tried to be encouraging and supportive of her during this exam period but by January he "got weary" of Maggie's schedule and made it difficult for her at times. He was working a night job so when Maggie took "little breaks" from her writing she usually made arrangements to visit with other friends. He later expressed his disappointment "in" Maggie for not spending more of her spare time with him rather than her friends.

He felt neglected and even though he never actually stated it, he often displayed it in other ways that would distract me or irritate me. We weren't communicating well at this time either. I knew I had accomplished a great deal and my husband was trying to be supportive. His needs just weren't being met. Plus it had been quite a long haul for him during my last years in school with such a difficult schedule and grueling hours ... It was not an easy time for either one of us.

Toward the third week in January, 1993, Maggie finished and submitted her exams. In the weeks after she “began to feel queasy and a little weak ... [she] had some suspicions but didn’t want to believe it could be happening just yet ...” and early in February, 1993, Maggie learned that she was about two and a half months pregnant. She still had preliminary orals to take that month and two final courses to complete that semester.

In the meantime, the courses Maggie was taking that semester in statistics and qualitative research were “a bit challenging and demanding in time.” Her statistics professor was well known in her field.

She will always stand out to me because of her childishness in dealing with one particular student whom I believe she just didn’t like. I question any educator who needs to resort to such tactics as taking the student’s notebook, slamming it shut and practically yelling at her to pay attention. This happened in a class of 6, all graduate students. Her harassment continued throughout. The student was a little antagonistic, but I do not feel such actions were warranted.

Maggie was having difficulty with her pregnancy and she wasn’t sure she was going to “make it through February.”

I worried that I would lose the baby. I could tell that my body was having a difficult time. I went and had my thyroid checked again and had the dosage adjusted.

Maggie’s preliminary orals, scheduled for mid-February, went very well.

... one of my professors even told me the one thing that she would ask me during the orals. Since I was taking her qualitative research class in conjunction with my exams that semester, I was learning what I was not so well versed in as far as research methodology. She asked me that question in my orals and smiled as I answered.

Maggie had anticipated more difficult questions but she was relieved when it was all over. She felt very positive about her accomplishments, especially in the orals.

My highest high came from my oral defense after my comprehensive exams ... I had passed my exams and orals with a great sense of accomplishment. My advisor was very impressed ... I remember sitting across from my advisor, who was describing my performance as ‘stellar’, asking me where I ever came up with the thesis that I’d developed in my comprehensive exams.

I was elated at my so called terrific performance and the work I had produced was top quality. I felt it and knew it. It was like all I had worked toward, all the ups and downs came to a point where I had succeeded. Perhaps more importantly I allowed myself to believe I had succeeded.

When Helen first set up her comps committee she had been warned by other graduate students that some members of her committee were really tough and “couldn’t get along.” However, Helen’s experience was different. Helen thought that perhaps the other

students' "worries were overdrawn." She found all three of the women on her committee to be "highly professional, respected in and outside of the department."

I can't imagine any of them taking out professional differences on students.

Helen was also "older than most of the folks in the department" – older than two of her three committee members and about the same age as the third and she thought that lent her a certain advantage.

One of the traditional hierarchies in school is the age differential. My similarity of age seemed to me to undo at least this hierarchy, if not others involved in 'testing' situations. Advantage, in this sense, may have been only in \*my\* mind, but I could look on the women I was working with as more nearly colleagues.

Helen couldn't imagine any members of her committee feeling threatened, "let alone by me ... they're all strong women."

Too, I don't feel the need to 'threaten' them with being more knowledgeable or by proving them wrong or inadequate. I've thought about this in reading advice to students about taking orals that goes something like, 'remember, you know more about this than any of your committee at this point.' A friend was talking about being trained in history to summarize the work that had gone before and then taking off by saying something akin to "and this is why they're wrong". That's sometimes the way philosophers work too, it seems. I don't need to surpass my mentors in that way, and I think my age in relation to career has something to do with that.

Like Sarah and Maggie, Helen also met with her committee members to discuss her comprehensive exams.

We met to talk about how I'd write exams, but I'd already decided, so it was a matter mostly of telling them what I needed. I had put together reading lists with each individually but only at the end of my year. We met, but couldn't decide much about questions (which students have to say in formulating) and so said we'd talk on e-mail, and parted company.

Helen's committee met infrequently and as far as she knew, they never met without her. In her department other committees met more frequently and sometimes without the student present.

There were no specific guidelines for how often committees should meet or what they should meet to do. There are rumors about that committees soon will be required to meet on several specific occasions for making specific decisions -- at least once I believe without the student present.

Helen's chair went on sabbatical in the fall of 1993 and despite her own deadlines and her father's serious illness, she managed to co-ordinate the questions for Helen's

comprehensive exams with Helen and the other committee members. Helen wanted to write her comp exams in August of 1994 and her committee gave her “pretty free rein.”

If I wanted them to put together reading lists, they did. If I wanted to make changes in those lists, that was ok too. They were willing to let me write comps in the summer (though orals were in fall term), and were willing to go out of their way to make my exams happen in spite of the fact that two of the three were on sabbatical the spring before I wrote in August .... In sum, they believed it could happen the way it needed to if I was to do it at all and were willing to do their part to make it happen.

Helen knew she had to write her comprehensive exams that summer or she’d “never get back to it.” That summer she isolated herself from any outside distractions, moved several hundred miles back to the campus and sublet an apartment. She read for seven weeks straight before taking the four weeks to write her exams. Without the flexibility afforded by the program and her committee, Helen believed she never would have made it.

I immersed myself for the summer in my comprehensives -- did nothing else for eleven weeks, and had figured out how I had to arrange my life so things would work out .... Had I not been able to move away for the summer, or had I had to teach to afford it, or had my committee not been willing to have me write in the summer (the month of August), or had the option for a month-long take home comprehensive exam not been available, I’d never have made it.

Throughout our correspondence Helen repeatedly expressed a great deal of confidence in her own writing abilities but even that confidence wasn’t sufficient to prevent her worrying about the outcome of her exams.

When I wrote my comprehensive exams, I knew they were good. I also knew I’d pushed some limits ... I’d written about webs as metaphor in women’s writing. I’d written answers that cross-cited freely -- from composition, to philosophy, to gender studies ... And I’d far exceeded the 2500 word limit imposed on each of the four answers ... I was confident that I could DO the writing, I was less confident (and became increasingly less so as time passed before I heard) that my committee would accept what I had written as appropriate to the genre ... I envisioned their political differences erupting over my interdisciplinary question -- all sorts of doubts emerged. I find waiting for response very hard. Perhaps my confidence is a facade! ;-) ... When I didn’t hear and didn’t hear and didn’t hear, I began to wonder whether I’d pushed the limits too far -- and I worked through several scenarios about what I’d do when I was told I’d failed my writtens.

At another level, Helen was “unwilling to fail” and although she admitted that “some amount of bluff” might be involved in that belief, she also felt she’d been able to sort out the difference between knowing she could do something and do it well by her own standards and the uncertainty she encounters about whether it will be judged by others as sufficient.

I can thus value my own judgement and the feedback that matters to me over the judgements of others which may not matter as much, or which may have little to do with the quality of what is being judged.

Example: A few years ago, when the English department here was hiring fixed-term folks, I applied, but was not even interviewed -- this by a department that knew me. When I went to personnel and asked to see the search committee evaluation forms (which we're allowed to do) I discovered that one of the committee folk had said something akin to "does nothing substantial in the classroom". I was hurt, angry -- livid, in fact, because this wasn't at all what this fellow had said in more public forums about my teaching. I was, however, able to look at the comment not as an indication that I was a poor teacher, but as an indication of some rather nasty politics in the department. I value the comments of my students more than his, and my students' comments are overwhelmingly positive; the 'substance' of my classroom stuff shows through them. I do wonder, sometimes, about whether I'm 'doing' good stuff in the classroom, but I'm selective about whose word I take as an evaluation.

Helen's committee never met to discuss the results of her exams. They were so pleased with her work that the committee chair sent Helen an email indicating they'd approved her exams without the necessity of meeting as a committee.

One month following her written exams Helen returned to campus for her preliminary orals. Helen's oral exams were conducted like a "kitchen table chat."

My chair asked how I wanted to conduct them -- highly formal and structured, kitchen table chat (her image), or something in between. I also had the choice of location (picked a room with comfy chairs and a big table to sit at). She as chair opened my orals by letting people know my choice was to chat.

Prior to orals Helen had made a comment to one of her committee members about having been "on pins and needles" waiting to hear the results of her written examinations. The first question put to Helen during her orals was an 'oh, by the way' -- 'how could you possibly have worried about whether you'd passed!' Helen enjoyed her orals and reflected on the experience.

Perhaps (again, a thought as I write this --) it was a sense that I had learned to talk 'woman talk' -- all three were women -- over serious matters. There was no 'defense' really, but clarification and sharing of possible directions I could proceed from there, talk among the committee members as well as directed just at me, and the three of them had to talk about all the lists, including material they hadn't read, because I'd cross-cited so much. One said afterward she wished she could have bottled the clear, apolitical air in the room!

Orals could have turned out to be a less enjoyable experience for Helen had the committee members not been successful in setting aside their professional differences. Two of the faculty had been on "opposite sides of a loud and fairly bitter disagreement ... that had led to rather open hostilities in the halls."

In conjunction, there was a growing argument over turf -- who teaches what and which areas get all the power. Not only did these things not intrude on my comprehensives, the feeling in the room was quite powerfully intellectual and focused on my ideas and writing.

Denise's issues around the preliminary exams related less to her belief in her ability to do the work and more to the departmental policies and practices surrounding the exams – practices that did not weaken her resolve to be successful (her admission to the Ph.D. track hinged on the outcome of the exams) but did serve to undermine her self-confidence.

The year Denise's cohort entered the program the guidelines for graduate students were being re-written and they weren't ready for distribution to the students until October. Those revised guidelines "were totally different" than the guidelines Denise had looked at when she first chose the program.

... when I looked at the program there was a reading list of about 200 texts ... The reading list had been revised and 75% of the books on the list were new. I think it was in May or June, after I'd been accepted but before instruction began, that the NEW reading list was made public. I liked the list. But no mention was made of any other changes.

Prior to these new guidelines, students had taken the comprehensive exams after completing their course work. There had been two exams, one general and one in a specified area of interest. However, with the new guidelines in place, Denise and her colleagues found the approach to the comprehensive examination had "completely changed" and instead of taking the exams after completing required course work, the exams were split in two, with one exam administered at the end of the first year.

Changes, changes, changes and we were barely informed, let alone consulted. I felt like I had researched programs very carefully and I know that the catalog you enter under is typically binding. But the catalog put out by a university and a department's particular requirements are not the same thing. When our department guidelines finally appeared, a couple months into the term, the method of examination had totally changed. This had been casually alluded to in our professional seminar, but the faculty insisted that we not ask questions until the document was available to read and discuss. In retrospect, the new method makes a lot of sense and probably is one of the factors in my success, however, at the time I again felt the rug pulled out from under me. I'd made what I believed to be an informed decision based on materials the department had sent me only to find out that they had withheld information about ongoing changes.

The exams themselves did not appear to be an issue of concern for Denise as she described nothing further about them and following the exams she was admitted to the Ph.D. track.

Tracy's concerns around her preliminary exams focused on both her own fears and anxieties and on the atmosphere in the department surrounding the exams. While preparing for her candidacy exams Tracy felt like she had no time for anything. Her exams were scheduled for January and in the seven months leading up to her exams Tracy focused on little else. Four of those months, including the Christmas holidays, were "completely consumed by studying."

Tracy described the rules for writing the preliminary exams in her department. Exam committees are chosen by the students. Subject to the approval of the supervising professor, students select the books for each exam from their reading lists. Professors on the examining committee formulate and grade the exam questions. In the event of a dispute, occasionally a professor would request a colleague to read the student's responses, but Tracy indicated that this happened rarely; more typically, the failure is accepted as such and a date is set for the student to rewrite the exam.

There were four candidacy exams in all – each on the literature of a different century – each to be written, one per day, over a four-day period. Students must pass three of the written exams and any failed exam must be rewritten before students are allowed to proceed to the preliminary oral exam. If two exams are failed students are required to repeat all the exams. Oral exams are typically scheduled for the week following completion of the written component.

Prior to writing her preliminary exams neither Tracy nor her friends knew anyone who had passed all of the written exams and she described the reasons students had been given for their failures as "absurd." A friend of Tracy's who had failed two of the written exams rewrote them only to fail again. Tracy described this second failure as "suspicious" because although this student's English was "mostly impeccable" in Tracy's mind, it wasn't his native language. Tracy described another of her colleagues as failing her exams because the professor didn't like her writing style.

One of my female friends was accused of not answering one of the questions on her exam and when she defended herself remarking that the question was clearly marked "#2" it was discovered that the professor was merely skim reading her exam and had accidentally flipped a few too many pages. He was ready to flunk her based on that, his own mistake. Instead of admitting his error he insisted still on interviewing her orally to make sure she knew what answers she had given. This was in addition, of course, to her official oral examination.

Recently a student had a question on her exam that was entirely concerning a book which was not on her reading list ... Luckily this student had 2 other questions she could choose to answer and did so successfully. She commented that since she has read that novel she could probably have answered the question. But still, how can you feel that confident about your exam when you recognize straight away that the professor who's going to be grading your work later has only a foggy idea of the material you're responsible for.

Tracy reflected on the climate in her department around the preliminary exams.

Of course, no one likes to fail so everyone wants to blame the profs when they fail instead of take responsibility for it themselves. But in my dept. there is little confidence in the integrity of the professors so it is always assumed that if a student fails it's a problem on the part of the prof and not on the part of the student. That in itself says something about our dept I believe.

Because of these experiences Tracy and her friends often discussed among themselves whether or not they would retake all the exams if they failed two. Most of her friends said, both before and after the exams, that there was no way they would rewrite any failed exams.

I felt like I would not make the decision to do this again. I was appalled at the egotism exhibited by certain professors, some of them who were on the committees of my female companions who were also taking the exams.

I asked Tracy to describe the kinds of behaviours that reflected what she had described as professorial "egotism."

I thought it was rather egotistical that some professors took a long time to grade the exams while at least one professor had them finished in 24 hours. They seemed to enjoy making us wait (and I'm sure this feeling was augmented by paranoia). But also one male prof made comments to a friend of ours (those of us who had taken the exams) that he saw no reason why a group of such intelligent women any one of us would have a problem passing. Then the same professor remarked to my friend in the hallway while I was present that he had already looked through her exam and it looked great. A few days later he called her into his office and told her that he had never seen such a mess of an exam in all his life and berated her before he reluctantly said he would "permit" her to pass.

Tracy's feeling was that "the only professors who gave anyone a hard time, or have yet on the exams have been male." Tracy's examination committee consisted of one male and three female professors.

Each of us was questioned by those professors ... that one professor passed me with a gesture somewhat resembling a king's pardon ... [and] some of us were told we were being passed 'anyway' despite the inadequacy of our responses.

In contrast, two of the three women on Tracy's committee gave her the most difficult questions and "they seemed capable of not only grading the exams in an acceptable amount of time, but also of telling me and my friends who also took exams with them that we had passed and without the need to intimidate us." However, even after they successfully completed their preliminary exams Tracy and her friends found little praise or encouragement forthcoming from their professors, male or female.

Of course they didn't pat us on the back either. I don't think anyone outside of my group of friends said congratulations, you worked really hard for this and you did it.

Throughout her program Tracy has come to depend on her friends for a great deal of support. Her friends offered their support for both her learning and personal growth and without this, she said her doctoral experiences would have been very different. These friendships also gave her the "bonds of knowing that the experience of doctoral study is difficult for everyone," – something that she appreciated particularly when facing her preliminary exams. Tracy's support network consisted of three other women and they discussed, not only their study strategies, but also their fears and anxieties.

We postulated together what we would do if we failed etc. One of the women in this group was pregnant and had her daughter (my god daughter) only a month after comps were over. This event was significant too since it shed light on how other important events in my life could contrast so markedly with the anxiety filled experience of taking exams.

In retrospect, Tracy doesn't really know what she might have done had she failed any of her exams. She had little confidence in departmental practices given what happened to her friends. "Luckily," – Tracy was amused at her own choice of words – she didn't fail any of her exams; nor did any of her friends and shortly thereafter, they stopped discussing it among themselves.

I am amused myself that I say "luckily." Passing comprehensive exams shouldn't depend on luck. But I still have the feeling that a lot of what happens in my dept is almost entirely political (who likes whom). I think that is the reason why my friend failed his exams twice. I think that is the reason more recently that a friend of mine failed one of his exams. He was told by the professor's ex-girlfriend that the professor had a chip on his shoulder from the group who took exams before (my group). The prof. apparently told the girlfriend that he would never pass anyone first time around again.

Tracy found that the five exams which constituted the candidacy requirement in her department seemed more like hurdles to be overcome than a process which might encourage students to extend or challenge their own personal thinking or learning. Through her own experiences and those of her friends in other departments, Tracy experienced an intense lack of "integrity" and "fairness" surrounding candidacy exams.

If I could change anything that would be to create some sense of integrity in the exams. People need to feel that they are evaluated fairly. Some depts have group grading of all questions on the exams. That would alleviate the feeling that you are at the mercy of the sadistic whims of one prof.

And to make the exams more relevant to candidates' degree goals, Tracy advocated reducing the number of exams from five to three, with two written exams to cover specific periods of specialization (19th and 20th century literature for example) and the oral exam reserved to cover a special topic of the student's choice.

Although I wasn't aware of it when Tracy first agreed to participate in this study, she had experienced a "pretty major depression" after her candidacy exams and had entered therapy at about the same time she agreed to participate in the study. A period of some eight months passed in our correspondence before she felt comfortable disclosing this information to me.

In September of 1995, I had written to the women participating in the study asking them to complete a short questionnaire that would give me some basic demographic information that otherwise had not come to light in our conversations. At the end of the questionnaire I included an open-ended question that I hoped might tap into potentially important areas that the women might not yet have identified. This was, indeed, what happened in Tracy's case. In response to an item asking the women to identify "Other major life events that affected your degree progress at any point in your academic career", Tracy wrote:

a pretty major depression hit me after exams and lasted for a while. i was in therapy about the time i started this study (doing the study was a big help actually) and though it has taken a while. i feel normal again!!!! yeah!!!!

Although Tracy had given me this opening, it was my judgement at the time that the issues she was dealing with might still be too close and so I waited for a time before I queried further on this point. Later I wrote, "Now that you have a little more distance from this period and without getting more personal than you wish to, I was wondering if you could tell me a little more about this – about the depression and what it was that actually prompted you to seek therapy; how the depression showed itself, to you and to others, in your everyday life; and the way in which it was connected to your doctoral work" – to which she responded:

Okay. I feel ready to tackle this today. It's all kind of a blur with different aspects of my life all mixing together in this web of insecurity bullshit.

In the aftermath of my comprehensive exams I felt very strongly that I wanted to be living anyone else's life but my own. I was seriously doubting my choice for a career in academia. I couldn't remember that the goal I had once set for myself to get a PhD ever entailed such an absolute emotional shut down as I felt had been required to prepare and take my exams. In addition to that, most of my life I had felt supported and positive about school and academic work which was a refreshing escape from a dysfunctional family environment. That was no longer true as I discovered the academic world to be rampantly dysfunctional.

When the exams were over I really didn't know what the hell I had done to myself. Emotions that I had put on hold concerning my mother's death and the break up of a rather serious relationship all came rushing in like a dam had broken and mixed with my confusion about the academic world. I really wanted to run away from school and everything and for someone else to give me all the answers as to what I should do with myself. I tried to escape taking responsibility for myself by getting involved in a really self-destructive relationship and blowing off academic work altogether. I said many times to myself and to others during this time that academia looked very ugly from the other side of the exams and that I hadn't planned for the kind of bullshit I had to deal with. I wanted very much, and verbalized this desire several times (usually in the guise of a joke), for someone else to save me.

I took my exams in January and by summertime, may/june I was aware that I had an intense fear of taking responsibility for myself and my future. The job market looked like hell. I couldn't imagine having to start all over in a new place with new friends. My family unit seemed to be disintegrating. My father was more and more focused on his relationship with his new girlfriend and less emotionally available than ever. It was during this time that I came to the conclusion that freedom was an awesome responsibility. I wrote about and talked about it almost obsessively. I was, for the first time in my life (I felt), balking in the face of the freedom to choose my own path. I am convinced that this is related to being so disillusioned with the emotional violence I felt I had experienced in going through comps - an event (I perceived) entirely related to my own personal career choice.

I didn't know what to do with myself. By the end of the summer, july/august I was so depressed I couldn't get out of bed in the morning. I developed the habit of getting sick to my stomach before dealing with a stressful situation (usually related to my really bad relationship by this time). Then around the time that my relationship was coming to an end I was vomiting every morning when I got up. This went on for a couple of weeks. I could barely eat anything without feeling sick. And nobody, not even my closest friends knew that this was happening. I lost about 15 pounds and everyone (of course) complimented me on how great I looked. (now i look at pictures and i think i looked like a skeleton. my normal weight is about 125 which already is pretty thin on a 5'7" frame)

Well, around the time school started a friend of mine had decided to go to therapy because of a really self-destructive relationship he'd been in. In light of this, I was discussing doing therapy with my best friend and told her about how I had been throwing up all the time and I wondered if I had some kind of eating disorder. She got really upset and said that if I didn't call somebody she would. So I called because I realized (seeing it through her eyes) how actually horrifying what had been going on with me really was.

For Tracy, the period following her exams was a time of "absolute emotional shut down." It was a period she described when a lot of "psychological shit [was] hitting the fan."

Mostly the psychological shit I was referring to here had to do with family relationships and not with school. But I do see how in some ways my family bullshit crosses over into my school work.

Tracy then began to describe in detail the relationship she had with her parents – what she described as a "dysfunctional family" – and the ways in which this relationship and class issues played into her doctoral experiences.

I guess I have a workaholic father who was and still is to a large degree emotionally unavailable. He was mostly absent from my life really until recently when my mother died. He's still pretty absent but at least he makes a vague effort to communicate now. My mother was a big codependent. She had a hard time drawing boundaries of intimacy and perhaps abused acceptable boundaries with her children since her marriage with my father was pretty much without affection (at least in my memory). The issue of my mother emotionally terrorizing my pursuit of graduate study is relative to the class issues I discussed before and to her inability to draw emotional boundaries. She was a pretty angry woman about many things. I believe that she was resentful of my education especially when it seemed to place me in a contrary position to her belief system or emotional/psychological power over me.

I also had asked Tracy whether she thought any aspects of her family's dysfunctional patterns had been recapitulated in her relationships with her committee members or her advisor – and whether she saw any similar patterns of dysfunctionality between home and the department.

Now this is an interesting thought about my committee. I suppose the dysfunction in my behavior is repeated in the sense that I work very hard for a committee who seem to care little about the energy I put in. My advisor has certainly been less than supportive at times and very supportive at others. This kind of behavior is similar to my father who will go out of his way to do one thing for me elaborately and then is completely absent both physically and emotionally the rest of the time. Also there is an analogy in that as much as I feel that my father has no concept of what I actually do and why, I also feel that my diss. advisor has no concept of where I come from and what odds I may struggle against to do the work I must do for her.

I asked Tracy about her attempt to “escape taking responsibility” for herself by “getting involved in a really self-destructive relationship and blowing off academic work altogether” – about her view of academe that “looked very ugly from the other side of the exams” and what she described were the same kinds of dysfunctional patterns she'd experienced in her family – the absence of meaningful communication and a fundamental lack of trust in her relationships with the faculty.

In some ways the people on the faculty were an essential part of the ugly picture I saw. I had much disdain for them because they were intimately involved in the nightmare of academia. I never told any faculty members about what I was going through. I don't think I ever would. Not those on my committee. There are faculty members here who make themselves much more available for friendship to their grad students than those on my committee. I do not have any relationship with those professors outside of basically just knowing who they are.

Tracy chose not to confide in any of the faculty in her department about her personal issues, but she did express a “desire for support from the academic environment” around academic issues. She connected her need in this area to a lack of support that she had from her family and she saw this as crossing over into issues related to class. In part, at the root

of Tracy's depression was the realization that academe had many more of the same qualities of a dysfunctional family than she'd wanted to believe.

Perhaps my desire for support from the academic environment too, comes from a feeling that I don't get support from my family. This perhaps crosses over into class issues. For the majority of my family (in fact everyone I can think of) higher education is not an endeavor they are acquainted with. One of my uncles who has a Doctorate of Divinity was the only one who I assumed understood what I was doing. But because of his and my aunt's intense religious beliefs I always avoided talking about my research. This summer I was asked in all seriousness by my uncle what one does a doctorate on in foreign languages ... I had to explain to my uncle that I was studying \_literature\_ and I even mentioned the dreaded word "feminism."

My mother and I used to argue about feminism. She would insist that I didn't understand what I was saying when I called myself a feminist and that I shouldn't go around telling people that I was one. I should be careful because feminists are crazy. Now my mother wasn't crazy, just a product of a Southern Baptist upbringing in the Deep South. That's what I have too. Lots of preachers in my family. It's a strange world I won't try to describe, but it is relevant for our discussion that "work" in this world entails physical labor and it's something men do. Women can be teachers and that's usually how what I do is understood by my relatives. Intellectual or artistic work is not of much value to them and is considered somewhat odd. This is where I stand.

I asked Tracy if she found it difficult to stand between these two 'worlds' – the working class life of her family and her middle-class life in the academy.

Yes, even though most of the time I am surrounded by people who understand me and who understand feminism. My family ties are not too binding that it is a heavy emotional burden. It's just uncomfortable and annoying. Then again, I believe that teaching is what makes academia completely worth while. It may also interest you to know that standing between these two worlds is a position that gives me a cause as well. I do not want to flee the southern US. I hope to be able to work within this framework, find a teaching position in the South and try to open up some of the narrowmindedness found here. Things don't get better if you just leave them alone. In fact, they usually get worse. So maybe my personal familiarity with the prejudices that exist in the South also motivates me to consider it worthwhile to try to help change things.

#### Advisor/Advisee Relationships

All the women in this study, with the exception of Sarah, chose women faculty members to serve as their primary advisors. In Sarah's program students were expected, out of courtesy, to speak with each of the faculty members before deciding who they might best work with as an advisor. Students were expected to choose an advisor by the end of the first or second quarter in their program. Sarah found it frustrating to have to choose an advisor so early in the program.

How they expected us to know who to put on a committee when we didn't even know what we would take, and in many instances didn't know what our dissertation topic

would be by that time, is beyond me. I was the only one in my cohort to actually stick to this time line, however.

Sarah met with each of the faculty members until she had spoken with all but Ben, the faculty member who had conducted her admission interview. Although Ben is an internationally recognized researcher, Sarah had a bad taste in her mouth because of the way he acted during her interview. She thought he was pompous and overbearing. She met with him nonetheless and although they did share some common interests she didn't see how she could possibly work with someone she found to be so "gruff and intimidating." Ultimately, Sarah's reasons for selecting Ben as her advisor were related as much to her perceptions about the kind of person he was as they were to his subject expertise.

[During our meeting] the phone rang, and it was the vet calling to tell him that he (the vet) had to put Ben's dog to sleep. Ben teared up, and got very emotional. Then he called his wife to tell her. He was extremely upset. And I suddenly realized, watching all this, that the way he presented himself to students was just a cover. That he was, underneath it all, a very sweet person who was probably very afraid of being hurt by others. By the time I left the meeting, I had decided to ask Ben to be my advisor. The rest, as they say, is history.

Developing a working relationship with her advisor took a good deal of time. For the longest while Sarah didn't know what to expect from him. He edited everything she wrote with a fine-tooth comb, particularly in the early stages of her work and she started to see him as hyper-critical and began to wonder whether anything she developed would ever be good enough for him. Sarah recounted how it took a long time for both her and Ben to learn how to work together.

There were days when I seriously didn't think I could take working with him, but in my department there were literally no other options .... let's face it, faculty are not generally good "People people." They are better with ideas and data than with interpersonal relationships .... As a student, you're at the mercy of your advisor. If he or she is having a bad day, nothing you have written will pass muster. If, on the other hand, they're having a great day, you can do no wrong.

Sarah also noted differences in their intellectual styles as something they had to work through: "he will read EVERYTHING (and remember it, too, damn his soul), while I will read what is necessary and/or interesting or relevant. I tend to cut to the chase."

Sarah noted that Ben had only one other female advisee and although she indicated that this might have been problematic, she recounted no specific examples. However, she did observe significant differences in interaction styles that she attributed to gender.

Sarah recounted that she and a number of students, alumni and faculty from her institution, about 15 in all, had gone out to dinner one evening while attending a

conference. She asked Kathy, one of her colleagues, a question about the keynote speaker's address and Dan, a male colleague who was a year behind her cohort, "launched into a 20-minute lecture about it" even though she hadn't asked him. Kathy "never got a word in. By the time Dan had finished his 'lecture' no one else wanted to speak." Two nights later Sarah and some of the same students were again discussing issues pertinent to their studies and Dan launched in another verbal attack.

Nothing we said was defensible, and if we couldn't immediately provide facts and figures, he sneered and suggested that we didn't know what we were talking about. Oddly enough, [another male colleague] started challenging us, too, although not in the nasty way that Dan did. But it was quite obvious that we were being attacked.

Eventually, Kathy and I just gave up. It was no longer an exchange or a fun conversation; there was no dialogue. When Kathy and I got back to the room, we looked at each other and said "what the hell was that all about"? We also discussed it most of the next day. It seemed to us that what Dan and Ron had done was what other faculty members had done to panel members or discussants at the various sessions. Challenge, combat, attack, poke holes, etc. Except, once we reflected on this more, we realized that it was mostly the \_male\_ faculty who acted this way. Sessions attended primarily by women had more dialogue and interaction, less trying to prove what you know. So we figured that Dan and Ron had simply picked up on this verbal style, especially given the surroundings. Kathy was willing to forget all about it once we got home; I on the other hand got madder the more I thought about it and sent Ron a stinging two+ page e-mail message about the whole situation. To which he responded that he had been really uncomfortable with the way the conversation had gone, but couldn't figure out why he had gone along with Dan. He acknowledged that a lot of what I had said about the combative nature of the men's speech was probably true. He also hated that he had fallen into that trap. I still remind him of that incident once in a while--he still thanks me for teaching him a valuable lesson.

Sarah was also in a unique position to observe how the nature and opportunity for mentoring in the advisor/advisee relationship may be experienced very differently by male and female doctoral students. After completing her doctorate Sarah began to date Ron, a colleague in her program who, coincidentally, also had her former advisor, Ben, as chair of his own doctoral committee. She describes her perceptions of the relationship between Ron and Ben in contrast to her own relationship with Ben.

For him, conversations with Ben have usually taken on more the tenor of dialogues over theory, etc. It appears to me, from hearing Ron talk about his conversations with Ben (although I have never been around when they have these talks), that Ben has always viewed Ron more as a colleague. Not that Ron would say so, but it sounds that way to me. Of course, as Ron and I have discussed, he and Ben have been able to have a different relationship because of their gender. For instance, there have been several conferences that Ron and Ben have attended where they roomed together in the hotel. You and I both know that you have very different conversations with someone that you have known in those circumstances. I think (again, my perceptions, not necessarily reality) that Ben and Ron have known each other long enough ... and have shared many long conversations and as a result, Ron probably didn't look upon Ben as being as much of an authority figure as I did. I never had the opportunity to just shoot the shit with Ben late at night, or discuss world events while watching the news. You know,

the kinds of conversations you tend to have with someone when you stay in the same room for three or four days. So for me, there was a sense of formality and distance in my relationship with Ben for quite a long time. It took the better part of four years to get to a more comfortable, more collegial relationship.

Tracy chose as her advisor, a faculty member who had served as second reader for her master's thesis – a professor she admired for her enthusiasm, her supportive attitude toward students, her teaching abilities and her genuine interest in her subject. She described the relationship with her advisor as “comfortable” but “very professional.”

She is supportive but we have a very professional relationship. We have only a few times acknowledged our mutual experiences in dealing with the predominately male world of academia. That was a good experience to have with her. I feel that she is helpful but she keeps her distance. I don't feel close to her at all. And I do find her slightly intimidating at times because she's always so busy. She is also chair of the dept.

Tracy described herself as the kind of person who generally doesn't like to show her vulnerability. However, she didn't feel her relationship with her advisor suffered in any way because of this and she wasn't inclined to want to change anything about the relationship. Tracy seemed to feel that if her advisor “insisted on a topic” that she would be able to speak with her about it. She described the relationship as “mutually respectful” and felt she could listen to her advisor's suggestions, but she felt equally comfortable in choosing what most interested her. Tracy described her advisor as “always collecting articles and titles and such for suggestions for reading which is supportive.” On two occasions Tracy described slightly different views of her advisor's response to work she had submitted. On one occasion Tracy indicated that her advisor reviewed her work in a timely fashion and provided “constructive comments.” This Tracy described as “good enough for minimum.” However, on another occasion Tracy indicated that her advisor didn't seem to review her work that carefully and at that time Tracy felt she had better input from others on her committee.

I later asked Tracy why she hadn't shared, with her advisor, her reasons for not wanting to pursue the topic of the “sick body”. I wondered whether Tracy felt there was an adequate level of trust in their relationship to be able to share her reasons to her advisor – and I wondered what Tracy thought might have been the outcome if she *had* discussed her reasons. I also wanted to know if Tracy's resistance to following her advisor's suggestion had created any further awkwardness or difficulty in their relationship.

I think that my relationship with my advisor is good but is not very personal. She is supportive professionally but I don't ever seek her support for other things. Expressing the need or desire to avoid certain topics of study for personal reasons would reveal to

my advisor a dimension of my personality which I don't care to share with her. That, I believe would or could create an awkwardness. Not sharing with her that I associate sickness and especially sick mothers with a very personal experience was a way to avoid awkwardness and making my advisor feel that I am only suited to study certain topics. I don't want to limit myself professionally and I do have the feeling that showing such an emotional motivation for avoidance is the kind of thing that works against you. I don't know why we are socialized to work this way, but especially women have working against them the notion that they are too emotional and/ or moody to be entirely professional. Even though I was dealing with another woman, I was dealing with a woman who I know may see my emotions as a weakness.

Although Tracy was somewhat reserved in the degree of personal disclosure she allowed herself in the relationship with her advisor, she felt she had developed a professional relationship with her advisor that had been "fairly positive." Her advisor had been very helpful, both during her preliminary exams and with the development of her ideas for the dissertation.

However, in early October of 1995, Tracy had an encounter in which she felt she had been blindsided by her advisor. Tracy had asked her advisor to write a letter of recommendation for her placement file. One day as Tracy was walking down the hall with a friend, her advisor approached her and informed Tracy that she wouldn't be able to write the letter of recommendation if she didn't know where Tracy was in her writing.

Well, I felt like I was busted because though I had started writing, I actually took a vacation and found it hard to catch up on all my teaching etc. and get back into writing all at the same time. She asked me to give her all that I had written even though I told her I was in the middle of my 1st chapter and had nothing that was ready to turn in. She insisted, so the following Monday I gave her about 14 pages of incomplete work.

A few days later Tracy's advisor called her into her office.

... she ... asked me questions that were very clearly answered in the pages i gave her. (She has a reputation for not reading anything) After about 5 minutes of that, she told me how disappointed she was with my progress (based solely on the quantity of pages that I had given her). I told her that she forced me to give her work that wasn't ready yet and that I was working steadily (though not swiftly) and felt confident about my progress. She decided to insult me by telling me "You are not going to get a job." I stared at her unsure of the context she was referring to, in the dept? in my life? in a university for next year? So I said to her, "what do you mean?" and she replied that no one was going to hire me at the rate I was moving on my dissertation. "I'm aware of the job market." I said to her, thinking that her bitchiness was utterly unbelievable. I didn't want to bother explaining to her how I wanted to put my best foot forward knowing that my chances are sl.m, how I hear going through the motions is worth it even if nothing comes up because you'll be really prepared when you have a little more solid ground to stand on the following year, etc.

Anyway, I ended up asking her if she was going to write me a rec letter or not. I wish that I didn't even have to get one from her because she is well known for writing shitty letters. She says "Of course" as if I'm silly for asking but adds that she's not going to "LIE" about where I am in my work. Jesus! No one was asking her to lie about anything. The woman has known me for 5 years, she worked with me on my Master's,

now she's my diss director. I figure she should know me well enough to recommend me. Why the schizophrenia?????????

Beyond "really hating to write recommendation letters" Tracy couldn't figure out what had gone wrong. Three of Tracy's friends had similar experiences with this same professor. Two women had asked her to write references for a particular fellowship and were informed that they had no chance of receiving the fellowship in question. In the end, both found other references and were later awarded the fellowship.

She told one man who had applied for a job in another dept since his funding in ours was out that she had called the sec'ys in that dept and they had no idea who he was. He was stunned and felt a little bit violated that she had gone asking about him behind his back. She insisted that his chances of getting a job there were next to impossible and she wanted to know if he would consider taking a job back in our dept or did he want to wait on the other dept. Being offended by her lack of diplomacy and knowing more about that dept than she did, he told her he'd rather work for them because he'd be more marketable in the end w/ the extra teaching experience. He, of course, got the job in that dept.

Tracy found it difficult to understand her advisor's motivations for treating Tracy and her colleagues in this way.

I can't figure the moral of the story either. This woman clearly has a problem performing her duties and supporting the grad students in our dept. Funny thing is she's the chair of the dept too. Eventually she will become like the former chair, I suppose, so burnt out and bored that she doesn't remember who anybody is and no one will want to work with her.

For Tracy, her advisor's behaviour presented as a negative role model and although this gave Tracy cause to question her commitment to academe, Tracy's confidence in her own beliefs and values has remained strong.

I used to be scared a little that I risked becoming like this if I stayed in academia. I don't believe that's true. I'm much too self-reflective. I'm much too concerned for others (even at my own expense sometimes). I believe too much in the role of education, the power of education to change lives. There's some of my optimism again.

Denise first connected with her advisor when she was in the process of having her status changed from master's student to doctoral student. It had been this professor who had advised Denise, in the latter stages of the process, to write a simple letter to the faculty requesting a change in her status.

She must have sort of bonded to me then, because later that same semester after she'd made sure my status was changed, she claimed me as her student when my advisor (just a designation for official purposes and a person to talk with about coursework) had to reduce her student load. She told me what she'd done and asked if it was alright. At the time I felt a little strange about it. I'd been doing fine with my advisor. But within no

time I was very pleased because my chair has been available and helpful at every turn in the road.

This new advisor/advisee relationship worked well for Denise. Whether it was because of the bond they ultimately developed or some other reason, Denise later described having chosen to work with her advisor.

As to the interpersonal side of things, I chose her because I work well with her. I'm not intimidated by her. She clearly supports me and my work. She praises me, tells me I'm making good progress. In terms of tasks, my chair and I would talk about what needed to be done and who needed to do it. When I needed her help to write a letter, check into procedures or the like, she was always more than willing. When she saw something, like a grant that I should apply for she would inform me and help me meet the deadline.

Although Denise wouldn't say that she and her advisor were friends, she did suggest their relationship bordered on friendship. Occasionally they would do things like have meals together. They knew each others' partners and sometimes they did things as a foursome, but throughout her studies Denise saw her advisor more as a colleague than a friend.

I enjoy talking with her. She's very bright and puts things together in interesting ways. Her degree is in English and she's done lots of feminist work so we have those things in common, as well as a no-nonsense approach to all of this. She expresses her confidence in my abilities. She's a confident person also which helps. We negotiate the power difference between us. I've never seen her as a "superior." There's not really a single word to describe the relationship or roles that we play. It changes with the task. It's never adversarial. Even when she was on one side of an issue that arose at the university and I on the other, we were able to respect one another.

Denise recalled two incidents with her advisor that reflected how they managed conflict in their relationship. The first incident occurred when her advisor had edited a letter Denise was writing as part of her proposal.

She had asked to read it to offer feedback and instead of marginal notes or a narrative reply, she had crossed through words, rewritten sentences and the like. As a comp person, I find this pedagogically unsound. As a writer I was offended. I took the letter into her office and asked her about it. She told me that she had done it that way because she felt that the tone for this particular audience (a full dept. approval was needed) was crucial. I asked her if this was the way that she would be responding to chapters. She explained her normal procedure which was less intrusive and presumptuous. I told her that for this it was fine but that I would not want her making changes in my diss. That I valued her suggestions and concerns but that I wanted and needed to maintain ownership of the language. Mostly this has worked out well.

The second incident occurred when Denise's advisor "had a very negative reaction" to one of the chapters Denise had submitted. Up to that point Denise had been sending chapters to her advisor and then continuing on to the next chapter, saving the revisions for

later. But “her complaints about this chapter were so strong” that Denise chose to revise it almost immediately. At first Denise was upset about her advisor’s disagreements with the chapter. However, after rereading it, Denise agreed that the chapter needed reorganization.

So I did that ... I pulled aside some of the material that she thought inappropriate. I set it off with its own subtitle. She wanted the material pulled, but I thought that some members of the committee who were less familiar with this area of scholarship would need what she saw as old hat.

Denise moved some of the text into a separate section and wrote an introduction to the chapter, inviting readers to skip the section in question if they were comfortable with her explanation of the material. This strategy enabled Denise to retain the text that she wanted to keep in her dissertation.

This seemed to satisfy her. And I think she was pleased that I had acted so quickly on her other suggestions. It was a painful process for me. I spent several angry resentful days, but in the end, I made peace with both her and the text.

Denise never had the opportunity to gain any knowledge or insight into the nature of her advisor’s own doctoral experiences. She did share some further insights she had about the ways in which her relationship with her advisor differed from her own familial relationships.

I think my advisor wants me to succeed. Unlike my mother, she defines that based on what I say success means, not some picture in her own head. I am direct, but I do many things differently from other students. She doesn’t have a problem with this. She trusts me to do what needs to be done. For example, her partner chides students not to leave campus because they won’t be motivated to finish. When I [decided to move away from campus], we talked about it. She expressed no concern about my dedication ... Occasionally she helps me negotiate what the system wants and how I am willing to meet that demand.

It’s difficult for me to be direct and honest with [my family]. But that’s not the case at all with my chair. Perhaps it is partially that I have always seen us as equals. I entered the PhD program as a 31 year old woman. I had lots of experience in the world. I didn’t see myself as a student (or child) needing guidance. So I wasn’t looking for a maternal or parental figure. I like equal relationships and have worked on having healthy ones. When things are not equal I fall into old family patterns. Guess that says my chair was also willing and I think grateful for that type of relationship. She doesn’t hold my hand. She doesn’t need to. I understand the traffic patterns on the street. And when I cross against the light, I know the risks I’m taking.

Throughout her program Denise’s partner and her advisor provided the kind of support that she felt she needed to see her dissertation through to completion.

They’re both people who have been through it. I think that’s an important element to their support. They could offer advice and provide context beyond my experience. They’ve both been good at encouraging me and believing in me. I think that can’t be

stressed enough. I don't have any doubts that these two, among others, expect that I will finish. that I have what it takes. That belief carries me through when I have self-doubts.

The difficulties Denise encountered with her admission process and the changed rules around comprehensive examinations were problems that demonstrated to her that "faculty were not good at following through. They were constantly changing rules in the middle of things."

Although Denise wasn't affected personally, she described one of the hidden rules in her department – "what you don't ask specifically, they won't tell you" – and the impact sabbaticals had on some of her colleagues' programs.

If an advisor isn't forthright about when they have a sabbatical or how they are going to deal with it, students get blindsided. Schedules for grad students are often totally disrupted. Students should be told when they enter that they should ask about sabbaticals when forming committees, but most only discover this when a committee member or chair is on the way to the airport saying they'll be back in touch in X-number of months. It's ugly.

Zoe was the only one of the seven women who eventually had two co-chairs on her committee. Zoe wanted to do an ethnographic study of prostitution, but the faculty she spoke with in the department had quantitative orientations to research and repeatedly told her she needed a working hypothesis that she could quantify. Zoe couldn't seem to think of anything that would work when she thought about the population and issues she wanted to study. After several false starts she found a new assistant professor who had done a qualitative research dissertation of her own and who found merit in what Zoe wanted to do.

she immediately looked at me and said that of course i could design a study of the nature i was talking. i just needed to think about research differently than i had ever heard it discussed in this department .... So, from that first meeting on, i had my topic, my approach, my dissertation chair (well-- co-chair), and the support that had been lacking through so much of my graduate training.

This new assistant professor had been at the university for only a year and Zoe was advised to ask her advisor of four years to serve as co-chair. He had been at the university for about 25 years and would add credibility to the committee. Being a "hard core quantitative scholar and researcher," he was more than a little reluctant to be part of an ethnographic study, but Zoe finally managed to convince him. However, the next several months proved difficult for Zoe because of the differing perspectives of her committee members about the nature of research.

The credibility was there, but so was the foundation for a lot of struggles through the next 18 months of my life. The quant people on my committee just couldn't understand what i was doing and, largely because of this, kept finding reasons to "question" what i was doing and its viability and credibility.

Throughout that fall, Zoe worked closely with the female co-chair of her committee being careful to include the male co-chair in everything they did. However, it soon became apparent that her 'quant' co-chair was having difficulty seeing the efficacy of her research. Increasingly, their meetings were focused on informing him about ethnographic research "and getting him up to speed" rather than on Zoe's research.

it became apparent that if i were to forge ahead i would have to limit his input as i was wasting too much time and energy continually trying to "educate" him about my type of research. So, soon she had me writing little short pieces to her and she would serve as the go-between, filling him in on what i was doing.

For the remainder of her program Zoe worked most closely with her female co-chair who was a "very strong feminist." Zoe described the relationship with her female co-chair as professional and collegial.

She was also quite a "task maste ." and she will admit to that. However, at all times as she pushed me she also did so while reminding me of how valuable my work was and how qualified and competent i, as a professional, was. She pushed me, both from a pragmatic sense and from an intellectual sense. She set schedules for me that i was expected to maintain-- perhaps i should say that we conjointly "negotiated" schedules. But, when they were made, i knew i needed to stick to them. On the intellectual side of things, she always challenged me to think more deeply than i was and to look at things from a different angle/perspective .... She built my belief in myself and that continues today. We now have moved our relationship to a different plane, becoming truly colleagues and friends.

Zoe felt very comfortable confiding in her female co-chair about both the interpersonal and task dimensions of their relationship.

She assumed a very assertive and forthright position when dealing with conflicts. And, when conflicts occurred, she was always quick to remind me that it was \*her\* job to resolve them. My job was at all times to stay focused on the research and the writing. My male co-chair, when he did become involved, was more autocratic and, in many ways, more underhanded. At times he created conflict by passing information onto me about my committee members that had little, or possibly nothing, to do with my dissertation. This did, however, add stress to my dissertation experience. I learned early in the process to take any concerns i had to my female co-chair and when the male co-chair played what can only be described as "power games" i also notified my female co-chair of these and she immediately intervened, again reminding me that my focus was to be the research.

Zoe's relationship with her male co-chair was less satisfying.

Our relationship was often one that can best be described as paternal--he tried to "parent" me. As my dissertation process moved along our relationship became characterized by distrust. I became guarded in my interactions with him and i felt at all times that he viewed my work as "less than credible," due in large part to his feelings about the type of work i was doing (qualitative) as opposed to the type of work he typically undertakes (quantitative).

Having described her relationship with her male co-chair as paternalistic, I asked Zoe if she thought there were any similarities or differences between her relationship with her advisors and her relationship with her parents. Zoe described the relationship with her female co-chair as “so collegial and egalitarian in nature that it stood in direct contrast” to the relationship she had with her parents. The relationship with her male co-chair was another matter.

I had never thought about the possibility that there would be similarities here, but that may well account for the feelings of inadequacy i always had with regard to my co-chair. He was, in many ways, autocratic, but always in a very subtle and insidious way. And i always found myself trying to “measure up” for him, but never feeling as if i really did. That is, in many ways, the feelings i always had about my relationship with my father.

Over the next several months, two events transpired that would test Zoe’s patience and exacerbate her already high level of stress. Both events were related to her committee. First, Zoe learned that her co-chair, the qualitative researcher, the one member of her committee who had been so supportive of her work since the beginning, had accepted a position at another university. For reasons unknown to Zoe at the time, the university was threatening not to give her co-chair the usual one year leave to complete her committee responsibilities. This meant that not only would their remaining work together be conducted at a distance, but Zoe would have one year at best, and possibly less, to finish her dissertation.

This inspired me even more to get the work done!!!!

The second event occurred later that summer after her qualitative co-chair had left the university to assume her new position. Zoe received an email message from her ‘quant’ co-chair asking if she had heard any student complaints being levelled against her other co-chair.

I honestly responded “no” and asked if there were something about my dissertation i should know about. Keep in mind that at this point all my experiences were being filtered through and around my dissertation, so i naturally assumed the credibility of my work was once again under attack especially since she was no longer here to “defend” it.

Zoe sent her ‘qual’ co-chair an email asking what these events might mean. Her co-chair had no idea what might have precipitated such allegations. Angered, she contacted Zoe’s co-chair only to learn that two female students had made allegations of sexual harassment against her. She was furious at her colleague for contacting Zoe about the charges.

i was the \*only\* person in the department who believed her unequivocally from the onset and believe her i did when she told me the allegations were unfounded. However, neither she nor i had any departmental support for maintaining this stance, thus further alienating both of us from the rest of my committee and the department as a whole. The rumor mill went wild, there was talk that the university proper would not "recognize" her as official chair of my committee, and no one seemed to know what was "real" and what was "fabricated." In the midst of all this high drama i continued to write and teach full time. Exhausting!!!!

At one point i visited the department and was told that there were going to be 4 official charges of harassment leveled against her (two from students; two from profs in other departments), but no one could verify the validity of the claims. However, official word did come from the university's legal department that \*no one\* in my department could engage in any conversations in which her name appeared (faculty, staff, and grad students). Imagine my dilemma. i had to network with these people and no one was supposed to talk about my co-chair.

Zoe dealt with this problem by first passing everything to her female co-chair via email. Once Zoe had her stamp of approval, she systematically forwarded all her writing and chapters to individual committee members for their feedback and comments.

Helen described her choice of advisor as "another of those intuitive leaps" she sometimes makes. The same professor who had recommended the Pearsall book on "Explorations in feminist philosophy" had, at the time, made a strong impact on Helen. She reflected on their first meeting.

Her office was warm, a bit cave-like -- no windows, a desk lamp instead of the florescent lights, comfy chair for visitors, lots of books that looked read, wall hangings. She created a comfortable space for herself. I was simply but remarkably struck by the sense that she was a woman from whom I could learn a great deal. If it was philosophy I had to do to have her as an advisor, so be it. She was eventually named the chair of my comps committee and has recently agreed to be my dissertation advisor, though with a laugh. And she is a friend.

Although Helen described her relationship with her advisor as one of friendship, in the context of her master's degree, she described relationships with former mentors as one of the "most tricky things about growing up."

When I worked at the library ... I started out as mail sorter and gradually worked up to being professional staff -- on paper I was colleague, but I never got to the point of feeling like a peer. Never quite made it after getting the masters and starting to teach (fixed-term, not probationary) in the same department as I'd gotten my masters in -- colleague perhaps, but not peer. I've wondered if one ever gets to be a peer of the mentor(s) with whom one studies or does one have to move on to find peers?

Helen describes her advisor as a person who is "efficient, never misses deadlines, [and] gets things done." In turn, Helen tries to allow her advisor plenty of time and asks only for what is necessary. Helen sees herself struggling more than her advisor with the 'imbalances' in their relationship. In part, Helen is concerned with issues she's read

about – that she “will offend, step out of line, etc. and cause a rift in the relationship.” Helen hasn’t discussed this with her advisor, though she thinks she probably will.

Partly, this is related to her taking on the project with the mutual understanding that she might, at some time, feel she had to step out of it. Partly, it is my own struggle with the whole notion of becoming an academic. And I’m not sure ‘imbalance of power’ is what it’s about so much as the intrusion of a somewhat artificial, temporary construct into the possibility of a long-term friendship.

Helen doesn’t expect her advisor to be of assistance in her post-degree job search because her degree is interdisciplinary and she is not specializing, nor could she claim expertise, in her advisor’s field of study. Other members of her committee, because of their prominence, may have some degree of influence in helping Helen get interviews.

Camila chose her advisor because of the great respect she had for her advisor’s research and for her skills in bringing people together to work as a team and because of this Camila sometimes found it difficult to deal with her ambivalent feelings about her advisor. She described her advisor’s behaviour as sometimes “weird.”

she never lives up to her words so she talks good but does funny or does not good. funny not as in funny ha ha ha but funny as in weird i mean.

When Camila identified the most critical events and challenges she faced during her doctoral experience she described first, her relationship with her advisor.  
at two points in time i almost dropped out.

Camila described several issues that seemed central to her experience. She hadn’t thought of her advisor’s behaviour as “abusive” or “manipulative” at the time, but on reflection, these descriptors seemed appropriate to her.

i described how i was abused or i think it is abuse now. it was hard to realize though cos she is very good at making things look like she does them for you. but it was messy big time ... it makes you feel like you ought ta’ protect her and be patient with her etc.

Camila often met at her advisor’s home to discuss her work and during these meetings her advisor would turn the television on and would constantly switch channels while they were working.

it killed me.  
this and other kinds of things like this made me explode once or twice and i told her i can t stand it and she hated me for that. once when i was trying to get past her editing of my first publication she exploded in tears for two hours about how nobody understood her etc. and we started talking and the minute i know i am arguing with her and she tells me get out of this house and don t come back or something like that and i said “i am not leaving” and i didn t and we fought literally for some time. it was a riot

literally verbal riot i mean. d'ya' get a picture? these things went on for 2 years but i had 2 big fights with her--this one that i describe and another one. and i said what i thought and things changed a lot.

Although Camila was rarely reluctant to express her thoughts and feelings in these kinds of circumstances, she also recognized that doing so came with certain consequences.

this also created friction with some people who did not like me saying what i thought. same thing applies with my adviser.

Camila also found her advisor to be very controlling in their relationship.

my adviser controlled things pretty much and i had to negotiate with her. she got mad at me once cos i called a meeting up to tell the committee how my plans had changed. she said i should never do that again. i still don t agree.

Camila's thoughts about withdrawing from her program on two different occasions, were echoed by her advisor, when at the end of Camila's third year, she suggested that Camila should get another advisor, but Camila refused to change advisors.

i told her i would not and if anything i would drop out. that made her mad as hell. i wanted her cos of her knowledge and i wanted her to be respectful of my needs and choices. if not. i was gonna drop ... the second fight was right before we went to argentina in the summer of 94 to work at the literacy world congress. i think i came back and finished due to my family's support down there. and due to my relationship with my boyfriend who was really nice. he was in argentina with me that year.

Camila's decision to finish her degree was also grounded in the remorse she carried for not completing her history degree years earlier at the University of Buenos Aires.

i wanted to finish and i would have felt bad hadn t i done it--i know. it relates to -- i think -- not having finished my h'istory degree in argentina. i know already what it feels like to be or feel remorse for not having completed something, so i guess i was not gonna go thru that again. plus i was somewhat convinced that i should and wanted to do it.

Maggie's relationship with her advisor is one that has all but undone her resolve to finish her degree. Her advisor has a strong national reputation in her field and Maggie chose her, in part, because of her tremendous expertise in her subject area. Maggie took several courses with her advisor who held high expectations and standards of performance, but she had also been encouraging and supportive of Maggie's efforts.

Early in 1994, shortly after the birth of her daughter, Maggie resumed work on her proposal. She was feeling stronger and began to compose a new work that she would perform with a colleague. The rehearsal schedule was gruelling and it included an hour

long commute each way. Maggie met with her advisor once or twice that semester and she read a little, but she wasn't making much progress on her proposal.

Then I read in the university newsletter that my advisor and two other colleagues had presented a conference session using the theme I'd developed in my comps. I was sitting at my desk at work and remember trembling outright for here was the seminal idea of my work presented at a major national conference. Several times I gently urged my advisor for a copy of the paper. I discussed it with her saying I was very interested in what they had presented at the conference. No paper was ever forthcoming. She avoided the topic, never telling me anything until eventually I dropped it. I decided to go forth as usual trying to convince myself that she has more integrity than to use my ideas without giving me any credit. We worked together well on a couple of different projects over the next year.

Maggie continued working on her proposal during the summer of 1994. She was still very much in the stage of sorting out her ideas and she was experiencing some difficulty in conceptualizing the proposal. She had another conference paper accepted that overlapped with her proposal and she felt she'd experienced some confusion in distinguishing between them. She met once with her advisor and discussed the first draft but after that her advisor had little time for her. Maggie was disappointed that the development of her proposal wasn't going as quickly as she'd hoped. She sought the advice of another committee member who did provide Maggie with some "wise counsel and direction."

That summer Maggie read and wrote in preparation for the fall semester. She wanted to have a draft of her proposal ready for her advisor's return in the fall. And after saving some extra hours at work, Maggie was able to enroll in a class being taught by one of her intended interviewees who was a guest lecturer that summer. Maggie admired this woman's work and she'd hoped to use the class as an ethnographic study of her performance techniques and methods, but it was all she could do to get through the class. It had been so long since she'd taken a performance class that she struggled somewhat with her technique.

Maggie invited the guest lecturer to dinner to discuss her research and she agreed to participate in Maggie's study. That summer Maggie contacted two other potential study participants and conducted preliminary interviews with each of them. She travelled to Chicago to meet with one woman and although Maggie found it quite stressful to leave her daughter for the first time, the preliminary interview was very successful. Maggie was relieved. After the summer class, Maggie headed back to the northwest, this time to present another conference paper. Maggie became quite ill during the conference and experienced relapses well into September. When her advisor returned in the fall Maggie felt a good deal

of anger when her advisor, having had little time for her during the summer, made a “snide comment” to her about her proposal.

That fall Maggie worked on her proposal in the early mornings since her husband was working a 2 to 10 p.m. shift and she was often up late into the evenings with her daughter and it was during one of those morning work sessions that she began to solidify her problem statement.

I remember the feeling of elation at seeing the idea more clearly articulated. I had started a personal journal where I wrote about my ideas and sure enough, it came from those few writings. I was also reading Howard Becker's book on writing for social scientists and it helped me a great deal. I remember sitting on the floor of my living room with the paper in front of me, my tired eyes trying to focus, a cup of lukewarm coffee, books piled around, and my space heater going. I had to try and be quiet so as not to wake my daughter who isn't always an early riser but can be at the most inconvenient times! I remember the feeling of 'there it is at last'. At last I had a foundation to work from. At last it was revealed to me. I knew I was headed in a better direction.

She wouldn't be able to finish the proposal before the end of the semester but she knew she would have a good draft for the beginning of the semester in January (1995). It was during this period that Maggie volunteered to participate in this study and around the same time that her advisor mentioned to Maggie that she was revising the syllabus for her core course and she had been looking over the book Maggie had used to develop her thesis.

I just nodded and didn't say anything or think anything about it until I happened to speak with another student a few weeks ago. She's a good friend of mine and I confided in her explaining the difficulty I was having with my motivation and the nagging question in the back of my mind about my advisor's use of my exam concepts. She looked at me and calmly described the course she was taking from my advisor and described the very theme that I'd developed in my exams and said that my advisor hadn't mentioned me at all. I flipped out and cried hysterically. I asked my friend for a copy of the syllabus if she got a chance but I didn't want to include her in this mess.

Maggie experienced this moment of discovery as the lowest point in her program.

My lowest low was the moment I found out my advisor had used my concept in her class. There are no words to describe the immense disappointment, despair, and helplessness. My friend told me, trying to console me, people won't remember you for your dissertation. She is right, they won't remember me at all.

Maggie saw a copy of the syllabus that spring (April, 1995) and wrote to me:

I received the copy of the syllabus recently. Time for me now has little meaning. The syllabus is actually a wonderful outline for my dissertation. My advisor has been counselling me from it this semester. I can tell. So I am tormented now because anything I do will look like, Oh, you were so and so's student. And how do I approach her on this one? My advisor is instructing more than a dozen graduate students this semester on my topic that I developed in my exams and she hasn't mentioned that at

all. She has acquired it for herself and feels it is hers to develop at will. We have a major communication problem here but I don't feel I'm in a position of power to address the issue. My advisor can make life hell. So now I'm stuck with a rather peculiar and disheartening position. Do I continue on? Change my topic? Walk away? The student has taught the instructor. I just wish I understood what to do. What is she thinking? What is her impression? I cannot, or perhaps I do not want to believe that she would be so callous. I know how strongly she feels about anyone touching her research.

So as you can tell the issue of trust is shattered here and my heart is heavy when it comes to my study. The love of the idea, the self-confidence gained from my exams and the orals, that final feeling of 'You really did well' is now at the bottom of my feet. The idea is displayed as someone else's or so it appears. In many ways I am resolved to finish the project and continue to use it in my own teaching, but I feel quite strongly that the academy is no place for me with power structures embedded in those few 'scholars' who are blind, manipulative and cruel. What kind of heritage does this pass on?

I hope some day to talk with my advisor about this but for now I just try and go on. I have another draft just about ready for her. What I am fighting now is that empty feeling and the fear that the passion for my study is dead. Now, there is no sense of failure, not even the fear of failure. Only helplessness. I believe I will be a stronger, more compassionate person when this is all resolved. For now, it's just getting through it.

Maggie did confide in her brother and sister about her advisor's use of her work but she had been reluctant to discuss it with her mother and doubts she ever will.

She is quite proud of me but this she would not understand and it would worry her incessantly. I would not like to cause her such pain. It has taken me awhile to realize that she is not really so strong anymore to really tell everything, so I am careful.

In fact, Maggie was reluctant to discuss the problem with anyone.

This is really something that the more I tell people, the worse I feel. Perhaps it is the feeling of alienation, I don't know. I think those friends of mine who are sympathetic also feel that feeling of helplessness. My friend said it best when she said, Just get it done. Naturally, I have also not spoken about this with my other committee members. I considered talking about it with my one committee member but I could not risk involving her and also jeopardize her relationship with my advisor. They are becoming fast colleagues and I know she will probably find out soon enough.

And she was particularly reluctant to convey even a hint of irritation to her advisor.

I always give her the impression she is in charge and I don't believe we have had any conflicts because I am learning how to maneuver around them. My advisor will watch for signs of revolt or conflict. If I do not provide her with any signs, especially of irritation, she is appeased.

Since these events Maggie has been struggling to regain the motivation to conduct her research. She had overcome a great deal of self-doubt to attain candidacy and just when

she was beginning to develop a sense of herself as a scholar the rug was pulled out from under her.

The greatest unanticipated outcome is the use of my idea or what I thought was my idea. I think I have always been careful when it comes to my professors and realize that they can at any time take your work and use it, but I never anticipated it would happen. What my advisor did killed my spirit. Perhaps that is why I lack the motivation for the whole thing. Perhaps that is why I feel like walking away after it is all done and cutting ties. If I can just get it done. I feel my future within the discipline is over. I don't know that I want any part of academia. It has no tolerance for empathy and respect. It has no room for me.

I know also at play is my self-esteem here which I feel is suffering by way of my lost voice. I guess I feel my voice was taken from me with the use of my work. I feel silenced. I also feel that no one really wants to hear about it ... My husband continues to encourage me in my study but I feel he wants me to 'just get over it' and move on. I know there is value in being able to let go and I will do that in time, but for now the hurt and conflict still works within me. I feel very lonely most of the time. One of my friends said that I wouldn't even be remembered for my dissertation anyway and that it will all work out in the end. I guess the dissertation meant more to me than that. I guess it meant my accomplishments were realized and I was on my way to being an accomplished scholar. Will I publish more? I don't know, I don't know even if I want to. I feel alone in this entire venture and find that I don't even want to talk about it with anyone anymore. When someone asks me how it is going, I just say slow. I really don't have the desire to talk about it.

Ultimately, how can the experience be more meaningful if the very individuals you thought you could trust unwittingly betray you? I have the best of circumstances. I have a great committee. These women are wonderful, supportive, and they want me to succeed. It has helped me grow more self-confident. The entire experience has been positive up to a point. And for the most part there are still many positive points about my experience now. I just battle a sense of dead weight inside.

In the late summer of 1995, Maggie experienced yet another deep emotional blow with the death of her father.

Now, I do well to get up in the morning ... With the death of my father I feel very lost and empty. My life here has been so unstable that the stability I had at home was a lifeline. In the first of August my spirit was very restless to go home and I knew that I needed to go. My mother broke down on the phone and I arranged to leave mid-August. I am a deeply spiritual person and I believe God called us all home for that specific purpose. My siblings were all there which was quite a feat and all the grandchildren. My father had breathing and heart problems for quite some time and he was worn out. He was not moving around a lot but did not wish to go to a hospital. My mom tried to make him as comfortable as possible. My brother came to town for a wedding and my sister was on vacation in the area. They all left Sunday and I cried because I knew we were all standing on the edge of change. I stayed up with my father Sunday night and heard him labor well into the night. The next morning he didn't want to get up. My mom kept checking on him and he finally did get up to shave. She left him for a second and he was gone. I ran to his side but his eyes were empty and yet he was still warm. I know that I was supposed to be there and I know that he felt at last at peace to go home. My mom could not have handled it alone.

Dad was a wonderful man and I am fortunate to have had such a father. I am also fortunate that he felt at peace to leave when he did and he considered me strong enough to handle it. Amazingly, so did my siblings as they both confided that they did not feel they could have handled it. The memories of that week and the shadows of the mountains which I dearly long for haunt me now because I feel so lost in my own direction. I feel like I am standing 'still' and watching everyone else pass by. I wonder when I will begin living again.

Later Maggie wrote about her sense of "standing on the edge of change" and what that meant to her.

Like all change this change too will take a long time to occur. I have no concept of what it will be. I only have more questions. That day as my family departed I knew we would never all be the same again. A chapter in our lives was closing. The next chapter will review itself slowly.

Throughout the fall months, feeling very withdrawn and empty, Maggie struggled with the loss of her father and with "just plain old loss of direction."

I am trying to plod ahead and make myself go to work every day although it has been stressful. I am looking forward to a few days off for Thanksgiving and am trying to get some stuff together for Christmas. We will be flying home to see my mom for Christmas. It will be good and it will be difficult. I know all pain takes time.

In a telephone conversation (January, 1996) Maggie told me she had begun taking medication to help her deal with her depression. However, after learning she was pregnant with her second child she stopped taking the medication.

Throughout their correspondence the women described a number of attributes characteristic of effective advisors and advising strategies. I identified six categories into which these attributes could be classified, including subject knowledge, work habits, personal attributes, advising practices and attitudes toward students. When aggregated in this fashion, these attributes represent an ideal – not the sum characteristics any student, or at least any of the women in this study, would realistically expect to find in an advisor.

### The Women's Perceptions of Attributes of an Effective Advisor

#### Subject Knowledge

- demonstrates expertise in subject;
- shows genuine interest in subject;
- has interesting ideas; is someone you can learn from.

#### Work Habits

- organized;
- attentive to detail;
- efficient: gets things done; attends to deadlines.

Personal Attributes

- bright;
- enthusiastic;
- patient;
- compassionate; empathetic;
- displays integrity;
- flexible;
- sensitive;
- trustworthy;
- forthright when dealing with conflicts.

Advising Practices

- provides clear expectations;
- recommends readings;
- makes time for the student; reviews student work in a timely fashion;
- creates an atmosphere conducive to learning; engages students' ideas; knows how to inspire and encourage students;
- challenges students to think more deeply and to understand different perspectives;
- provides constructive comments and appropriate feedback, including positive feedback when appropriate;
- provide advice, wise counsel and direction to students;
- mutually negotiates tasks and schedules;
- helps students to negotiate the system;
- encourages participation in professional organizations;
- provides letters of recommendation;
- guides students in making grant applications.

Attitudes toward Students

- wants student to succeed;
- believes in the student's ability;
- trusts the student will do what needs to be done;
- respectful of students needs, efforts, interests and choices;
- nurtures the student's self-image as an emerging scholar:
  - supports students' interests and passions;
  - nurtures students' sense of ownership of their work;
  - fosters an egalitarian relationship that is neither intrusive nor presumptuous;
  - appropriately acknowledges students' contributions and accomplishments;
  - sees the student as a colleague, not a competitor and uses authority and power to serve student interests;
- maintains appropriate role boundaries:
  - student's role as an emerging researcher is clearly defined;
  - advisor's self-image is not that of a parent, but a colleague who expresses support and confidence in the student's abilities;
  - does not expect to be 'parented' by the student;
- able/willing to negotiate a compromise in the face of disagreement or conflict;
- assumes responsibility for political or interpersonal issues that arise among committee members and intervenes on student's behalf;
- shows respect for the multiple role demands placed on women as both scholars and mothers.

Other factors the women described as contributing to positive relationships with their advisors included sharing common interests, shared perspectives of about research paradigms, a mutually flexible approach to the relationship in which both members were able to accommodate a range of tasks and a mutual respect for one another that culminated in a relationship that was professional, collegial and egalitarian.

The women also described attributes of their advisor/advisee relationships that added stress to their doctoral experiences which I classified in three categories, including personal attributes, advising practices and relationship management.

#### The Women's Perceptions of Factors that Diminish Advisor/Advisee Relationships

##### Personal Attributes

- cold; impersonal
- autocratic
- pompous; overbearing
- gruff

##### Advising Practices

- hypercritical
- unavailable; does not respond in a timely way to student requests or messages

##### Attitudes Toward Students

- manipulative
- lack of respect for alternate perspectives of research paradigms
- wants to shape student thinking in accordance with one's own views
- controlling, resulting in friction when students speak their minds
- abusive and cruel: belittles students; makes snide remarks
- intimidating: attacks students' beliefs and is constantly testing the student
- uses positional power and authority to silence the student
- view emotions as a weakness
- blurred role boundaries in which the student provides an audience for the advisor's personal and/or departmental issues
- creates conflict among committee members

It should be noted that none of the women in this study characterized relationships with their advisors as falling solely within a single domain, either positive or negative. Even Maggie, despite the negative experience with her advisor, readily acknowledged positive attributes her advisor presented under other circumstances.

#### The Dissertation Committee

The women in this study had two types of committees. Some had two different committees, one for the candidacy exams and a second committee that guided their dissertation work. Only one woman, Sarah, had an all male dissertation committee; three

women had dissertation committees that consisted only of women; and three had committees of mixed gender. In addition to regular faculty, Helen also had another doctoral student on her committee and Camila included a teacher from the classroom where she conducted her research on her committee. In most instances the women in the study chose the members of their dissertation committees.

When Sarah formed her dissertation committee she first sought the advice of her advisor. He suggested likely members in other departments who might be interested in her topic. Ironically, the chair of another department requested to serve on her committee; this was the same department that earlier had declined to admit her to the program. Sarah gladly added this department chair to her committee; he also recommended some courses for Sarah to take and later she asked one of those professors, Matt, to serve on her committee as well.

Sarah admired Matt. He was organized and well versed in theory but he was also a successful practitioner who had proved he could survive in the 'real world.'

Matt was very fair, answered questions well, and seemed to respect the students without going overboard. If a question was REALLY basic, or showed a true lack of thought or comprehension, he would let you know that but without being insulting. Since several of his classes were combination upper-division undergrad and grad, you never knew what sorts of questions students would come up with. But he handled it quite well.

By the fall of her second year, Sarah had her full committee in place and they met that quarter to approve the course selections she had outlined for her program. It was Sarah's belief that most committees "stay together throughout the process" but as she was collecting her data she found that one member had moved to the southwest without telling her. She'd sent her committee members a progress memo in and had touched base with three members but was never able to contact the fourth. When she stopped by his office in early August, she was told by the secretary that he had moved the previous week. Not long after that she found she couldn't keep another member of the committee because of a conflict of interest related to his employment outside the university. Suddenly, Sarah found herself with only two committee members and she needed a minimum of three. She approached one faculty member from whom she'd audited a course.

When I pitched the idea, I let her know that I was a "short-timer." I knew she was trying to get her stuff together for a tenure review, and didn't have a lot of time to spend on committees. She was interested in my subject (which of course by that time had changed again), but was concerned that I only had "an n of 4." Well, when she said that, \*I\* was concerned about whether I was making a big mistake. I gave her my proposal (which was the first three or four completed chapters of the d) to read and she seemed to have a better understanding of what I was doing after that. I don't think she was ever quite comfortable with my qualitative focus, though. However, she pretty

much did what I wanted her to, which was to be on the committee, not be much of a hassle, and provide some focus or cites if I needed them. She did turn me on to a couple of good books, but other than that she was a very marginal committee member (which was precisely what I wanted).

Her second member was marginal as well. Sarah had talked that over with him at an early stage and he said he “wouldn’t be any trouble – you’ll have enough trouble dealing with Ben.”

Although I did try to go see him more often he was not very accessible, and rarely returned phone calls. I can’t estimate how many times I left a chapter or two, or a list of questions, on his desk or chair and never heard from him. And yet, when we did get together, he was very helpful and had great suggestions. But mostly my committee was Ben. And that was enough!

Tracy’s dissertation committee consisted of all women with the exception of one member. In addition to her advisor she chose the professor who had supervised her master’s thesis because “she was so wonderful to work with and has always given me lots of constructive input and support.” She chose the third member because they shared a common interest in gender and related topics. The male member of her committee, a professor with whom Tracy had studied previously, was added only because she needed another person who specialized in 20th century literature. She described him as “not much help as a prof. kind of bitter. But I do enjoy talking with him about politics at times.” The final person on her committee is a woman from outside the department, as required by the grad school. “I chose her without knowing practically anything about her except through referrals from other students.” After adding this last professor to her committee Tracy audited a course offered by this professor on 20th century literary theory which she enjoyed a lot. She gave Tracy some “constructive input” and Tracy was glad to have her on the committee.

Tracy described some of the unwritten rules – the informal understandings shared by students in her department about choosing committee members.

In my dept you have to carefully choose who goes on your examination committee. There are certain profs who have reputations for failing you or just being assholes all around, so you try to avoid them. I didn’t have any of those professors on my committee.

The profs with the worst reputations are male. All in all in my dept there seems to be more confidence in the female professors than in the male professors who are about equal in number. Perhaps that is because most of the students are female? I wouldn’t know.

In another department within her faculty, Tracy didn't seem to think there was this same kind of problem even though "the professors are mostly male and the students still mostly female." She had no lofty expectations of her own committee members. She was satisfied knowing they wouldn't sabotage her progress.

I have been a little disappointed with how distanced my advisor is and even the co-chair seems fairly absent. I have been happy with the input of some of the other committee members though. I sort of expected, when I chose my committee, that I would be basically on my own ... They're not super supportive. But I'll get my work finished with their help and not despite them or something like that. They don't try to get in the way, they just don't really think about trying to help out where the job market is concerned. No one is going out of his way to find out if they can put a good word in for us in depts where they may know someone etc. My advisor is always collecting articles and titles and such for suggestions for reading which is supportive. She also reviews the work I turn in to her in a timely fashion and with constructive comments. That's good enough for minimum, I think.

Tracy feels professionally supported by some members of her committee but she doesn't have any sense of "family" with them. She described her desire for a more collegial relationship with her committee.

Though I really feel professionally supported by some of my committee members, I do not have any sense of "family" with them. They do not seem to communicate as members of the same group other than professionally and so I don't really feel like we're a team working together. I feel more like I'm alone in this with individual support from different professors. When I want to feel like I'm not alone, I seek out my friends who are doing the same kind of thing. If there is any analogy between my doctoral study and my family relationships, it is that in both arenas I have sought support from my friends when I did not find it from those to whom I was most directly responsible.

At one point during her program Tracy's advisor added another member to Tracy's committee and made her co-chair of the committee because she felt the professor's theoretical background would be an asset and because, Tracy said, she was a new professor and the chair felt "this would help her get points toward tenure." Tracy had no real input in the decision to create co-chairs on her committee.

I'm okay with the change but I would have appreciated being specifically asked or at least told before the changes were made. I found out through the mail--a piece of paper that had been signed by everyone in my dept (it seemed) except for me.

Like Sarah, Tracy anticipates that she may have to restructure her committee before she finishes. One of her committee members, the most helpful member, had recently been denied tenure and would be leaving the department and although Tracy will be finished, or close to finishing her degree before this member leaves, Tracy is anticipating that she may have to do some restructuring of her committee. She has already thought about who she

would choose as a replacement, but for the time being Tracy continues to benefit from her input and support.

Camila's committee structure was unusual in that it included three professors as well as a classroom teacher with whom Camila worked for three years. She found the teacher gave her a lot of "significant feedback." In exchange for serving on her committee, Camila volunteered time in the teacher's classroom. Camila also described having an improved relationship with one of her committee members by the end of her program.

As already discussed, Camila's relationship with her advisor was sometimes rocky. At one point Camila called her committee members together to discuss some changes in her research plans.

my adviser controlled things pretty much and i had to negotiate with her. she got mad at me once cos i called a meeting up to tell the committee how my plans had changed. she said i should never do that again. i still don t agree. she was threatened by her fantasy i think. her own trip of what is it that i wanted changed.

There were strong expectations in Camila's program for students to present conference papers and to publish their work. Camila described these expectations as a "big time unspoken rule." Camila also described the unspoken work ethic that was prevalent.

informal requirements are a work ethic that says you are - must be overworked to consider yourself a true grad student or academician, that you must attend and present in conferences and being accepted is a big honor ... that you must sort of slave for certain people if you want them to be kind to you [e.g. advisor or people working with advisor] etc.

i learned about these slowly and mostly thru my adviser and thru seeing other people do it. these are usually presented as opportunities and i agree with the concept in general but not with the specific ways of carrying these opportunities out.

Denise's dissertation committee consisted of all women. She had complete freedom to choose who she wanted on the committee, with the only restriction that she must have four members, including at least one member from outside her own department. Denise had two women from her department on the committee, one of whom served as chair. She also had another professor from the English composition program and another woman from a well-known university in the north mid-west U.S. This last member is well known in the field of composition studies and has produced a few articles in Denise's area of experimental academic writing. All of the women on her committee were 10 to 15 years older than Denise.

In Denise's experience students often fail to recognize that the relational aspects of student/committee interactions are at least as important as the knowledge the committee brings to the student.

It seems to me that committees are critical and students don't recognize that the kinds of relationships and expectations on both sides are at least as critical as the "knowledge" the committee member can add to the pool.

Denise even theorized that students are more likely to be successful when committee members are not experts in the student's area of study.

This provides more of a balance in the relationship. The faculty member has the bureaucratic power but the student has the knowledge power. I don't know. My chair certainly understands the feminist dimension and theory behind the work I'm doing, but she doesn't know most of the texts very well. Then I have a committee member who I call my thinker, she knows another dimension of where my work comes from, but as it turns out I won't be doing much that fits that area. My third member at my home institution is my "method" person and an encourager. She doesn't know much at all about my stuff but finds it interesting. All of these women are interested. I believe they see me as bright and capable and think that my pushing of the boundaries is important work, though work that most of them would not venture into. And I have a fourth member [at another institution] who is one of few people to write about the kind of work I'm doing. But she's more of a name for job getting than anything. And her work in the area is limited. Again, interest, but her expertise is limited to an aspect of what I'm doing. I know others who have gone this route of having a committee they know they can work with, but who may not be "well read" in the actual area. In my experience they make faster progress. There's less fear, more encouragement, more excitement.

Despite the generally positive working relationship Denise had with her committee there were some difficult transitions that required negotiation. When Denise began submitting chapters of her dissertation to her committee, she agreed to send materials to her chair and get her approval before sending them on to other members. Each time she sent material to her committee members Denise conveyed to them, her advisor's approval of the material. "Two of my committee of four did not respond as things arrived." When Denise received a disapproving response to her work from one of her committee members, she believed that it had been her own failure to adequately convey her advisor's prior approval of the work.

Though I probably wasn't clear enough, I tried to convey this to committee members. Each time I sent them a chapter I mentioned [my advisor's] approval.

The package Denise received from this committee member included five chapters of her work "with many pages containing marginal commentary and a single-spaced, two-page note."

The note apologized several times, but basically disapproved of my whole approach. She seems to have a misimpression of my dissertation project all together. She remembers an early idea that I had but sees it as the whole project which it never was. My response to this is mostly that she's off about my topic, and I haven't written an intro which would help her get the context of it all. But there's all kinds of politics

now. How do I deal with her? How do I point out that what she disapproves of has already been approved? She surely knows I can't please four very different readers. She's not even in my department. (Of course, that's probably part of the problem here, her uncertainty about parameters and her need for some authority.) Oddly, her letter ends with saying that we should call my defense a presentation rather than defense because there's no need to be defensive.

After receiving this feedback Denise felt very "defensive" and worried about what might happen at their next meeting, but she tried not to dwell on her own feelings and chose to view this member's response more as a reflection of her committee member's "stuff" rather than as a reflection on herself or her dissertation.

Will she attack me? Try to get me into a corner? I don't have any big insights here. I just wanted to pass along the story. Both my partner and a friend at work commented on how well I was taking it. The friend, a woman, pointed out that this kind of criticism is the reason she could never do what I'm doing. (She's almost got an MA in education.) She says she's not confident enough about her writing to handle something like this. My partner just says that he's been waiting for this moment and that he thinks my response that it's mostly her stuff and not about me or my dissertation seems positive, proper, sane.

The impact of this event receded from our correspondence when only two days later Denise wrote to tell me she had received a call from a university inquiring as to her present interest in an academic position she'd applied for. Later that summer, Denise returned to her home university to meet with her chair and her disgruntled committee member.

I met with my chair first to get her input on how to handle it. It all seemed so delicate. But when I met with the committee member who had been unhappy with my work, she stressed that she had just needed to say these things. She resisted getting into any particulars. She told me that she was sure that my chair and I would work out the details. Said she hated dissertation committees. Said I should not send her anything else until it was all done. Which is what I did. Then she didn't say anything about her displeasure with it until the actual defense, even though I made sure she had over a month between receiving it and the defense in case there were problems.

Whatever this professor's concerns had been, it seemed beyond Denise's ability to resolve them at the time and as Denise hinted above, these problems would be revisited at her final defense.

Maggie's dissertation committee also was comprised of three women, all in their forties, two sociology professors and another faculty member in her department. Generally, Maggie found her committee members to be encouraging and supportive.

I am fortunate to have all women on my committee because they were all so responsive to each other as well as me in such a positive tone. I really felt that all of these women were there to see me succeed.

Over the years Maggie worked closely with three of her committee members but she didn't feel that her fourth member was quite as in tune with her research. Although Maggie thought this professor's knowledge of feminist perspectives to be very narrow, Maggie always admired her and found to be "nothing but encouraging and supportive."

I have the best of circumstances. I have a great committee. These women are wonderful, supportive, and they want me to succeed. It has helped me grow more self-confident. The entire experience has been positive up to a point.

When Maggie began to develop her proposal she approached one of her committee members about the possibility of setting up a meeting.

She was not sure she would be able to read anything else this semester when I mentioned I wanted to try and get together this semester. I know I was inconsiderate in the timing. I didn't think my proposal would be anywhere near ready for committee. Anyway, I had my proposal all ready to hand to her and got her signature on the necessary committee form. She said, "You are prepared." She agreed to read it and we would meet [in two weeks] at 9 am. I managed to make contact with my other committee member and she said she was looking forward to it. She said, "Now you can really get underway and move forward."

As Maggie anticipated a committee meeting about her proposal, she expressed "a certain trust in the women."

They will be tough, but they will not destroy. Perhaps I am also open to the possibility of returning and re-writing on their request. I feel the two sociologists on the committee will keep my advisor on her toes as well. I have three very intellectual published scholars on my committee whose work I respect and admire. My advisor likes these women also and I believe she wants to include them as much as possible in the department. I know one of my committee members is already on another doctoral candidate's committee.

Helen also experienced very positive relationships with her committee members. This was something she attributed, in part, to her own age.

I escaped a lot of red tape and written how-to's because the program was so new. Then too, I'm older than most of the folks in the department -- than two of my three committee members and the same age as the third -- and that lends me a certain advantage.

However, as she was putting her committee together, she sometimes felt overwhelmed by the process.

I've started writing, trusting, as I told my chair, there'll be someone there to read it when I'm ready to share it .... I seem only to be more and more overwhelmed. Perhaps when I get my committee officially in place and settle into a routine --

Helen also had a committee consisting of all women – three who are around her age and her chair who is about eight years Helen’s junior. She also has a “peer reader” on her committee, a ‘category’ she added by “playing with the forms.” He is about 25, gay, – “which he makes a point of” – and also a Ph.D. student, although at the time he hadn’t written his comprehensive exams.

Helen hasn’t experienced any conflicts with the members of her committee but her committee is “operating on a somewhat different model.”

All members are active in the process, sharing drafts, making comments, talking about the shaping of the project. We’ve met once as a whole group, and I hope to continue the pattern.

Initially her committee was doubtful about whether she could complete her course work requirements in only one year.

... after looking at my initial course plans [the committee] granted I could probably manage my fall plans, but that what I’d planned to take for winter and spring wouldn’t be possible. (Later they said I was “terribly disciplined” :-)

Helen felt she’d gotten fairly good at judging what she could and couldn’t accomplish and was “reluctant” to throw herself into a project that was too much, so her committee’s doubts about her program of study didn’t deter her from her goal. If anything, she was somewhat surprised to realize they thought she might have misjudged her capabilities. Beyond her committee’s initial expressions of doubt about her program of study, Helen has found her committee to be very supportive of her goals and they seemed more than willing to make personal adjustments to accommodate her needs.

The kind of support Helen experienced was not limited to her committee. It reflected a climate in the department in which faculty expressed their support for the program and the students in a number of different ways. Among the faculty there was a voiced pride at the placements of previous graduates and there has also been concern expressed about students in fields other than composition who are having a more difficult time finding employment. Helen also finds there is a lot of support for the quality of student work: there is concern about the courses students should take, the papers they should read – and there is the kind of talk among the faculty that indicates they think their colleagues are doing good work; in fact, there is “outright ‘bragging’ about the quality of the students, the faculty and the program in forums outside [the university] – but bragging in a good sense.”

They put on quite a reception at [one conference], encourage us to take departmental information packets to other campuses we visit, carry on quite a publicity campaign

about the quality of the students the program draws -- which is different than supporting individual students it seems.

Helen felt the faculty also demonstrated genuine concern when unresolved processes led to problems with some of the students. For example, one student did not pass his comprehensive exams after receiving good marks on all the papers he'd written prior to his exams.

... there was a flurry of effort to make sure we knew how to write comps! A couple of lecture / seminars, help sessions. Prior to that time, people had simply worked with their committees -- meeting when they or the committee wanted.

Helen also found the department to be flexible, open and willing to work around some of the "quirks" of her life. In part, she attributed her committee's support to the quality of her own work as well as to her committee's respect for her research.

But I attribute much of my insight, my ability to juxtapose things meaningfully, certainly my skills at writing to the fact I've been doing this sort of thing for a fairly long time. My work twenty years ago would not, I'm reasonably certain, have impressed folks as much or in the same way, though I still got A's. One of the women I've asked to be on my committee, for instance, ended her comments on a paper something like, "You do think well" in spite of having made comments about a number of points with which she disagreed. I wouldn't say my earlier work deserved such comment.

Without this kind of supportive climate in the department and from her committee Helen felt the experience would have been more difficult.

When Helen reflected on factors that contributed to the supportive climate in the department she saw it emanating from an ethic of "very strong personal caring and friendship." However, the ethic of caring seemed to reflect more than an individual or personal ethic on the part of a few select faculty; it seemed to be embedded in the program itself.

Part of what they care for is the program itself -- relatively new and unproven. It will graduate its second and third Ph.D.s this spring. The people I work with, and who have been so supportive of me, are the ones who shaped, birthed the program. So in a way, my "success" -- completion -- seems to me to be an affirmation of their project, part of a feminist ethic? \_I\_ think so.

The faculty in Helen's program had a personal investment in the program itself and they saw the students' successes and failures as reflections on themselves. Helen saw this quality as the ability of both individuals and programs to "stay young."

... staying young is difficult for people and programs, I guess, but equally important. Perhaps as more women get higher up and have more to say about things, it will be easier to maintain a youthful approach. A male friend and I were talking about gender-reactions to mid-life. The spur of the moment conclusion was that men in mid-life tend to retract while women expand.

When queried further, Helen expanded on what it might mean to maintain a “youthful approach” to the program.

Being willing, perhaps eager, to take risks; resisting routines; maintaining a fair amount of trust - though these sound pretty standard. I want somehow to explain this by explaining that when I was a child I used to climb up into the bing cherry tree in my backyard and sit eating cherries, breaking them open first to pick out the worms, but not minding that the worms were there. I was intimately connected to that cherry tree, knew it, loved it and appreciated it, but once I climbed down I wasn't possessive or fearful or preoccupied with it. I would go on to be just as intense about something else, not even thinking about the cherries or the tree. It seems almost as if I'm saying youthfulness requires a intense focus that contradicts or works against the kind of context-richness I think my age has given me. Perhaps the difficulty is in keeping the immediate focus and the context awareness in tension.

Like Sarah, Zoe also faced a major restructuring of her committee – a challenge she recognized even before she completed her candidacy exams. There were two reasons for this. She was a TA for “the dragon lady” and Zoe realized she didn't want to use her research as a springboard for her dissertation; it would be a time-consuming project that would require additional course work. Zoe also realized that disengaging from and replacing the dragon lady on her committee would be “difficult at best.” The other member Zoe wanted to replace was her theory instructor who had served as the specialist for her comprehensive exams.

I had not appreciated his teaching style (which was really non-existent) \*and\* he had at all times given me the message that he found me to be of lesser capabilities than my colleagues. Some of these messages came through in very curt responses he wrote on my exams, others came through in his conversations with me.

As previously discussed (see The Advisor/Advisee Relationship) Zoe ended up with co-chairs on her committee, a supportive ‘qualitative’ co-chair with whom she worked most closely and a quantitatively oriented male co-chair who assumed a secondary role in directing Zoe's committee.

Before Zoe defended she would restructure her committee at least twice as various ‘quant’ members of her committee had increasing concern with the “credibility” of her project. Rather than expressing their dissatisfaction directly, Zoe only became aware of these problems when she began getting “subtle” messages from other grad students and

from her 'quant' co-chair that one of the women on her committee was "concerned" and had reservations about the credibility of her work.

It's hard to describe the impact of this on me because nothing was ever explicitly laid out to me. there was a lot of innuendo going on (and communicated to me) about my research being "less than" the standards the university normally adheres to and i was picking up a lot of rumor mill/grapevine stuff about how committee members were receiving my work. So, i contacted my other co-chair who said that she had concerns about the comments being made. She also led me to believe that there was even \*more\* talk going on in the halls than i was privy to.

Within a few days her co-chair suggested to Zoe that it would be in her best interests to replace the disgruntled committee member with someone who would be more "sympathetic" to the type of work she was doing. Zoe's co-chair "felt so strongly about this that she took it upon herself" to locate a professor in another department who had just finished serving on a committee for another qualitative study related to prostitution. Without ever having met this professor, Zoe accepted her co-chair's advice to place this professor on her committee and her co-chair took the initiative to contact the committee member and let her know that she was being replaced. It was agreed that in a few days Zoe would follow up with a diplomatic communication to the ex-member. Zoe did and it was then that "the proverbial shit hit the fan."

she was pissed that i had replace her, claimed we had breached protocol in the way it was handled, and the rumor mill reared its ugly head once again and my "un-professionalism" was now the topic of discussion. But, i now had what would be my final committee.

The committee Zoe ultimately had in place consisted of the male co-chair in his early to mid-fifties and approximately 10 years older than Zoe, a female co-chair in her mid-thirties about eight years younger than Zoe, a male member in his mid- to late fifties, a female member in her late seventies and a female member in her mid-thirties, approximately seven years younger than Zoe. However, Zoe's problems with her committee were not yet over. She soon learned that her female co-chair who had been so supportive of her work from the beginning had accepted a position at another university. Shortly after her co-chair left the university to assume her new position, Zoe received an email message from her 'quant' co-chair asking if she had heard any student complaints being levelled against her female co-chair. Zoe sent her 'qual' co-chair an email responding in the negative and asking what these events might mean. Her co-chair had no idea what might have precipitated such allegations and angered that Zoe had been drawn into the middle of this, she contacted her colleague, Zoe's other co-chair, only to learn that two female students had made allegations

of sexual harassment against her. Because of these events members of Zoe's department were advised not to engage in any conversation that included Zoe's chair. Zoe dealt with this problem by first passing everything to her female co-chair via email. Once Zoe had her stamp of approval, she systematically forwarded all her writing and chapters to individual committee members for their feedback and comments.

As the date for Zoe's defense drew closer it became apparent that the department and the university administration were both fearful they had "blown it" with their handling of the allegations leveled against Zoe's co-chair. The university had violated her right to due process and the administration was cognizant of the fact that she had grounds to initiate some pretty devastating legal action of her own against them. Because of this, Zoe found everyone on her committee treating her quite differently than they had in the past.

in some respects it was as if they pulled so far away from my work that i became a "non-person" and in other respects their detachment was good as i could just keep working and writing. Of all on my committee, the co-chair who had committed the original faux pas when he notified me before talking with my co-chair about the allegations, distanced himself \*completely\* from the end process of moving toward my defense. I had literally \*no\* contact with him directly. Occasionally, i would get second-hand information about his reactions to my chapters from another committee member, but nothing from him.

The strained relations with her committee and the climate that existed in her department added to Zoe's stress as her defense drew closer. Her co-chair's lack of communication often left her wondering if there might be another "surprise" waiting for her at the next turn, yet in the back of her mind, Zoe also knew that the university was fearful of what her female co-chair might do legally.

i was, in reality, in a pretty good position as the department would not want to give her anymore ammunition for claims of differential treatment, even if it was treatment meted out to her dissertating student.

The drama surrounding Zoe's committee continued to the end when only two days prior to her defense, she learned that one of her committee members was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor and would be unable to attend her defense.

the day of my defense my co-chairs were scrambling to get special permission from the graduate college for me to defend with one committee member absent! Surprises and glitches right up to the end!!!

### The Dissertation Phase

The dissertation phase of the doctorate involves a number of different stages that begin with the student's general orientation to a topic and become increasingly focused on specific issues or questions to be addressed by the research. One's choice of a dissertation topic is grounded within larger epistemological and ontological orientations that reflect certain assumptions about what constitutes knowledge and the methods by which knowledge is 'acquired' and understood. The task of defining researchable questions and contributing new or unique understandings of our environment through one's research is often a formidable one for doctoral students. It is not a linear process, but rather a journey marked by twists and unanticipated turns of events. For two women in this study, Sarah and Maggie, developing a focus for the dissertation research was particularly difficult.

When Sarah first met with her advisor to discuss the selection of her dissertation topic she was interested in labour issues and organizational change, particularly, organizational response to decline. She had taken one course in labour relations that was instrumental in her decision to focus on labour as a topic for her dissertation. Honing this broad topic into a researchable dissertation question proved to be a more formidable task for Sarah.

Anytime I came up with what I thought was a plausible topic or question, Ben's response would be "And so what?" Meaning that it should address some concern or be significant enough that it was worth doing. If there wasn't a good enough answer (in his estimation) to the "so what?" question, then I had to keep looking.

Sarah recalled being really excited about a particular study but when she presented the idea to Ben, she didn't have an adequate response to his "inevitable so what" question and she abandoned the idea completely. Two months later, she and Ben were attending a conference session together where a nationally recognized professor presented a working paper about a new project that, in Sarah's mind, had the same precise focus she had discussed earlier with her advisor. She recalled sitting in the conference presentation and thinking to herself, "[HE] is studying this, why wouldn't Ben let ME do it?" Only later did Sarah come to understand Ben's rationale in not allowing her to pursue that particular line of questioning. While he "agreed that it was at least an interesting topic" he didn't think it would "provide any earth-shattering or even terribly useful data. Or at least, I couldn't frame a research question in relation to a study like that in such a way as to answer a 'so what?' question." Sarah was frustrated in her attempt to define a research question that was acceptable to her advisor.

Little by little I began to realize that what Ben wanted was a challenge. He seemed to be waiting for me to not only find my voice but use it to fire stuff back at him. One of the best pieces of advice I ever received came from [a woman I met at a] conference .... I was complaining how I couldn't seem to get Ben to agree to any of my topics, etc.. even though there had been several that I was fired up about. She said, "Sarah, at some point you're just going to have to decide when to dig your heels in. There will come a time when you know that whatever it is that you're saying is what you want to say. You'll have to be ready to fight when that time comes." Basically, what [she] meant was that I may well decide to accede to Ben's wishes in terms of topics, or phrasing, or whatever; but at some point, I was going to have a topic, a model, an idea, or something like that that I was not willing to compromise, lose, or change. [She] believed that most advisors were really waiting for their advisees to get to the point where the advisee said, "No, this is what I mean, and this is why, and this is how I'm going to do it in the dissertation."

That conversation with her came back to me several times in the next three years, and I really believe now that she was right. I did eventually get to the point where I dug my heels in, and let Ben know that his ideas were interesting, but they didn't fit how I viewed the topic or the research, and so I was going to do it my way. In fact, one day he literally grilled me about why I was using such and such a model, why so and so as grounding points, etc. He kept it up for about 30 minutes, and I was able to come back at him each time with a sound reason as to why I wanted to use a certain model, literature, etc. He sat back then and said "You're ready to go." Meaning that I was ready to really start doing the research. But up until that point, I had always backed down, or gone off to read more books that he said were important, or re-research some point that I seemed shaky on. After that conversation, everything changed. It was more like I started to become a colleague, and less like an advisee who needed to be led through the process.

Two days after returning from the conference Sarah had an emergency appendectomy. Nonetheless, she managed to maintain her workload and later that quarter "hit on an area" for her dissertation. Her advisor was interested in her choice of topic and for the next three or four months she focused her efforts on developing a solid research question.

Ben was pretty brutal with his critiques, especially at the beginning .... I gave him about 8 pages of rough draft--this was when I was just beginning to frame the questions. He read it and marked it up, then we met regarding his comments. I think there was maybe one sentence that he hadn't marked. The rest of the pages looked like they were bleeding, there was that much red ink on them. A friend of mine saw me waiting for the elevator after that meeting. She ran over to me and asked if I was all right; she said I looked as though I planned to throw myself down the elevator shaft. I showed her the paper Ben had marked up, told her how depressed I was. She was in her second year at the time, and so hadn't been through the process yet. She called me about a month ago, however, and reminded me of that occasion--said she'd just had a meeting like that with her advisor, and she now understood what I had gone through in those early days.

Sarah took these early critiques of her work to heart and was even harder on herself than Ben had been.

I know that no one will ever criticize me as soundly as I criticize myself. I am always very aware of my own mistakes, quite apart from anything anyone else may notice. At first, when Ben would come down hard on my feeble attempts at proposals, I don't think he realized how devastating that was to me. For one thing, I had difficulty judging for myself what quality of work I was presenting (I had no basis for comparison). But then when he would land on me, I was doubly upset because (a) I felt like a moron and (b) I felt that it would take me forever to earn his respect. So each draft that was bad--or at least not up to either of our standards-- really represented a sort of defeat for me. One that I had to overcome. Does that make sense?

In Sarah's eyes, Ben took a very different approach with her than he had with his other advisees. Where other students were giving him periodic outlines of their intended research, she was developing entire chapters. She recalled "bitching" at a colleague once, saying "Why is Ben making me do chapters when you get to turn in outlines?" Nonetheless, early in the third year of her program Sarah had completed three chapters of her dissertation that would constitute her proposal.

During the data collection phase of developing her dissertation the most significant event Sarah recounted related to the restructuring of her dissertation committee – replacing two members, including the member who had moved without telling her.

Sarah described writing the last chapter of her dissertation as one of the most difficult phases of the doctoral experience. Throughout her program she had experienced nagging self-doubts about her ability to "measure up." It had begun in the first year of her program when she recalled being made to question everything about herself intellectually:

... how we thought, why we believed/learned/thought as we did, etc. And reading literally hundreds of articles, books, etc. It was as though we weren't worthy of an original thought--then the second year, we were told to start thinking about our research. Who would be on our committee? What topic? What theoretical grounding? As though, having survived the first year, we were now worthy and capable of becoming baby scholars ourselves. But the questioning and epistemological shake-up of the first year stayed with me for quite awhile. I felt as though I were going through the motions of developing and writing a study, but some day they (\_real\_ PhDs and scholars) would find out that I was just blowing smoke. So I'm sure that some of this was on my mind as well when I was writing the final chapter and preparing to defend.

The nature of the feedback Sarah received from her committee members on her final chapters varied in the extreme. Her advisor "couldn't respond fast enough." He reviewed her drafts within a day of receiving them and gave her good feedback. Carol, the most recent addition to the committee, provided some useful suggestions and Sarah felt confident of her support of her work. However, the other male member of her committee she described as "most unhelpful."

While I really respected his insight and his knowledge, he rarely responded to my requests for help or guidance. I would leave a copy of a chapter on his chair in the

office, leave a message in his mailbox, send an e-mail, and leave a message on his home answering machine (all in the same day--wanted to be sure I had covered all the bases). And the response was zip. I could go a month without hearing from him. When he did bother to get back to me, his comments really were helpful; I think that's about the only reason I kept him on the committee at that point.

Sarah described the days she spent writing the final chapter – attempting to develop her own voice.

By the end of May, I was trying to get a handle on the final chapter. The first chapters were in good shape, although I knew that I still needed to polish a couple of the later chapters. But the final chapter was the hardest, both because it was supposed to encapsulate my contribution to the academy and because it was where I finally got to really use my own voice. Up to that point, I had been revisiting other scholars' work (lit review, etc.), or reporting on my research. Suddenly, I had to change gears and be the authority, as it were. And of course, I wanted it to be brilliant. I wanted a strong finish, something that would remain with the reader. So there I was, trying to develop a chapter that would accomplish all those things, and suddenly I was alone and depressed. There were days (weeks, really) when I would cry for hours and then try to write. But nothing seemed to really come of the writing. I was having trouble concentrating, having difficulty trying to figure out what I wanted to say. And always the tears, the rage at Keith for choosing that time to leave, and the fear that everything I had done and sacrificed up to that point would be wasted.

Slowly, Sarah began to develop a sense of ownership about her work.

There was a point where I didn't want to edit or cut out any words; it was like trying to cut off a piece of myself. But of course you have to learn to excise some of that work because either it doesn't fit or your advisor doesn't like it, or it just doesn't work anymore.

Sarah described how her relationship with her advisor began to change even more significantly during the last five months leading up to her defense. Her advisor was "going through a lot of changes" – deciding whether or not to apply for early retirement, which ultimately he did. Their meetings began to focus less on Sarah's writing and more on Ben's own discontent with the academy, his colleagues and the university in general.

I recall that, of an hour meeting, we often spent 45 minutes talking about him, and maybe 5-10 minutes talking about the dissertation. In a way, I think I was sort of flattered that Ben shared his thoughts with me. It kind of symbolized my move from student to colleague. At the same time, though, it was hard to focus on his angst when I was going through so much of my own. I had become almost a mother confessor to him, and yet there wasn't much reciprocity. At a time when I probably needed more encouragement and focus on my own fears as these related to the dissertation and the defense, I found myself instead having to be supportive to Ben.

Sarah wasn't the only doctoral student in her department who sometimes felt the need to provide reassurance to their advisors. Sarah described a colleague who confided in

her that he was feeling “jerked around” by Ben and had decided to “dump” him as an advisor. When another of Ben’s advisees learned of this he sent Ben a note of reassurance.

... Ron decided he’d better send Ben a “love letter” and make contact fairly quickly, as we both know how upset Ben is. likely to be over this turn of events. Ron and I are both sure that Ben will be feeling abandoned, etc., and so Ron will need to assure Ben of his continued interest in maintaining a working relationship. As I said, Ron’s relationship with Ben, although not perfect (is any advisor/advisee relationship ever perfect? I doubt it!!), is apparently much better than that enjoyed (sarcasm!--also past tense) by Glen and Ben.

There were times when Sarah dreamt she wasn’t good enough and wouldn’t finish and the end of a four year relationship just six weeks before her defense further shattered her self-confidence. Keith had fabricated a reason to have a fight, something they both knew at the time, but only much later admitted to each other. He told Sarah that he was tired of dealing with her and her dissertation and didn’t want to see her any more. Despite spending what she described as an enormous amount of energy balancing work on her dissertation and the time she spent with Keith she readily admitted, “I was probably less than the supportive, attentive partner I had been earlier in the relationship. I also knew, and assumed that he knew, that this was a temporary necessity. I had to get and stay focused in order to finish. Unfortunately, he couldn’t accept this view, and so he left.” Working full-time during the last six months of her dissertation and facing the end of yet another relationship, Sarah’s confidence was shaken and the “pressures really took their toll .... I almost didn’t finish the last chapter of the dissertation .... Quite frankly, I’m still a little surprised that I’m actually done.”

I think this issue was particularly strong for me as I was trying to write the last [infamous] chapter. Having been told that I wasn’t good enough to be in a relationship (not that those words were used, but that seemed to be the meta-message) with, something I had actually done before, how on earth could I possibly be worthy of defending an original study before four people who were all published and experienced scholars? The crisis of confidence is something that is never mentioned with regard to this whole process, yet I see it quite often among my friends who are still embroiled in the writing of the dissertation. And I know I went through it-- often--myself .... basically it comes down to knowing that you are capable versus feeling and believing it. And that’s the toughest part of all. I know it’s the part I struggled with the most.

In the days leading up to her defense the high stakes associated with the final orals continued to take an emotional toll on Sarah.

I remember crying to Ron (my current partner) the night before the defense about how much I hated the fucking Ph.D., and how worried I was that, after everything it had cost me, I still might not get it if I blew the defense.

Maggie also struggled to develop a focus for her research. Her dissertation topic evolved throughout the last two years of her course work and through her efforts to develop a proposal. Her studies in feminist theory and philosophy in addition to her work in the library gave her exposure to a wide variety of literature she found very stimulating. In her initial effort to focus her research she explored historical perspectives of performance, linking this thread with feminist theory.

The combination did not work but I made a gallant attempt. The next semester my advisor discussed it with me and recommended that I just focus on women's studies and drop the history avenue. She advised me along these lines for the class in professional literature. I ended up examining a more performance oriented approach to the research and decided to explore the idea of feminist performance ... I decided to follow up on that particular line of research and found it quite interesting ... Anyway, through my comprehensive exams, I developed the idea of meaning-making to apply to performance to create a feminist performance theory.

Maggie continued taking courses and presenting conference papers and most mornings before going to work she spent time researching and honing her ideas. By January of 1995, when Maggie first volunteered to participate in this study, she had finally developed the focus for her research and finished her proposal which her committee later approved that spring. Limited financial resources and her second pregnancy have made it difficult to travel and conduct the necessary interviews for her research. However, the most debilitating influence on Maggie's progress has been the loss of motivation precipitated by her advisor's use of her work. Her advisor's betrayal left Maggie all but immobilized emotionally as she struggled daily with the meaning of her own work and her relationship to academic culture. For a long time Maggie wondered if she would even choose to finish her degree because in many ways the degree itself seemed meaningless to her. However, throughout this period of self-questioning, she continued presenting conference papers, actively contributing to her field. In the summer of '96, Maggie paid for one of her interviewees to fly in to town and Maggie planned to complete the remaining interviews and transcribing by the end of the year.

The remaining five women in this study seemed to experience much less difficulty in developing a focus for their dissertation research. Camila described herself as being personally motivated by her topic – a topic that was grounded in her own experience of being bilingual. She focused on how students and teachers used two languages to learn and to teach. Camila described her research as one of the most enjoyable aspects of her program. Tracy barely discussed her research and although she did indicate that she had shifted her focus somewhat after writing the first two chapters, she was very satisfied with the shift her work had taken.

Zoe also was very clear about the focus of her research and it took little time to hone her topic into a researchable question. It was after she completed her preliminary orals that Zoe turned her attention to defining her dissertation topic. It was important to Zoe to choose a topic that interested her, in part, because of her experience with her master's thesis and her inability to sustain an interest in her topic and because she'd "heard too many horror stories of students merely doing what their advisors wanted in order to get through the process – only to find out they could not get through the process anyway because they lacked the interest in the topic to keep them going through the months of research."

Raised in a "pretty religious family," Zoe had always been "the good girl." But beneath her 'good girl' exterior, there was a "deviant and limit-tester" screaming to let loose.

clear through high school i can remember being so tired of being \*so\* very straight, moral, and upright -- and just wanting to cut loose and do something that would shock everyone's socks off! But, i couldn't do that and face the reactions of my family and those who knew us. then i settled into the very conventional married life -- still, however, wanting to do something unexpected and unusual, but, my husband (much like my parents) is \*very\* conventional, traditional, and straight! So, the opportunity never presented itself, for i would have risked a lot to do something out of the ordinary.

The more Zoe talked with her fellow grad students, the more she came to realize that she wanted to study prostitution. It fit naturally with her major and minor areas of study and she was fascinated with the idea of getting to know more about the world of prostitution and what hooking was all about.

I think women like the ones i studied have always fascinated me because they have an ability to free themselves from social constraints in ways i have never been able to -- to basically say fuck the world, this is right for me and i'm gonna do it!

In a quantitatively oriented department, Zoe was initially frustrated in her attempts to shape her research. She wanted to conduct a qualitative study and pose questions that weren't readily quantifiable and once she found faculty who would support her qualitative focus her research began to take shape fairly quickly. She spent a year in the field collecting her data and then almost another year writing the dissertation.

As i look back on it now, the last year of my life can be best explained by the sociological notion of anomie, a time of normlessness, a time when the traditional rules went awry -- an outcome of many things -- my own loneliness and isolation, the impact of spending so much time in the "unconventional" world of the hooker, and my growing discontent with always being the "responsible one" in the family unit, the one who took care of the kids, the finances ...

What Zoe remembers most vividly about this last year of her dissertation research was the “extreme sense of loneliness” she felt.

i was responsible for maintaining all the family finances, making sure the kids had birthday celebrations, a parent at all school functions and athletic events, etc. as it was typical for my spouse to be gone for most of these occurrences. i was very much living a single-parent’s life, teaching at the college and trying to complete the PhD all at the same time.

i used to remark to friends that i lived a single/divorced life just without the benefits of male companionship that most single women enjoy, for i would not only be a good mother. i would be the wife that i was “supposed” to be, faithful, no matter how lonely i might be.

So painful was the loneliness during this period that for the first time in 23 years of marriage Zoe became involved in “a torrid affair with a fellow grad student.”

About the same time i began writing my dissertation our communications changed “tones.” at first there was just the “flirting.” then it became more serious as we realized there was an honest attraction and caring toward each other, all based upon a six year friendship we had maintained.

i was feeling really down about the hollowness of my own marriage, and i was feeling so isolated and driven to get the dissertation done and, he offered me the support to keep working on it, he offered me excitement, and he \*invited\* me to do something unconventional in my life, and coming from him, it sounded so very ok.

A relationship developed. we have managed to be with each other on three separate occasions during the seven month time period and it has become a relationship that is beset with many problems, primarily because we are each dealing with a lot of “junk” in our private lives that impinges upon our abilities to bring the “best of ourselves” into the relationship we have with each other.

However, her new-found companion seemed to have a “vested interest” in her completion – even more interest in her completion than in her well-being and Zoe soon began to feel like his “pet project.”

he pushed extremely hard. and i responded, putting in longer hours and beginning the journey toward complete physical and mental exhaustion. As i look at it now, by the time i finished and defended the dissertation i was closer to a complete breakdown than i have ever been in my life.

In mid-May, Zoe began really pushing herself, writing most days for 12 to 14 hours and after four rewrites, she had the first chapter of her dissertation ready for committee review. She met with her full committee and found them very supportive of her work. However, this new-found comfort would not be long lasting. Shortly thereafter, Zoe learned that her co-chair had accepted a position at another university and there was talk in the department that charges of sexual harassment might be laid against her. In the shadow of these latter events, communication in the department about or with Zoe’s co-chair was forbidden. At the same time, Zoe was also experiencing sexual harassment at the institution

where she'd been teaching full-time since the fall of 1993. The sexual comments and innuendoes made by her colleagues and former mentors became increasingly troublesome. At first she managed to ignore most of their remarks. But in the spring, just as Zoe was concluding her last field interviews and before she realized how much her colleagues' treatment was affecting her, one of her colleagues made a remark that had the effect of catapulting Zoe into a year-long emotional and physical tail-spin.

we were having a department meeting in my office. i had poured a cup of coffee and was returning to my desk when. from behind me, the colleague i had always respected the most said to me. "Jesus Christ, Zoe, have you been putting on weight or what? Your ass is huge!"

It was embarrassing and, yet, pointed out a truth i had recognized myself. i had allowed myself to rise to the heaviest weight of my life. I vowed on that day i would start losing. i began "intelligently" to work on my weight, then the opportunity arose with Tom to introduce a new dimension into our relationship. we made plans to spend a week together in late july, and i felt the need to "rush" the weight loss. anyway, between that and the ongoing stress from the harassment that was now getting out of hand, i quite simply lost all interest in food and/or eating.

With her ensuing weight loss, Zoe's status changed from "one of the boys" to "the woman" in the department. That spring and summer the remarks directed at her by her three male colleagues, all former mentors, began to change from subtle innuendo to explicit sexual remarks that were "crude, explicit, offensive and anxiety provoking." So while Zoe was driving herself to finish her dissertation she was also contending with comments from her colleagues like:

wanta fuck?

i'd like to make your body my business

i watched two dogs fucking last night and it reminded me of what it must be like when you have sex.

These were just a few of the comments made to her.

i learned very quickly that former teachers, mentors, and friends can become less than desirable colleagues, colleagues who used their maleness to introduce a lot of ugly stuff into my life and have added to my desires to introduce needed change into the very workings of my personal reality.

Too embarrassed and thinking there must be something about her that was asking for these comments, Zoe told no one about these events for six weeks. As time passed, she found it increasingly difficult to tolerate these remarks and she confided in her long-distance lover. With his support she found the strength to confront what was happening to her and she began keeping a diary of all that was said and done. Eventually, she "mustered

the courage” to let her husband read the diary. She wanted to talk with him about how she could best handle the situation.

his first remark was that i should exercise extreme restraint in any decisions and actions as he did not want me perceived as the “troublemaker” here. I think that’s when i first allowed myself to realize that my marriage was one in which two people came at things from such diametrically opposed positions that i am, to this day, unconvinced the marriage is worth maintaining even though it has a 23+ year history behind it.

Zoe decided to speak with the chair of her department about her concerns. His response, two days later, was to write a suggestive comment on the chalkboard in her classroom. Torn between silence and the potentially harmful consequences of lodging a complaint, Zoe contemplated her next step.

funny, the men i have spoken to all say “go for it.” the women are much more reticent and thoughtful before making a response and their comments usually reflect thought given to the “price” i may well pay if i do something.

In the end, Zoe did lodge a formal complaint, first, with the Dean of Arts and Sciences and then with the Provost. At every turn she was told that this kind of thing would be “confronted, dealt with and not tolerated” by the university. The university administration met with each of her three colleagues and then the Provost met with Zoe to share their findings. He informed her that there would be no formal sanctioning of her colleagues.

[He said] this had been a “growth experience” for all involved.

The university’s “solution” was to call a meeting with Zoe, her three offending colleagues and the Dean of Arts and Sciences. Zoe also invited a university Vice-President to accompany her as her advocate.

During the meeting i was asked to repeat \*explicitly\* the comments each colleague made to me then each was allowed to defend himself. I taped the meeting and have it well documented that these men admit to every comment made, but defend themselves by saying “but, you were enjoying it.”

This was the climate in which Zoe attempted to complete her dissertation and move towards her scheduled defense in the late fall and although the institution’s follow-up of her concerns had the immediate effect of putting a stop to the explicit sexual comments directed toward her, the very fact that she had lodged a complaint came with its own set of social consequences.

i am now left out of all departmental functions (mainly social). others are notified of them, even those in different departments. i, however, am not. And i am “out of the loop” with regard to information i might be interested in receiving. Although my chair

has an office directly across the hall from mine he communicates only via e-mail with me and speaks only when i initiate a conversation. So, am i still dealing with the ramifications of their original treatment of me and of my courage to bring this treatment to the university's attention? You bet i am!!!!

At home, following her husband's comments about being a troublemaker, there was an ever-widening rift in their relationship. Over time as her husband heard their friends expressing anger about the behaviour of Zoe's colleagues, he learned to be verbally supportive of her, saying "all the correct things," but Zoe questioned the motivations behind his rather belated support and left her with the feeling that his words were shallow and meaningless.

In the spring of 1994, Zoe began writing the final chapters of her dissertation and throughout the summer she worked seven days a week, sometimes 12 or 14 hours a day, to meet a self-imposed deadline for a fall graduation.

It goes without saying that i was more than driven at this time, and became more than a little obsessed with the writing as i pushed to get it written and done .... I had this horrible feeling that if i missed my deadline i would never get it done--so, i kept pushing.

What Zoe remembers most about the period following her withdrawal from the field was the extreme sense of loneliness she was feeling.

i remember those weeks and months of burying myself in the writing and the self-push it took sometimes just to climb out of bed in the morning, knowing that once i did it was to sit at the computer for countless hours writing and rewriting!!!! And i had to keep forcing myself to maintain the early morning hours, setting the alarm, through the shower, then off to the office to sit and write. During the summer months it was sometimes so hard to make that initial move out of the bed, knowing that in any other summer i could "loungue" and give myself some down time.

But, i also knew two things. i knew that another summer would come when i could return to the lounging \*and\* i knew that once i got involved in the teaching again my productivity would slack off since i am not real well versed in juggling more than one thing at a time. And my self-perceptions were accurate, even during the summer when i only taught one class at 11:00 i couldn't get my mind "focused" until after the class, then i would write, but i also contended with a split mind that was at all times preparing for the next day's class. So, the focused push was necessary, however, when and if i ever supervise a dissertating student i will caution him/her to remain at all times aware of what this push is doing physically and psychologically.

The evolving relationship with her former classmate also intensified Zoe's desire to complete the dissertation.

he was always driving me to complete one chapter, move onto the next, and keep the projected defense date. in fact, when i look back on it now, although i know he saw his "driving" as good, it was also very hard for me to contend with and placed a lot of additional strain on my already "wobbly" mental health. And, to this day, i am not sure

why it was so important for him that i complete the dissertation by the projected date, yet, it sure seemed to hold a lot of importance for him.

Both Denise and Helen were able to focus more on their dissertation topics and less on the relational aspects of their experiences. Their topics were also very closely aligned though each examined distinctly different perspectives. In both cases their research focused on the process and experience of writing dissertations and, in Helen's case, the research also included a biographic perspective.

When Helen first entered the doctoral program she was interested primarily in gender studies and composition theory. She thought English as a Second Language (ESL) might be a third area of potential interest. However, her exposure to philosophy and feminist literature precipitated a shift in her perspective and focus. Her dissertation research focuses on 'voice' and language – on issues of style and writing as they relate to gender and to academic discourse as reflected in the genre of the dissertation. She is interested in the idea that argument and debate seem to characterize the dominant view of acceptable academic discourse – a mode of discourse that frequently is not a good fit for some women.

... having to adopt academic discourse, if one is not so inclined, is a bit like business women having to wear plain gray suits to work and otherwise become 'one of 'em' .... I've wondered, in a way, if 'academic discourse' isn't a defensive mechanism.

Helen's interest in language style and the evolution of voice as reflected in the dissertation stems, in part, from observations she has made about her friends' experiences in writing dissertations and from her own experiences teaching English and composition. Of her friends' experiences she wrote:

... a friend complained of her advisor's preoccupation with commas and sentence structure, and another said that all of a sudden her advisor had decided she (the friend) couldn't write and should take her dissertation to the writing center! Another who's in a Ph.D. program said she's been worried about doing a dissertation because the only way she can write even a paper is to pretend she's writing a letter to a friend. The result is a chatty sort of thing that she's afraid won't pass muster if she tries it in writing the dissertation.

Helen is hoping to use narrative as a possible discourse in her dissertation research. Central to Helen's study is an exploration of the evolution of her own voice in writing the dissertation.

I have some thoughts about the value of individual stories -- mine that evolves in my own dissertation about developing a 'voice' as an academic -- not for generalizing but providing some sense of possibilities, the way, perhaps, identifying with characters in

fiction does. Anyhow, the how of the difference between my stories and others will be important to me.

Reflecting on changes Helen observed in her own writing, she wrote about a colleague and former teacher who observed that Helen had “picked up a tendency to jargon” while she had been away at school.

*\*My\** impression is that stylistically I’ve become more flexible in sentence structure and probably use more ‘vocal’ punctuation (ellipses, dashes, commas for voice rather than grammatical structure). I’ve been working on visual aspects of my text -- type fonts, column width variation, etc. I think, on the whole, I’m not as worried if my writing seems to be clusters worked out in words instead of forced into a linear pattern of logical progression toward a secure conclusion.

After I’d been at the university for a quarter and a half, I got galley proofs of an article [I had written almost two years earlier.] I read through them and my reaction was amazement that I’d written it. Stiff and formal and *\*academic\** sounding. :-)

Generally, Helen has “felt pretty much in control” of her writing for a long time.

I could beat most themes into linear submission given time. The control I mentioned (at least I think this is what I was thinking) is that whatever the end product, I was fluent enough not to have to ‘worry’ about the writing part of what I was doing. I was / am in control enough to play with the words and ideas and experiment.

In her teaching, to bridge the expanse between traditional academic discourse based on logic and debate or ‘separate knowing,’ and the “connected knowing” described by Belenky, et. al, Helen stresses choosing a topic in which the student has a personal investment, a personal connection.

I teach first-year English, mostly, and work toward fluency, personal narrative, use of personal experience to construct what used to be called “research” papers .... I provide my own examples, talk about care in revealing how much of the connection one exposes in writing. I encourage ‘conversational’ papers, don’t limit students to ‘argumentative’ stances or proving a point. I encourage students to use their papers. Example: one student informed herself about diabetes so she could take her (newly diagnosed) mother in hand during the summer and get her to change her eating / exercise habits. I have an article coming out soon that talks about another student who researched the question of out-of-culture adoption of American Indian children. She wrote both of what she found in the library and her own experiences as an Indian child adopted out of her culture .... I don’t, as some colleagues still do, discourage the use of “I” in even formal academic papers. I also find this tendency in published academic papers. Cotterill and Letherby did a piece about auto / biography in their own research. Some women writing in legal reviews are looking at the value of storytelling and narrative. Language and style in academic work both before and after the dissertation seems to be moving toward informality, autobiography, narrative, mixed genres (poetic if not poetry per se). One study of dissertations I read, rather quickly passed over the “of course in clear and precise English” part of writing the dissertation, focusing instead on things like the importance of good advising and of selecting a (not too hot :- ) topic).

Helen's choice of dissertation topic – the exploration of voice, language, style and writing of the dissertation – includes an examination of her own evolution of voice in the process of writing her dissertation; it reflects an evolutionary process of who she is as a person and how her vision of the world continues to reshape the person she is becoming.

One of my students .... asked how we can continue reading this feminist literature that continually questions our own participation in the oppression of others without being overwhelmed -- not quite her words, but sort of the idea. If one takes feminism seriously, I think, it demands a lot of thinking about the sort of real people we are and why we are the way we are -- language, probably because I teach writing -- seems a big part of it to me, and the sort of exploration I'm doing does touch some very elemental parts of the person I am.

For Helen, the exploration of her dissertation topic is more than just an intellectual pursuit. It has become central to her life journey – a journey filled with passion and connection with different parts of herself – a journey that demands different forms of expression. A poem she wrote reflects the contrast and tension residing within her between her own voice of passion and her 'academic' voice reflected in much of her early training.

I know, though, that my writing has changed -- a fact I'm perhaps willing to admit to because I feel mostly in control of it. I can send along a poem if you like that grew out of the process.

Helen provided the following background to the poem.

I've been fascinated by ravens since I was a small child and met the raven kept as a pet by an old woman from whom my grandmother bought rags for the rugs she made. Ravens, I read somewhere, are second only to humans in the number of distinct vocal sounds they can produce .... part of the origin of the poem was the realization that I couldn't say much of what I felt in the language I'd spent years perfecting -- argumentative, reasoned thinking. If I could presume to have a spirit guide, I suppose it would be a raven, and thus, I would look to the raven to at least prod me into a situation of growth -- in this case, damaging my speaking capacity in 'academic discourse' to the point that I had to heal and hopefully develop new ways of speaking. What particular event led to it? I can't recall exactly, but I have a spanish / andean flute tape I put in and listen to for the duration of the 8-hour drive to and from [the university] when I go back. I find that it's good thinking music -often have to stop every couple of hours and write: poems, notes for papers. I think I wrote [Un-learning] on a drive home the summer after I did my [doctoral] coursework.

### **Un-learning**

Wrenched from the stone-hard expectations of my ancestors about a woman's place  
 - roots and tendrils left behind in the tearing away -  
 My soul, soaring, incautious, on unfamiliar wings ...  
 grasped away by a hunting eagle in the north woods  
 who feeds on the synapses of my mind  
 - unrelenting -

Loosed, plummeting, dumb and wounded, I open my mouth to cry out:  
 Ravens snatch at my tongue ...  
 Would they use it to speak to me in words my ears know,  
 Gladly would I open my throat to them  
     then mutely listen to their stories  
 But silent they look at me ... I, at them ... unheard by one another.

And I am left my flayed tongue  
     having urgently to find words  
         to speak ancient stories whose remnants fade and blur  
             through feverish deliriums of memory  
     - Stories that in their telling are new  
     - that in their telling, shape my life in other metaphors.

Denise's research focused on the cultural changes in America and the academy characteristic of postmodernism, multiculturalism, feminism, changing epistemologies, chaos theory and how these perspectives have influenced experimental and unconventional approaches to writing in the dissertation. Some of her research has focused on graduate students who write in "unconventional" ways and she has also examined professional academic writers who published unusual texts. Her research suggests that academic writing is not as constrained as many academics perceive it to be. And she approached her own dissertation using a less conventional style of writing.

I use personal material. I use multiple columns. I don't always use transitions, but often write in a more fragmented way. Linear and thesis driven my dissertation is not.

Central to her thesis is the idea that academic writing can accommodate multifarious forms beyond the traditional, argumentative and linear styles that most typically characterize academic writing.

Denise described a number of factors and events that contributed to her interest in less traditional forms of academic writing. Her interest stemmed both from the experience she had with one instructor telling her she "couldn't write" and her tutoring at the university writing center where she observed the difficulties students had with writing. Denise also described a friend of hers who had spent three years trying to write her own thesis.

It took several years of therapy for her to let go of it and move on--degree still incomplete.

Denise described herself as always having been a global thinker, a factor central to her consideration to pursue an interdisciplinary degree. She has been an activist for many years and sees herself as someone who tends to challenge systems by looking for ways to change things and often fights for those changes. Her departure from the seminary and the

discouragement she experienced there with respect to her own writing also had a strong impact on the choice of her dissertation topic. As well, through feedback on her writing from her partner, also a Ph.D. in English, Denise “learned a whole different writing process.”

Of all the factors influencing Denise’s choice of dissertation topic, she described in greatest detail her encounters with the professor who had told her she couldn’t write. Denise found other professors who encouraged her unorthodox approach to writing and her first experimental piece of writing ultimately became her first publication.

It was definitely a catalyst. That piece combines three voices. One voice is made up of long quotes set apart from the text. One voice asks paragraphs of explorative, unanswered questions. And the third voice is a personal one which tells anecdotes and analyzes material. The text explores difference in a “different” way.

### The Final Defense

Prior to the start of this study two of the seven women, Sarah and Zoe, had successfully defended their dissertations. Camila and Denise defended while the study was in progress and this left Tracy, Helen and Maggie to defend after the study was completed. Neither Maggie nor Helen had given much prior thought to the defense. Tracy was writing the final chapters of her dissertation and continued presenting conference papers based on her research as part of her personal and professional development. She believed these experiences would help to prepare her for the final defense, although she was quick to recognize that “the committee is a different kind of judge.” Her strategy for the defense is to “be prepared” and she believes that on-going discussions with her committee members as she writes each chapter will enable her to know where her committee’s concern are. She found this to be a strategy that worked for her with other presentations and in her preliminary oral exam. “Otherwise,” she wrote, “I’ll just maintain a certain level of denial about the possibility that things could go wrong.” But she has “little fear of the final oral defense because there hasn’t been one in so long; only three that I can think of in my 6 years [here]. But no horror stories from the three. So that’s promising .... I’m sort of not too worried about it. If I am there that will mean that I’ve done my work. I generally don’t have a fear of speaking in front of people or anything that would cause me panic; that would be secondary to just being accountable for my material.”

Both Camila and Denise wrote briefly about their experiences of the final defense. Camila described a meeting she had the night before her defense with the teacher-member of her committee.

she asked me tons of questions and bombarded me with intellectual challenge. i appreciated this and also hearing she benefited from my research big time. and the kids too she said ... that was my real defense ... we all know how the myth goes about teachers being non theoretical. She asked me theoretical questions at the level of methods and frameworks (I had used in the thesis) BOTH. Of course, I could say that her words were not the academia jargon but that is totally irrelevant from my point of view.

In contrast to this meeting, Camila experienced her orals the next morning as significantly less meaningful.

the orals were just a joke of pretense. i didn t enjoy any bit of them.

Camila's experience of the oral defense as a "joke of pretense" was, in her assessment, because there was no real discussion at the defense of the ideas she presented in her thesis. She indicated there was a lot of talk and a lot of jargon being tossed about the room – but most of it had very little meaning to her.

Lots of little wars about who gets to talk when but no real meat. Or veggies if you are a vegetarian but I am an Argentinean Beef Lady. I should say that there were two attempts during the orals to have good talk: one was when one of the profs critiqued some of the tools (format and writing, id est, where I had said what -- my thesis crafting) I used in the thesis. He said that there was a full section that I had put somewhere where it was in a way not exactly very "helpful" he thought for a reader; I indeed took his suggestion and changed the thesis for the last version. But funny indeed, when he brought this up, someone else in the room AND NOT ME thought his suggestion was not good, defenc ed my work to a ridiculous extreme, I think, and left me kind of off side, to use a soccer metaphor. I thought that was odd given that IT WAS ME and not them who had to worry about these things. This is an example to me of pretense: there was a pretense that we were intellectually engaged in discussing ideas and the crafting of an intense and rather big document (an ethnographic and sociolinguistic account of a bilingual classroom) BUT I found out that we were about polishing someone else's egos. Or defending their "apprentice" (me). Of course, I am sure that this is NOT their point of view at all, and of course, I am being crude because it was a shock for me. At that point I knew there was nOOOO point in arguing with them because I had very intense fights with one of them in the past and we can not communicate in the best optimum way. What was kind 'a funny was that I had already had my defense if you wish to call it so when I talked with the teacher the nite before. It had been a 3 hour challenging intellectual encounter. Very meaningful and very professional.

As the date of Denise's defense approached, she wrote:

I'm getting anxious! 10 days from now. Amazing. I've had a few nightmares as the defense looms in front of me. None of them explicitly about the defense itself, but I interpreted them as melds of fear and confidence over what lies ahead. Got my hood in the mail. I bought one. It's the one piece of "regalia" that I want for some reason. Gonna have my chair hood me at the party the night after the defense. She's not very into it. In fact, I got lots of "feminist flack" for wanting the hood. But it's the equivalent of my graduation, and I'll do what feels right to me. [My partner] will be meeting me [there]. He'll be there 3 days and I'll be there a week. Hope to relax and enjoy friends and sun and warmth.

Realized that I still need to write my abstract so I guess I need to get my head back into it all. I've been avoiding that, but I guess it's time. Haven't heard from my readers about changes. Wish I could just trust that it means they have only typo type suggestions.

A few days after her defense she wrote describing her experience.

It was a rather strange/typical defense. My chair and the reader from my department were celebratory, though their questions were pointed and not easy, especially since most of them went beyond my dis. But I handled them well--according to those in attendance. However, one committee member (from another department) was incredibly passive/aggressive! Her body language was incredible and of course I was facing her. She was SO angry! After several of us talked about it, couldn't figure out what her problem was. We hypothesized me or my chair or just her own life. Who knows? She signed off even though she thought there were problems. Very strange. In the midst of my defense the angry committee member attacked the chair of my department. The dept chair had said something that made reference to the angry one's comment. It wasn't insulting or anything, but she took offense and exploded. But it wasn't at me, so, I just watched. They all signed off as it was so all I have to do is get it turned in. Had hoped to do that before I left here but there wasn't a single printer on campus that would put out single sided pages of good enough quality so I'll print it in at home.

Guess that's the basics. I'm gonna go play today with a friend. I head back home on Sunday. Then back to work as a "real person" on Monday. Sounds good to me. It really is a good feeling to no longer be a grad student under their weirdness.

About a month later when Denise had a little more distance from the experience she wrote,

I feel much more relaxed. Even now as I put in lots of hours because I was at a conference last week and we're in the midst of the hiring process (I've interviewed between 4 and 6 candidates each day this week!) I can feel that I'm not nearly as hyper. Rather than freak out, I just work longer if I need to. And it's ok. No resentment or anything. Kind of cool.

For Sarah, the final defense was also a grueling experience.

I remember at some point in the writing process thinking that I would never get to the point of defense.

Sarah estimated her time to completion and twice this changed while she was writing the final chapter. Finally, in the spring of 1994 she settled on a Friday that would fall two days before her 35th birthday – she'd made a pledge to herself to finish the degree before she turned 35 – and suddenly she was confronted with the reality of finishing. This new perspective of the degree altered the way in which she viewed her own writing.

Where before I had been able to just go along, writing and editing, now I looked at each word as something that I had to justify and defend. These words would be my legacy. Would it be good enough? Was I really writing anything that would add to the store of knowledge? Was I really asking and answering a "So what?" question? .... Needless to

say, the pressure at that point really kicked up a notch. There were times I would write for four or five hours, and then at some point feel my stomach go into knots. I tried to visualize sitting in the defense. I also tried NOT to visualize sitting in the defense. And it was such an unknown. In preparing for [the preliminary exams], I at least had the ability to ask people who had been through it, and to review the questions asked in other general exams. I had some sense of what to expect. I did talk to a few people I knew who had their doctorates, but I can't say that anything I heard really helped to prepare me.

One of Sarah's committee members, despite being informed well in advance of her defense date, managed to double-book himself and the date was rescheduled for two weeks later. That meant Sarah had to defend four days after her 35th birthday. She was annoyed – actually, she described it as “pissed” – that he would “jerk” her around like that but she “knew that the defense and the doctorate would be finished [then]. It was real.” When I asked Sarah to describe what the defense had been like for her she wrote: “I honestly can't recall anything about the dissertation defense, although I sense that I was able to sleep [the night before]. Just can't remember specifically.”

Zoe's recollection of her defense remained quite clear in her mind. Her husband had scheduled a trip to Mexico during the week of her defense and the only other family member able to attend was her son. He drove three hours from his own college to be present and to celebrate with Zoe and her committee members afterwards.

the one person i wanted present, was 1500 miles away and unable to be with me on one of the biggest days of my life. however, he phoned me that night and we celebrated via ma bell:) This was, however, more than my husband did. i did not hear from him until two days after my defense.

Zoe found the defense “collegial and fun.” For her, it was a wonderful way to finish her program.

That evening my chair and i celebrated; and i received an hour long phone call from my lover, full of pride and claims of loving me even more. However, thirteen days later, a mere three days before my graduation (which he had for a long time considered coming to) he ended the relationship in a hurtful and mysterious way.

So, given all i had been through during the fall: a) the committee and university stuff; b) sexual harassment where I was working; c) teaching full-time; d) the deterioration of my own marriage; e) the overwhelming experience of fully loving someone only to watch it end once i completed the doctorate, my graduation was anti-climatic and very, very sad. I felt no sense of accomplishment or self-worth. i had lost 49 pounds in the process and i felt violated rather than fulfilled. And i lost a lot of my trust in the people around me.

I spent the entire holiday season of 1994 in a deep and very dark depression over many things in my life that had turned out to be less than i had thought they would be -- my work situation, my home life and marriage, my professional sense of self from receiving the phd.

### Women's Understandings of the Post-Degree Experience

At the time of my own defense in April, 1997, five of the seven women had successfully defended their dissertations and four were employed in academe, one in a tenure-track position. Sarah accepted a new appointment as Director of Admissions at a private 4-year college in the southern U.S. Denise is the director of a writing center at a predominantly undergraduate institution; Zoe, who held a tenure-track position in Sociology at her undergraduate institution accepted a one year appointment at a 4-year undergraduate institution on the east coast and plans to return to her home in the mid-west at the end of the 1996-1997 academic year. She is still uncertain as to whether she and her husband will be able to sustain their marriage. Camila is a sessional lecturer at her doctoral institution and although she married an American citizen while studying in the US, she continues to battle a US Immigration requirement that she leave the US for two years before reapplying to enter the US. Tracy successfully defended her dissertation on April 1st, 1997 and has accepted a position in the private sector as an assistant editor for a publishing company.

Both Camila and Denise have made relatively smooth transitions during their post-doc period. For Sarah and Zoe the post-doc period has been one of intense reflection about their doctoral experiences and about who they have become in the process. Both women experienced a significant post-doctoral depression; both experienced significant problems in the relationships with their partners as an outcome of the doctorate; and both women were exhausted from the experience.

I think if I had to pick a word that sums up the doctoral experience, exhaustion would have to be it. I don't know how anyone with kids manages to complete the degree. If I'd had to go home to kids and deal with them and their needs every day, and THEN try to handle the workload, I would never had made it. I'm frankly a little surprised that I managed to keep a relationship going during most of that time period. [Sarah]

For Sarah, the loss of two marriages, including the loss of her home with the second, the loss of her appendix – and most of her savings along with it – meant that money, or “the ability to live without constantly worrying about not having any money – was a major factor” that contributed to the stress and exhaustion she experienced. It was some time before she was able to come to terms with her ambivalent feelings about the degree.

I only recently had my degree framed and put on my office wall (everyone in my consulting firm tends to display their college and/or law degrees, it seems to be part of our culture there) .... I rarely if ever use the “doctor,” .... For a long time, I didn't really want to admit that I had the doctorate. I think that's sort of a denial thing; it cost me so much in terms of finances and emotional toll that I sort of wanted to forget it once the

defense was done. Ironic, isn't it? I worked for five years to get the degree, now I don't even tell people I have it.

I asked Sarah how she might explain the doctoral experience to someone who hasn't been through it.

Well, it's probably not "rigorous," but I've always described it to people as similar to giving birth, except that it lasts longer and the end product weighs less. Otherwise, I'm sure that there are many similarities (at least I assume, I haven't had kids).

Even Sarah's family didn't really understand the nature of the experience she'd been through. Only one of her brothers asked to see her dissertation.

he actually read part of it, although he said he didn't understand it .... We had some brief discussions about that when I was visiting him over Christmas .... My mother's only questions regarding the D were "how's it going?" and "when are you going to graduate?" Ron says the same thing; his family (particularly his mother, I guess) asks how his "paper" is progressing. As though this were just some 20-page assignment for a class. But having experienced this, I can say that no one understands who hasn't been through it. Even my friends in the program who are just starting to write, or have just finished general, don't really comprehend what "doing a dissertation" really means.

Then Sarah began to describe the ambivalent feelings she associated with the degree, the symbiotic nature of the dissertation process – her fear of stopping – her fear of moving forward.

For one, you're scared spitless at some point in the process. It's like you want to go back or quit or stop moving inexorably toward whatever it is that happens at the end, but you just can't. I'm sure that at some point, as a woman is being wheeled into a delivery room or having a contraction, where she thinks to herself "Maybe this wasn't such a good idea, after all." It's kind of like that. But by that time, you have such an investment (in the dissertation and the program), that you simply can't give up. You can't become a statistic. And the dissertation process is very creative, although probably not procreative. You're bringing forth something that no one else has created before. It's your baby, in a very real sense.

Sarah described both the physical and emotional pain she experienced. The physical pain: carpal tunnel syndrome in her wrist from using the mouse; shoulder and neck pains that left her feeling "like they were made of concrete" and eyestrain. However, aside from periods of intense stress, gaining a few pounds and not staying toned, she thought she had probably escaped the doctoral program in largely the same shape as when she started – "physically, at least. Mentally and emotionally, I'm not so sure." Sarah, who described herself as an extrovert, hadn't been prepared to deal with the isolation or the exhaustion she encountered in the early phase of her program.

The stress levels were enormous. When I was taking four classes a quarter and working 20 hours a week, there were days when I thought I wouldn't make it. I was just

exhausted. I remember being frustrated by one of my classes one quarter, and sitting outside my advisor's office crying because I didn't want to stay in that class, even though it was one my committee thought I should take. The professor of the class had the most overwhelming reading list I've ever seen--just the photocopies (two-sided) of materials stood three feet high. Let alone that we were supposed to read about 20 books. All in 10 weeks. I ultimately did stay in the class, although I can't say I remember much of it.

Sarah recalled the sense of isolation and despair she experienced during the final stages of the dissertation process.

One of the most enduring memories of the final stages of the dissertation process is the sense of isolation and despair I experienced. In part, this was due to the end of a four-year relationship at that time; part of the reason for the break-up, according to my former partner, was the fact that I just "wasn't there" anymore. It's interesting, he and I had quite a long conversation ... [recently] .... when he saw how focused and wrapped up I was in the dissertation, he felt that there wasn't room for him anymore. He also said he thought I had changed quite a bit from the person I had been when he met me (toward the beginning of the doctoral program) and the person I became as I was trying to finish the program. I acknowledged that I was aware of the changes--mostly brought about by the demands of the program and trying to finish writing while working full-time. He also was angry that I had gone through so many ideas, questions, topics (which he felt were probably more interesting than what I eventually did the dissertation on). It seems that he was angry with my advisors, for making me change topics so much, and angry with me for going along with my advisors. Also, every change, every re-write meant more time added on to the program. I guess he felt I wouldn't finish--that somehow the faculty would find a way to keep me writing forever. (I have to admit, there were times I felt like that, too!)

In Sarah's experience, the doctorate was extremely hard on relationships. She saw two basic ways to approach the doctorate.

You could refuse to give up your life and try to 'satisfice.' Which may ultimately mean that you don't finish or you could obsess and be compulsive and just do it, like I did, which in effect means you have no life outside of the Ph.D., or you could refuse to give up your life and try to "satisfice." Which may ultimately mean that you don't finish .... The doctoral process is like hitting yourself in the head with a sledgehammer--it feels so good when you stop. I think I prefer the way I did it--sure, there was intense pain for a few years, but it's over now."

Sarah described the feelings she experienced while writing – her total absorption in the process – wondering when she was going to finish – the resulting anger – and the love/hate relationship she ultimately developed with the dissertation.

And [then there's] the nagging ("when are you going to finish?"). And the feeling like the rest of the world is allowed to have fun and relax on a weekend--and you're in a symbiotic relationship with a computer and a bunch of data. I can't tell you how many Saturdays and Sundays I sat down at the computer at 9 am and suddenly realized that it was dark! I had been working away for 9 or 10 hours and never ate. And after you've dealt with that for awhile, there may come anger. At least, I know that I was simultaneously attracted and repelled by the dissertation process. I couldn't not do it,

and I was pissed at the dissertation (as though it were a living thing) at the same time. How dare it take over my life?

Nonetheless, Sarah did see herself as having experienced a personal transformation as a result of the doctorate. However, as she described, “it is irrevocably intertwined in my mind with memories of the bleakest point in my life to date ... maybe that’s why I have such an aversion to the Ph.D. thing right now.”

Much as I hated the fucking thing (and I understand that you have to have at least 10 years between graduation and the time you stop referring to it as a “damned dissertation”)--by which I mean much of the doctoral process--I also wouldn’t have not done it for the world. I am who I am because (and perhaps also in spite) of it. It gave me new insights into the world and into myself. It introduced me to some fabulous people, many of whom I count among my best friends today. I guess, in time, I will forgive the Ph.D. program/process --and myself-- for everything that happened along the way. But it will take awhile.

It was several months after finishing before Sarah was able “to just sort of decompress” and begin writing again. She shared some entries from her journal – written about four months after defending during a period when she was rediscovering her journal and beginning to write again. In this entry she reflected on the previous 15 years – on who she was and who she had become.

There are many things I’ve found and re-read lately that remind me of the person I was. To some extent, that person forms the core of who I am now, while in many other ways that person may no longer exist. In retrospect, I think I liked her better than I may have realized at the time. I need to work to find and reconnect with those parts that I liked best.

One part that I have begun to rediscover, although not in all its youthful intensity, is the passion. I think at some point in the past I was probably more committed to various things, people or causes than I am now. I won’t say it was a more emotional attachment, although it may be that my commitments were less discerning than they are now. Then again, maybe it was the environment .... there was so much to be committed to, whereas now I don’t really see myself as part of something larger. A major portion of my identity was changed by completing the dissertation. That had been a major focus for me for so long, and suddenly it was gone. Ironic--so much of my prior self-identity had been erased when I entered the doctoral program, and it was erased again when I left.

Many of the feelings Sarah described as part of her doctoral experience weren’t the kind of things that she or members of her cohort talked about either with each other. Several months after finishing her degree, she and Ron were “sitting in a bar, having a beer and trying to figure out whether/how we were going to handle getting involved (we had been “friends” up to that point) and for some reason I just launched into this tirade about the whole Ph.D./dissertation process. I went on for at least two beers about it. And he just

nodded and said that he had basically felt the same way but never said anything about it and had never really heard anyone else say it either. Why do we suffer through this in silence?"

In many ways I wonder why the process seems to be made so deliberately difficult. Why must we negotiate these relationships with advisors, jump through the hoops brought about by classes, and--oh, yes--write a 300+ page "paper" to finish the degree? The classes are by far the easiest part, even when you're taking four at a time! Glen brought up an interesting point--actually, considering where he is in his D, he brings it up a lot--why are we requiring a 300-page dissertation when so few academics will ever write a full-length book? Most academics write journal articles. Many are also now working collaboratively in interdisciplinary studies. Why do we insist on this solitary vision quest motif as the only legitimate means for completing a Ph.D.? Is it merely a form of hazing? (Everyone else with a Ph.D. did it this way, by god you will too!) There are days when I still think it's no big deal to have finished (sorry to burst your bubble!). I merely seem to have played the games better or more successfully, or maintained my focus a little more clearly than others, and so I am now finished when they are not. And yet, there are days when I wonder how anyone gets out alive, let alone with any sanity.

Having survived the process, I can begin to understand why some academics are so bitter. At the same time, just surviving the degree for most people in academe is only the beginning--then they start the tenure grind. And IF you manage to get tenure, why the hell not just sleep late for a couple of years? I've known several faculty members who, by the time they finished the Ph.D., landed a job and jumped through the tenure hoops, were simply too exhausted or too burned out to care anymore. They literally didn't give a shit about teaching or anything else. We seem to be setting ourselves up to perpetuate that kind of attitude, and it will likely get worse as more and more Ph.D.'s graduate and find fewer and fewer jobs available. The pressure on those who DO land a position will be enormous, especially because they know there are so many jobless Ph.D.'s willing to take their place if they stumble.

For Zoe, the post-doc period was also one of deep reflection and intense emotional let-down.

Rather than feeling a sense of huge accomplishment over what i have done i feel instead an utter emptiness and loneliness .... If i regret anything of the experience it is the inability to experience utter joy at what i have been able to achieve. the emptiness and loneliness sometimes override all else in my life. At the same time, i keep telling myself that nothing is forever, that a sense of balance and stability will return to my life once i am able to move through the tunnel i now find myself in. There is and has been a lot of good in my life and that good will return. perhaps it is the uncertainty of not knowing how or when it will return that is so very difficult right now .

In many ways i continue my belief that this is a "pull back" time for me. i need to allow recent events to catch up with me. deal with them as i find the strength to, then figure out what is right for me at this juncture. In many ways i feel that this is one of those times when i must let things "speak" to me and trust in the fact that the path will unfold and divulge itself to me. i am too tired right now to try to create that path.

I do know, however, that even knowing what i now know, i would do it all over again. yes, possibly changing some things along the way, but, the PhD is that worth it to me .... So, with this great feeling of melancholia often with me, i now forge ahead to see where i am going and what my life as a doctor holds.

From the land of pea-soup fog, i wish you a very good day.

zoe

It was the year following her completion that all the issues Zoe had been dealing with during her pursuit of the doctorate moved to the forefront and manifested in the form of a deep depression. Her physical health, characterized by insomnia and severe weight loss, was in serious jeopardy.

this was when i first started experiencing the insomnia, sometimes only two or three hours of sleep a night, some nights with no sleep, and yet at the time i never felt tired because i just kept pushing myself so very hard .... i think part of my depression the past few days stemmed from once again shutting off things .... now i can see i did this at the expense of my own mental and physical health.

During the course of her doctorate, Zoe lost nearly 50 pounds and afterwards began losing her ability to maintain her weight. A series of minor illnesses, including urinary infections, bronchitis and strep, followed by three biopsies – one that came back positive for skin cancer caused Zoe’s doctor to look more closely at her chart and to question her about what was going on in her life. Zoe broke down. In the ensuing discussion he suggested anorexia might be a factor, but the anorexia was symptomatic of something much deeper – something the doctor eventually diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder. Zoe began seeing a counsellor who helped her to understand the many catalysts that precipitated her weight loss, not the least of which were the demeaning and hurtful remarks made to her by her, then, ex-lover.

the comparisons he made to me and the other women -- that contributed greatly to the anorexia. i heard constantly how “young” they were; how “strong” they were; how “furtive” and “exciting” his meetings with them were; how he would spend hours just talking with them; how i had evidently not learned much from my hookers. it showed in bed with him.

Like her pursuit of the doctorate, Zoe’s marriage was dominated by an overwhelming feeling of loneliness and isolation.

If i were to use one word to summarize the dominant component of the graduate experience it would be isolation.

Zoe’s own sense of who she was as an adult had been shaped in significant ways by her early childhood experiences of growing up in poverty. Her sense of who she might want to be was inspired, at least in part, by her undergraduate experiences at age 17, when she discovered her “calling” to social issues. Always highly motivated to be the best she could be, she put her ‘all’ into her adult roles as wife and mother. And when she decided, at age 29, to return to university, she did so, in part, because in comparison to the life her husband led, she felt inadequate and unfulfilled. Now, with a Ph.D. symbolizing the

highest level of academic achievement, Zoe's sense of who she was had grown beyond her roles of wife and mother to include a professional sense of self as both teacher and researcher. She began to see herself as an authority, as someone whose own voice was worthy of being heard, not only by others, but now by herself. She named this part of herself her "intellectual voice." With this voice, Zoe learned to examine and question her understanding of the social context of interpersonal relations. This same questioning extended to her own sense of self – who she was a wife, a mother and a woman. She described this other part of herself as her "feelings voice." And she began listening more attentively to this new feeling voice, reexamining her past and present goals, her relationship with her husband and the institution of marriage – she began to reexamine who she had been and who she had become in the process.

Zoe recognized her own contribution to the condition of the marriage. As a young teenager, marriage had served as a refuge from the instability that characterized her childhood and she had found a partner who was stable and predictable and rarely expressed emotions or feelings. That had worked for her at age 17, but she had different needs now and she was uncertain about what the future might hold. She felt very alone, torn between the security and stability the marriage had provided and a longing for the intimacy and companionship she so craved. And the process of pursuing the doctorate contributed substantially to the increased distance between Zoe and her husband. When Zoe spoke with her husband and children about social issues and the "stuff" of sociology, like Sarah's family, they didn't really understand and they often demeaned her voice.

He and i had become so distanced-- both emotionally and physically largely because of his job and the demands of my dissertation-- that i guess i felt i wasn't "desirable" enough for him to "seek me out" as both a partner and a lover. And we, as a family, had developed a very unhealthy pattern of "putting mom down"-- basically because of the chosen profession. At least it became the target. I came to feel so second-rate. That hurt, and i learned to silence my voice.

how much time is spent in counseling dealing with having had no feelings for so long.

In the summer following her defense Zoe struggled with insomnia and several times came very close to requiring hospitalization because of her continuing weight loss and depression; her health became something she could no longer ignore. She moved out of the home she'd known through her 23 years of marriage, took an apartment and following her doctor's recommendation, began taking the anti-depressant drug, Prozac. Very quickly, it had a positive impact on her sense of well being.

now i CAN think about things. before, if i tried the sadness and the pain (at times almost physical) became so much i just had to shove a lot into the back of my mind.

So, i was never able to "take things out of the closet" and really look at them because it just hurt too damned much and i felt either like i was falling off a very steep cliff or sinking further into a dark well where i would never find my way out of-- or have the strength to pull myself out of .... it feels good just to be able to see things clearly, sort them out, touch on what is triggering my responses .... the apartment, the independence, the autonomy, is all rather comforting and enjoyable.  
Yes, i am enjoying the peacefulness of my time and space right now while, at the same time, longing for some times of novelty and excitement once again.

Throughout the post-doctoral period Zoe continued to deal with the consequences of the sexual harassment she'd experienced at her workplace. In the spring she laid formal charges of discrimination with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission against the university and met with the faculty grievance committee and university administrators where, on several different occasions, she was forced to relive the experience and justify her accusations. And when the findings were eventually forthcoming in her favour, she was asked, on more than one occasion, to recommend appropriate sanctions.

They once again began asking me to give them sanctioning ideas. i told them i would not do that. it was not my job, that was part of the institutional response, and that is why we have persons delegated to do such tasks -- *\*not\** the "victim."

In late September, with news of a pending settlement rumored on campus, Zoe went to her office one morning to find a "very ugly, sinister and threatening message" taped to her door.

earn 30 percent less  
produce 20 percent more  
put your father and your son out of a job  
but don't expect history to remember you.

chan  
last of the great warlords  
defender of the faith  
and  
guardian of the doorway

That fall, the chair of Zoe's department "voluntarily" resigned his position, though he remained at the university.

i see him on a regular basis and he is an intimidating picture when i do-- a very large man with a scarred and pock-marked face who merely glares at me when he sees me now .... According to the president, the ex-chair is also making "thinly veiled" threats of filing a counter-suit against me and the u for "defamation of character." As the president himself says: a) this fits his modus operandi (and, of course, he would only deny it); b) he might think this is a "safe" time for such actions as, by threatening a counter-suit, we would be unwise to openly accuse him of such actions; and c) he has every reason to believe all is over within the department as the president had announced at an officers' meeting a few weeks ago we had reached settlement--what no one knows,

however. is that the settlement has not materialized and i have signed off on nothing!  
So. i do think it is him.

Near the end of October, Zoe received news that the university's settlement check, in the amount of several tens of thousands of dollars, was in the mail, but despite the quick settlement and faculty workshops, Zoe found little about the department climate had changed. The check did represent a form of vindication and validation and, at least for now, she could go to work with a deeper feeling of inner strength and her head held a bit higher.

### Women's Reflections on the Doctoral Experience

Many of the pre-conceptions the women had about the doctorate changed dramatically as a result of their experiences. Often their experiences were less than they'd hoped for – less stimulating intellectually, more fraught with the politics of interpersonal relationships, more isolating and more exhausting. For Tracy, there was much less independence than she'd imagined, less creativity and generally less interest in teaching.

Well, though almost everyone I know in a doctoral program does drink a lot of coffee, they are, of course, not all interesting or interested in and supportive of my individuality and politics. The coursework was certainly more time consuming than I could have imagined as an undergrad but it was stimulating in many new ways. I am still surprised at how politically disinterested many academics are. I do not now think that all academics are intellectuals. And I believe now that doctoral programs in the variety of who you find in them are much more like a slice of the real world than I first believed they would be. It's more about getting out and getting a job and postponing gratification than I originally thought. I am not as independent as I imagined in grad school, I am low paid labor for my dept. (though I get teaching experience-- I should be thankful) and I am submitted to political games I don't completely understand and I am subjected to valuing the faddish proliferation of scholarship for the sake of capital (i.e. getting a job, keeping the job etc.) I thought that getting a doctorate would be more about teaching and less about ego. I came to grad school to be a teacher. I was surprised to find so many people who loathe the idea of teaching and who only teach because feel they have to in order to study. I was surprised at some of the things I found to be different and pleasantly so sometimes. I'm happy to have grown intellectually in ways I could not foresee before coming. I have also been pleased with making mature friendships with people who are very different than myself. But I have been disappointed with the industrial nature of academia which graduate study is an introduction to.

For Camila, the best memories of her doctoral experience related to mentoring others, helping others and being an "active militant" in the students' association. Camila identified four factors she thought were critical to her successful completion: "support , ideas, challenge of thinking [and] emotional support." However, she was not without some

lingering self-doubt about the experience. She continues to question the very importance of her work and she has yet to find the self-confidence she yearns for.

confidence: i still-havent found- what i m looking for- that is confidence if you wanna know. i still think i do a bunch of balony for a living meaning i still am very unconfident as to the quality of my work

Camila continues to feel a certain degree of intellectual loneliness in academe and she is uncertain as to whether this might be a reflection on her or on academe itself.

intellectually i feel lonely here. either i think backwards or no one understands a bit of what i really think. there were some high highs related to intellect and challenge: when [a noted scholar] visited here and everybody hated his talk and i loved it.

The very nature of Camila's research raised important ethical questions in her own thinking – questions she continues to reflect on.

ethical issues and the PhD is a topic that came time after time for me in my studies. it translates as: who has the right to do what with whom for what purposes? what is "research" in social sciences? how do i write the dissertation? whose voice is that voice? the teachers? the co-researchers? the advisor's voice? my own? what is my own voice after so many years of working within a team?

these are issues that certainly put some stress into my writing and my dissertation work in general. they are really important issues and so far i have managed to discuss them with people involved. i think we dismiss (or tend to) these issues when thinking about doing a dissertation. i think these issues are particularly important for women, though i cannot generalize. i should say: chances that ethical issues of this sort arise in the work that women phd s do may be higher than for men. i may be dead wrong.

However, Camila is having some second thoughts about her choice of academe as a profession, influenced, in large part, by the climate in her department.

there is a lot of BS floating around in PHD programs related to elitism and prestige. that stinks.  
on the other hand  
my type of research and the way my team crafted it  
has given me a lot of pleasure. i am happy.  
i also think i am not quite sure that academics is my path, although i truly enjoy teaching and researching. but there is a phony-ness of academia in big places where people are seen as Researchers and Professors that kills me.

Camila described the climate in the department as a "mask of liberalism" and beneath the mask, it was not only extremely conservative, but highly competitive. Camila detests both the hierarchy and the system of rewards and punishments within academe. She would have preferred "a more open-minded and radical educational environment." When I asked Camila about the ways in which her doctoral program had exceeded or fallen short of her

expectations, the negative aspects she described were related to this competitive climate in her department.

a lot of pretense  
 a lot of egomania  
 a lot of not good counseling  
 these are the bad sides

I asked Camila, what, if anything, might have made the doctoral experience more meaningful for her. She wrote that she would have liked to experience greater diversity in her program, to have been exposed to more radical thinkers and she would have appreciated “more free will and less up tightness about not being rewarded by the [university] system.”

When Camila reflected on what she knew now that she wished she’d known, or had been told, before beginning her program, she thought she’d appropriately anticipated the degree to which she would have to adapt to both the language and cultural aspects of living in the U. S., but it was understanding and dealing with ideological differences that “killed” her. As to the things Camila might have done differently, she would have chosen a different advisor: she might well have chosen to study at a different institution – one of two universities where she had been offered a “better deal” – she would have changed professors, she would have gone away for a year and taken longer to finish. In summarizing what she had gained from the experience, she wrote,

i learned a new trade all together  
 i learned to live in an upside down world  
 in the other hemisphere and that is not trivial  
 i learned to learn and i love it.

When Maggie reflected on her doctoral experience she recognized her own accomplishments, but her advisor’s betrayal has left her feeling less fulfilled and less committed to a career in academe than she originally wished.

My doctoral experience has not exceeded my expectations. When I entered the program, I had none. When I felt I had finally accomplished ‘a doctoral level’, the rug was pulled out from under me. I don’t want to be bitter about my experience, I just wish I felt more fulfilled by it. I think now I question alternative uses to my degree besides the academic route. Perhaps I am in the middle of re-evaluating my direction and my end goal. I will finish the degree but where it will lead me I don’t know.

I would have to say that my view of the degree process I underwent is fairly positive. I felt for the most part that my courses, comps, and orals were well focused on my interests and I did feel a sense of accomplishment to that end. The degree process stretched me and gave me great insight into myself. But the final phase, writing the dissertation has given me more cause for reflection and questioning. Perhaps, that is what this phase is for. Unfortunately, it is here that I question what the whole process means to me and I am afraid that it means nothing. In this phase I am alone. I am

trying to balance and juggle a lot yet I am alone in this 'final act.' (and nobody gets it) What is this the trial by fire? The epitome of the degree process? Can it not be in this very final phase that even the strongest of hearts just grow weary? Could all that effort be for nothing? I want this very badly, but I fear my endurance is waning ... I seriously question the value of a PhD now ... Perhaps it has expanded me and matured me. Perhaps it has shown me what I don't want out of life.

Asked what advice she might give to others contemplating pursuit of the doctorate, Maggie clung to her belief that in the long run, justice would prevail.

I guess I would encourage them to finish and believe that in the end, justice will prevail. I encourage people now to finish as soon as possible. The prolonging only makes it harder to get on with life.

And knowing what she does now, it is likely that Maggie would have made different choices along her path.

I believe I would have committed myself early on. Ultimately, I wish I would have gone into the program a little more directed to finish. The longer it takes, the more unrealistic it becomes. I wish I would have known myself better. If I would have sacrificed stability and financial security a little bit more and got a Teaching Assistant, would I have been happier? Would that have made a difference? Would I be done by now? Would I have believed in myself sooner? These questions haunt me now. There is no way to really know how the faculty will treat you. Unfortunately, that only comes from experience (painful as it is).

Of all the outcomes related to her doctoral experience, perhaps the most unanticipated outcome is Maggie's own sense of her 'self' as unfinished.

When I began my studies, I had no great expectations. I never knew from semester to semester where I was going. Once I committed myself to it, I had no idea the personal sacrifice would be so great ... [and] it was imperative to have closure.

I am more confident in many ways and more insecure in others. I have a sense of maturity that the process has refined. I sense I will be effective in whatever direction I take. This experience has led me through much information and new knowledge about myself and about others. I found I could make connections. I could create and articulate ideas. I could be unique and contribute new perspectives. I can look at the world differently and I can integrate multiple perspectives to form a cogent whole. I can have friends who respect my ideas and my work. I can be admired. I can do all these things. I have learned these things. Now, I need to learn how to go on. I need to reflect as to the real meaning of it all. I need to salvage some respect, some crumb of self-esteem. I need to sort through all these emotions and find rest. Unfortunately, I am not sure I will. I went to a special class tonight and the instructor mentioned my idea with my advisor's name to it. This instructor is from a reputable university, a visiting professor. Yes, the ideas are wonderful but they are power brokers. If anything, this experience has taught me that no degree is going to give me self-esteem. It will help me discriminate and hopefully make [only] honest mistakes. It will hopefully make me a better person, a more compassionate one, and a better teacher. Yes I have changed. And the dissertation will refine me even more. I know the experiences I have with the research project will be most rewarding. Perhaps it will be a healing experience. I hope so ... I had no idea that I would feel so trapped for without finishing, I will feel unfinished.

Of course, I do believe that my current state now, which is definitely rooted in struggle, has a lot to do with how I feel about my voice. I sense sometimes my life is like an ellipses. it just shows something happened but it is not necessary to show the whole picture. Perhaps that is what I am struggling with now, the ambiguity of 'where I am' and 'where I am going.' (Which is up in the air) I believe writing about the experience has helped me put into context some valuable facts. I am capable of accomplishing quality and scholarly work. I have managed to maintain my integrity and I am intelligent. Someone once told me that a mutual friend of mine, whom I greatly admire, was organized yes, but I was intelligent. Somehow that was important to me. Perhaps I can believe it now. The completion of the degree means little to me. It meant more at another time. But perhaps the most important realization has been an acceptance of worth based upon an astounding accomplishment and the knowledge that I have a great deal more to offer. As I shape my priorities and my goals, which are much different now, I know I will not have regretted the doctoral experience. Writing about the experience has given me the permission to reflect, vent, and recognize that I have been shaped and changed.

Like the other women, Zoe experienced her pursuit of the doctorate as transformational; however, it is a transformation that neither began on admission, nor ended with convocation.

I now see, after writing about the experience, that i entered the doctoral program very NAIVELY. i did not foresee at all how "important" it would be to my life and how "defining" it would be in the months and years to come. I entered it thinking it was just another endeavor-- something i would do and then life would go on. But, i now see that the experience and the person that came out at the other end of the tunnel have changed things dramatically-- for i became a person that is so defined by who she became (i.e. the professional) that she is unwilling to compromise that person for the sake of allowing life to "go on." I guess the writing allowed me to do a lot of painful sorting ... i think it is \*very\* important at this point in time to comment that i see the whole thing as very interactive. My graduate experience, without a doubt, impacted upon my family life. But, my family life also impacted upon my graduate experience .... graduate education has been demanding on all of us and there have been many changes in and for me that have come from the growth experience of obtaining my PhD .... I also think the time with and by myself may be just what i need as i try to discover and figure out who this new person is.

A strong sense of disillusionment with both her doctoral experience and her marital relationship was central to Zoe's personal transformation.

... nor do i know exactly where my marriage is going. I "think" i know-- as it will be very, very hard to bridge the chasm that now exists between us, and i have confronted the ultimate disillusionment this time.

The transformation, deeply rooted in her upbringing, had begun many years earlier. Her self-image as a high- and sometimes over- achiever, stemmed from her own feelings of inadequacy – from feeling like she was never quite good enough – and could never quite measured up to her parents' expectations. Zoe's long standing self-image as a "do gooder," her strong sense of justice and her interest in social issues were grounded in the poverty of

her early childhood experiences and framed by the role model provided by her parents, particularly her father.

i'm not sure where my interest in social issues came from, but i greatly suspect it was from our own poverty situation, listening to my father voicing the disappointments in society that come from such a status, and watching him in action with regard to helping others even though we, ourselves, could have often used some help .... i have always been what one would call a "do gooder"... in our small community there was always an emphasis on "doing for others." it showed up in the churches and in the schools -- many of the organizations one joined throughout the school years were centered around the "doing for others" so maybe this had a bigger impact than i ever realized.

Zoe's personal transformation was also inspired by her first experiences at university at the young age of 17. Her experiences there, not only stimulated her intellectual curiosity, but the relationships she had with some of the professors, in particular Dr. Rowell in Introductory Psychology, had strengthened her self-confidence.

Throughout our correspondence, Zoe painted a picture of the person she is inside – a picture of how she sees herself. It is the picture of a person who is caring and compassionate: a person who in her center core, is an optimist; a person with a sense of humour who isn't so serious that she can't take a moment to laugh at herself and her own condition. These were the parts of her 'self' that endured throughout her transformation.

... Am now off to see the shrink to find out if i'm still crazy or not:) ... Anyway, as you can see my sardonic and sarcastic nature are once again restoring themselves.

... My experience has been that the years are usually \*more\* than we hope and with the more comes a hell of a lot of growth and learning.

And despite the stress of her doctorate and the difficulties with her family and work relationships, Zoe likes who she is.

what i feel so very strong with right now is that, even with all the shit that entered my life during the past year, i \*do\* still have a deeply caring and compassionate inner being that lies at the heart of who i am. i \*do\* want only goodness to come to my friends. i \*do\* have a naive and simplistic way of looking at how relationships should play themselves out and because of that i \*do\* present only the "me" that is so very straight forward and simplistic in my relationships and, beyond recognizing and coming to terms with who and what i am I LIKE THE ME THAT HAS BEEN ME FOR SO VERY LONG AND THAT, IN SPITE OF ALL I HAVE EXPERIENCED IN THE LAST YEAR OF MY LIFE, I AM OH SO VERY HAPPY TO HAVE THAT AS MY CENTRAL BEING AND TO KNOW IT IS STILL WITH ME!!!!

Zoe reflected on the transformational nature of her doctoral experience which, for her, represented the highest possible achievement.

... then i go for the highest level possible to “prove” i’ve really done something! So, the PhD was probably in my mind all along...

She was drawn to her dissertation research in large degree because she identified with the unconventional. Her choice of research topic provided an outlet for the unconventional self that she’d managed to hold at bay through 23 years of a very traditional marriage.

Not only did this [research] entail many hours away from the family, it also entailed entry into a very unconventional social milieu; one that has been very difficult for me to remove myself from and return to conventional life as i had always known it ... It has been quite an experience that changed my life in many ways. A lot happened during this time and i recognize that a lot of the happenings are the result of the different lifestyle i was forced to live as i gathered the life stories of the prostitutes ...

As Zoe began to re-prioritize her needs, she recognized how central her emotional and intellectual needs were to her sense of well-being and to her identity.

i have also come to realize there is more to a happy life than the security of the financial position and the material goods that an income can buy .... i have now moved to a place where i need more-- passion, excitement, emotion .... oh, how i want to continue adding to that goodness and allowing the adventurous me to take flight once again .... My, my, my. how things changed over the six years of graduate school as i am now contending with this very “traditional” self who is currently duking it out with a more “modern” self that wants ‘o BE a professional-- on her terms and no one else’s!

Although Zoe is still on anti-depressant medication and seeing a counsellor, she remains hopeful about the future, but when she thinks about the last year of her doctorate and about her doctoral experiences she is saddened.

had i been anything other than one who tenaciously sticks to the goals i set for myself (many just call me downright stubborn!), it would have been very easy, as I encountered numerous obstacles and different crossroads, to leave academe and return to my “previous life” as i call it.

i feel as if the “me” was eroded rather than allowed to emerge in all it could have been .... Sadly, it is only now that i am regaining any trust in people and feeling a sense of accomplishment about the doctorate. not the process, but having survived and reached a point where i have earned the right to be called “doctor.”

After Zoe’s graduation, her daughter gave her a card that said:

*a young woman bought a balloon one day, and she took it to the park where no obstructions could stop its flight. she watched as she released it-- and it soared higher than she had ever imagined it could.*

And Zoe wrote:

... with a small tear in my eye as i think about the past and the influences on me -- and as i think about the future and realize that it is indeed time to soar -- and to do that means challenging the status quo and allowing myself the right to forge my own path on my own terms with no limitations and no feelings that i have been anyone’s show

piece. there is only one kind of peace i want in my life and it is the peace that comes from knowing all i can be and living my life with that quest in mind.

Denise didn't experience the same kind of depression as Sarah and Zoe had after graduation, but she did feel an enormous sense of relief. After her graduate school experience, Denise appreciated both the increased respect and the better treatment she received and she felt relieved not to be further burdened with "the tenure grind."

At this point I feel like emphasizing how wonderful it is to be on the other side of the dissertation. Even before I finished the dissertation I realized that having the respect offered a person in a professional position was worth the struggles of grad school. Well, maybe not worth them, but it sure feels great to be treated better. (I want us to work on treating students better all 'round, but until then--) But then finishing lifted a burden of such great weight it's hard to imagine I had carried it for so long. For me, there's been relief in becoming Dr. Denise. Enormous relief .... It was a long and often painful journey through grad school. I'm glad to be out! But I don't regret my choice. I like being teased about being a doctor.

I'd like to get some publishing done. I'd like to do this, do that. But I don't have the pressure to. It would be different if I were in a tenure track position .... Compared to that nightmare. I feel lucky.

Helen's view of the doctorate as an experiential process has changed little as a result of her experiences. She has come to see the process as a way to make a political statement and among the many other things it represents for her, it means "good talk, hard work, [and] friendships" and despite her continuing ambivalence about wanting the degree or becoming an academic, she is committed to finishing.

What now pushes me to complete the degree is the ethical responsibility not to turn my back on the tremendous commitment to me that I felt / received from the faculty I worked with while I was there. I'm not sure, even yet, that I "want" the degree ...

Although Helen still doesn't have any long term plans about what she will do when she finishes the degree, she *has* had some long term thoughts about the future.

Perhaps my husband and I will hunt for a place, after the kids are on their own more or less, where we can both teach part-time. Perhaps I'll find a great job somewhere remote from [here] and become a 'summer wife' -- though this latter is a fairly recent thought, and not too serious. I've mostly, however, spent my life following my husband and making something of what I find where I land -- it hasn't been disagreeable, and even quite rewarding at times, but it doesn't lead to my formulation of long-term plans based on what *\*I'm\** doing.

Financing the doctorate was a significant concern for all the women except Helen and she was the first to recognize that her conception of the degree as an experiential process was facilitated by the privileged position afforded her by her family's financial and

emotional stability. In fact, there were times she felt awkward among her colleagues because of her financially comfortable position.

I'd suggest dinner out, sometimes, or splurge on books, forgetting that the people I was with didn't have the money, or might not. I would occasionally buy a beer for someone, but too often it seemed awkward.

However, the privileged position that enabled Helen to pursue the degree on her own terms in the first place, also bore post-degree consequences that many of her single colleagues didn't have to contend with.

[The] down side means that I'm not really too free to take a job either. We've talked about whether we'd move for a job I might be offered, but my husband is close enough to retirement that financial things intrude -- ugh!

Three of the women, Helen, Denise and Tracy, received teaching assistantships during their doctoral studies and Sarah and Camila, received research assistantships. Zoe held a combination of teaching and research assistantships. Maggie, who worked in the university library throughout her program, did not receive any assistantship during her program.

Helen also held a teaching assistantship during her residency in which she taught two sections of first year composition on top of a full course load. At home, Helen cooked and did laundry, but her husband and son looked after other family responsibilities.

Tracy hadn't given much thought to finances before entering graduate school, but after six years of "having trouble making ends meet" she found the prolonged poverty beginning to 'wear' on her.

One gets tired of living like this.

Tracy described what I call the 'T. A. ghetto.' On the one hand she is thankful for the experiences she's had in her role as a teaching assistant, but she also sees herself as "low paid labor" for her department. She is paid \$1,100 a month to teach two undergraduate courses. To maintain her teaching assistantship she must also register for 9 dissertation hours "which ironically cost more than the hours for courses with a paid instructor." Unlike some other institutions, Tracy does not receive a tuition waiver and teaching only one course per semester would not pay enough to cover her tuition. Tracy's monthly expenses for accommodation, tuition fees and a computer rental total \$798, leaving her a grand total of \$302 per month to pay her bills and other expenses for clothing, food and entertainment.

Needless to say I don't go wild on entertainment. At least most of my friends are in the same boat as I am. Many universities have tuition waivers for grad students but our university claims that they would have to lower our pay if they were to give us tuition waivers. I know some friends who have tuition waivers at other universities and they don't get paid very much. But they also don't teach as much as we do in my dept. Almost all of the lower division foreign languages courses are taught by grad students.

The issue of financial support for graduate students came up in discussions with the graduate student union (GSU) in Tracy's department when students pointed out to faculty that limiting teaching appointments to three years made it next to impossible for doctoral students to make progress toward a dissertation in addition to meeting course and exam requirements. From the faculty's perspective, "their reasoning for limiting the time of funding was so that they could bring in new blood." For Tracy, the lack of financial support seemed to symbolize the general lack of support for students in the department.

The faculty at my university have been confused and incredulous of our complaints about not being supported financially and/or intellectually/emotionally (morally?).

At Denise's institution having a teaching assistant was a rarity. With more graduate than undergraduate students, her department was top-heavy and that meant little money for graduate assistantships of any kind. Grad students had to "fight" to get even a single class with a half-time teaching assistantship once a year. Denise's strategy for dealing with this was to look beyond the department for employment. After her first year in the program she applied for teaching assistantships in several other campus departments in which she was qualified to teach. She received little consideration from those departments but, ultimately, she did get a position running a writing lab for the tutoring center.

When Zoe joined her department as a doctoral student she was given a teaching assistantship and assigned to "a very successful and up-and-coming assistant professor."

she was sophisticated, savvy, and very, very professional; very much the modern woman, married to a law professor who lived several hours away and taught at another major university.

This professor became Zoe's "first socializing agent into the world of academia and sociology as a profession." Typically, Zoe assisted her with introductory courses that had between 150 and 325 students per class. Throughout her entire doctoral program, Zoe worked with this same professor, either as a research or teaching assistant. As time went on, this professor claimed to have a "deep and intimate" friendship with Zoe, but Zoe never felt the same toward her. Rather, Zoe experienced her as a "very cold person," someone with whom she could never feel "intimate." At the same time, she was very supportive of Zoe.

She seemed to think i had a lot to offer academia and the profession-- something i never did come to see in myself the entire time in graduate school.

Repeatedly, she told Zoe she could look forward to publications from their work together. However, it quickly became apparent to Zoe that such outcomes would be unlikely unless she were willing to stay there until she “was a *\*very\** old lady.” Zoe was further disillusioned to find that the “hands on” research assistantship promised by the university was little more than the opportunity to do a lot of xeroxing, making numerous library runs and returning boxes of books to the university library.

Being a research assistant for her offered little academic and intellectual growth--instead, it offered a lot of “scut” work. The faculty kept talking about working with faculty to get started on the almighty pubs and research that would promote your career after graduation and i tried that, but my faculty mentors had me doing things like xeroxing and running errands while my younger colleagues were actively researching and writing papers -- good papers that were drawing attention from people. And, when i did do some “minor” work the professor always “redid” it without any acknowledgement that what i had done had any worth. he/she just used what i had done, reshaped it to fit the mold he/she wanted it to fit and that was that. I did a lot of scut work in grad school that never amounted to a learning experience, but the profs sure benefited from it!

The “scut work,” as Zoe described it, included personal tasks as well. Following a divorce, Zoe’s supervisor, nicknamed the “dragon lady” by students because she was “very driving and very tough on her assistants,” became involved with another faculty member in the department. When Zoe took a class with the dragon lady’s new partner, every evening at the end of the seminar, he would ask Zoe to drive him home, rationalizing to her that she was “commuting anyway.”

it seemed to make little difference that their home was 15 minutes in the opposite direction from where i needed to go to begin the hour commute home at the end of the day.

And although these requests for rides from her supervisor’s partner extended beyond what would be considered normal duties of a research assistant, Zoe was reluctant to raise the ire of her supervisor by complaining.

Both Sarah and Camila held research assistantships in their departments. Sarah interviewed for a graduate assistantship on the same day she interviewed for admission to her program. She worked between 20 and 25 hours a week at the assistantship, even though 20 was the maximum number of hours permitted. In Sarah’s program some students also received fellowships and the inequities this created were sometimes a strain on collegial relations. Sarah described the tension and resentment she felt toward another

female member of her cohort who received four fellowships and only one assistantship during her program.

She would bitch constantly about how hard she was working, etc. I finally told her to shut up because she at least had four years in which her only job was to study and write. She still isn't done and probably won't be until at least a year or 18 months after I finished (I told you god had a sense of humor!!).

Coping with the anxiety of not having enough money to meet her basic expenses was a constant challenge for Sarah and a major factor that contributed to the stress she experienced during her doctorate. With the loss of her second marriage, she also lost her home and her pursuit of the degree depleted all her savings.

Camila was awarded a Fulbright scholarship that gave her \$14,000 for her first year of study and \$10,500 in the second year. She was also given \$1,500 toward the purchase of a computer and, in addition, had her expenses paid for two professional development conferences. However, as a foreign student, Camila's tuition costs totalled \$13,000 annually. This left her little money to live on and beginning in her second quarters, she worked part-time every year just to make ends meet. Over the four years of her graduate program she held research assistantships which she described as "all nice and fairly paid," and numerous mini-grants from the university, but like Sarah, Camila "had to be constantly paying attention to money resources ... this was always stressful."

Financial constraints have shaped Maggie's educational experiences throughout her academic career. In her undergraduate years finances influenced her decisions about both the degree she would pursue and her choice of institution. In her doctoral program, Maggie did not receive any form of assistantship. She has worked at the university library throughout her studies and although the cost of her doctoral degree has been offset somewhat by virtue of the staff benefits she receives, these benefits could be realized only at the cost of working full-time. When Maggie began her program her husband was also pursuing his undergraduate degree and for quite some time her salary from the library was their only source of income. Inadequate financial resources have also hindered Maggie's ability to afford the extra classes that would have helped her to improve her performance techniques.

To conduct the research necessary to complete her dissertation, Maggie will require additional financial resources in the range of \$3,000. Short of going into debt, she doesn't know how she will be able to afford these expenses. Her advisor has all but told Maggie that she will need to "really fork out the bucks" for her study.

I don't know what she thinks I live on, but it sure isn't big bucks.

The cost, in either time or dollars, to transcribe the audio tapes from her data collection was also an issue for Maggie.

I cannot afford to pay anyone to do it so I know I will have my work cut out for me. I don't even have that one interview from my first trip done and it has been a year. So, I have many fears about it ... I am concerned about the time this will require and how I will manage it financially ... Unfortunately, as I enter into the new phase of the dissertation, the money is just the ticket for holding me back ... I don't know how I will be able to afford to do the research. After all this, now I am in the dilemma of being poor.

Like Maggie, Denise was concerned about transcription costs – it was a task she found physically gruelling; however, unlike Maggie, Denise's partner was able to help her with some of the transcriptions.

I still have tapes to transcribe from nearly a year ago. It takes so much time and is hard on my body. My back aches from using the machine. But I just don't believe I can afford to have it done. My partner is helping me, which is an enormous gift.

Despite the hardship of working full-time while pursuing her doctorate, Maggie felt fortunate to find a position that both offset her tuition costs through staff benefits and afforded her the flexibility to care for her daughter when she's ill. The less obvious cost of these benefits has been at the expense of Maggie's sense of belonging in the department. Maggie's colleagues made efforts to include her in a lot of their activities and although she feels herself fortunate to have been disassociated from most of the departmental politics over the years, Maggie sees herself "as a shadow in the department, not fully visible" and she regrets not being able to establish better rapport with her classmates who were full-time students.

... there were many fine people ... many of whom I have developed good relationships with. People knew they could talk to me about anything and that I would help in any way I could. Of course it was not without its disappointments, missing those happy hours, and often not being clued into parties etc. I just wasn't in the same circuit.

Of the four women who completed their degrees, Sarah, Denise and Zoe worked full-time as they wrote the final chapters of their dissertations. For Sarah and Zoe this was a particularly stressful period. Sarah experienced what she called "a crisis of confidence" – an intense sense of self-doubt, exacerbated by feelings of worthlessness when the relationship with her partner ended, – a period when she wondered if she could ever "measure up" in the eyes of the scholars who were her mentors. This self-doubt accompanied Sarah throughout her program – right up to the final defense. Zoe also

pushed herself through those last months working full-time and writing – pushed to the point of complete physical and emotional exhaustion.

For most of the women, prolonged difficulty in making ends meet and the sense of insecurity resulting from having no savings to fall back on were central concerns. They attributed much of the stress they experienced to the low value their institutions placed on the labour and contributions of graduate students. This was reflected in the way departments and/or faculty handled student assistantships. Factors that diminished students' sense of integration in the department and their identities as emerging scholars included:

- inadequate number of assistantships which left students seeking employment outside the department;
- the low wages paid for assistantships;
- assistantship responsibilities that reflected 'scut' work and contributed more to supervisor's needs than to students' scholarly development;
- assistantship responsibilities that take advantage of the power differential between students and supervisors and transgress into personal domains.

As well, the differential financial status among students – due either to qualitatively different awards (fellowships versus assistantships) or differences in women's abilities to finance their degrees – contributed to awkward or strained collegial relations when women saw themselves or their peers as financially privileged or disadvantaged. And in Maggie's case, the unanticipated cost associated with completing dissertation research was a factor that also slowed her progress, but even without these research costs Maggie and her husband, who was just beginning his career, struggled to make ends meet. This made Maggie's full-time job a necessity, not an option.

To Maggie, working full-time and being a mother to her daughter while pursuing her doctorate has felt like living in "two different worlds" without any real sense of belonging in either one. This has had a significant influence on her emerging identity as a scholar and often has left her feeling lonely and overwhelmed.

I took a class a semester and was not a teaching assistant ... like my colleagues who had entered the program around the same time ... Therefore, I never really developed a network with my classmates ... I remember wanting to feel more included ... I was not available for a great deal of the day to day stuff that is important in establishing yourself in the department ... I was never subsumed by the academic program and I had one foot in the working world of paraprofessionalism. I never felt I belonged in either. So my identity was always split ... Neither my job or my course work in those early days were very socially accommodating. I often felt alone ...

And although Maggie was the first to admit that some faculty were flexible and accommodating of her circumstances on a number of different occasions, in general, she found little recognition in the academy for the particular demands facing women who, in addition to their scholarly pursuits, must juggle parenthood and employment.

The real world deals with sick children and financial hardship. Few professors seem to have much empathy to this end.

Nonetheless, Maggie held only herself accountable for the circumstances in which she found herself.

Helen and Zoe also had children, but all were much older than Maggie's preschooler. Both women were devoted mothers who nurtured their children's development and were involved in their children's lives in significant ways. Helen volunteered at a parent-run school that her two boys attended and Zoe was actively involved in supporting her children's schooling and extra-curricular interests. Both Maggie and Zoe felt they carried most of the child-rearing responsibilities and frequently they felt like single parents. Zoe, in particular, often experienced a great deal of guilt – as if she was neglecting her children by pursuing her own academic interests. Even her choice of institution was made so as not to disrupt her children's lives. With the advantage of hindsight, she reflected on her original decision not to uproot her children.

They've always been pretty damned secure, high achieving kids and they could have handled anything! In fact, perhaps i did them a disservice through their lives by not introducing more changes so change could be viewed as exciting rather than threatening.

Maggie and Zoe attributed much of the stress and uncertainty they experienced during the doctorate to the difficulties they experienced balancing multiple role responsibilities. All the women except Helen and Zoe attributed much of their stress to financial considerations. Helen was the only woman whose doctoral experience was not unduly influenced by either of these factors.

## CHAPTER 5

### TOWARD A THEORY OF WOMEN'S DOCTORAL PERSISTENCE

#### Summary and Conclusions

The doctoral experiences described by the women in this study are both compelling and complex. During the early stages of my correspondence with the women a singular impression began to emerge that ultimately influenced the findings in an important way. Much of what the women described related not to the substantive areas of their research but to the changing nature of their self-concepts, their identities and the relationships they had with others. As might be expected the women wrote extensively about relationships with their doctoral advisors. However, just as often they wrote about relationships with others who were not directly connected with their programs – with partners, parents, friends - past and present, co-workers and former teachers. Through the women's descriptions of the complex interaction of personal, social and institutional factors that influenced their progress, the construct of relationship – relationship with self and other – emerged as central to understanding the meaning these women attached to their doctoral experiences. It is this construct of relationship that explains much of the variation among factors that enhanced and/or impeded their degree progress and may be central to understanding a potentially critical influence on women's doctoral persistence. For these women the decision to pursue a doctorate represented a life-shaping event that left a permanent mark on their lives. This decision, with its multifarious implications, became a focal point of reflection for the women both during their programs and at different points throughout their writing about their doctoral experiences. It was a decision that shaped and reshaped their identities and their relationships with others.

#### Personal and Social Factors Influencing Women's Progress

In this study academic self-concept, gender, age and class emerged as important factors that influenced women's decisions to pursue the doctorate and shaped their subsequent doctoral experiences.

#### Academic Self-Concept

The academic self-concepts women held prior to commencing doctoral studies were important influences on their doctoral experiences. Both Camila and Helen were confident

about their academic abilities. Sarah and Maggie struggled with self-confidence about their academic abilities and their fear of failure more than other women in the study. This factor made it difficult for them to develop images of themselves as emerging scholars and was a primary struggle for Maggie throughout the course work phase of her program. For Sarah, the absence of any ongoing feedback from her advisor about her progress lasted right up to the day of her final defense and was central to her inability to see herself as an academic or a scholar. When Zoe entered graduate school she was initially confident about her academic abilities until she began to compare her own accomplishments with those of her peers. However, unlike Sarah or Maggie, Zoe benefited from a high degree of structure, task focus, regular feedback and encouragement from her advisor all of which were important influences on her self-image as an emerging scholar. Denise also experienced a crisis of self-confidence during her first year in pro-seminar when she questioned her writing ability and her preparedness for doctoral level work. It was an occasion when she seriously contemplated leaving academe. With her partner's help she eventually came to see the task before her as manageable but the self-doubt and pressure Denise experienced was enormous.

### Gender

Gender played an important role in some of the women's perceptions of their experiences in two different ways. It not only influenced women's self-image but it was a factor that some of the women believed had influenced faculty perceptions of them as academics. For Sarah, being female had a counter-intuitive effect on her motivation to persist. Growing up female and being told repeatedly that she couldn't or wouldn't do well simply because she was female had the effect of strengthening her motivation to prove her abilities both to herself and to others. This counter-intuitive effect of gender also had a similar effect in strengthening Tracy and Zoe's motivation to finish. However, in both their experiences another effect of gender was also apparent. Both women grew up in families that placed strong expectations on them to marry and to have children. Their role expectations and identities as women were well established long before they even began to think of themselves as academics. Tracy and Zoe had both grown up amidst expectations that placed primary importance on their identities as women and mothers. To be seen and accepted as serious scholars in the academic milieu, where motherhood has a negative status, required them to make a cognitive shift in which one's primary identity as a woman was displaced with a newly emerging identity as a scholar. This identity shift gave rise to internal conflict and was manifested in the strained and sometimes estranged relations the

women experienced with their families. It was often just as difficult for the women's parents and partners to understand and reconcile these changes as it was for the women themselves. This reshaping of their identities in a way that devalued this fundamental aspect of who they were contributed significantly to the ambivalence the women felt toward academe as an institution. The fact that Zoe was committed to her children and had no intention of being quiet about it was a factor that often left her feeling as though her work wasn't being taken very seriously. She believed this was a factor that manifested itself in fewer opportunities to co-publish articles with faculty and in reduced access to fellowships. Zoe experienced a bias among some faculty in her department that mothers couldn't be scholars, and even if they could, the demands of scholarship were thought to be incompatible with motherhood. It seemed to Zoe that younger colleagues whose sole commitment focused on academe received more serious attention from the faculty.

### Age

The women's perceptions of the influence their age had on their doctoral experiences varied. Helen saw her age and the life experience that comes with being older as a factor that would enhance her doctoral experiences. Furthermore, she chose a program in which faculty also perceived her age and experience as an advantage and not a threat. Zoe had a different experience. She recognized the non-traditional path she had taken in entering her doctoral program at age 38, but unlike Helen, she found some of the faculty in her department were not inclined to view her age as a strength. This was another factor that contributed to the feeling that she didn't belong and that her academic work wasn't being taken seriously.

### Health Factors

Among the significant findings in this study was the overall impact of the doctoral experience on the women's physical and mental health. Stress and health related illnesses were important indicators of the quality of the women's doctoral experience. At one time or another all the women had dreams, images and/or thoughts about withdrawing from their programs. Three women, Tracy, Maggie and Zoe, experienced episodes of depression that were serious enough to seek medical support in the form of medication and/or counselling. Sarah also experienced serious depression although she did not seek medical support. The women wrote repeatedly about long hours of overwork, exhaustion, isolation, weight loss from stress and anxiety, weight gain from inactivity, disturbed sleep patterns – all characteristics more closely resembling induction into a cult than a transformative induction

into an academic culture that values learning and scholarship. Most of the stress these women experienced resulted from either diminished and/or dysfunctional communication patterns in relationships that were important to them. These kinds of relationships were a central influence that significantly diminished the women's capacity to complete degree tasks.

### Financial Status

Issues related to finances had a significant impact on the doctoral experiences of six women in this study. Only one woman, Helen, experienced a sense of financial security because of the seniority her husband held in his own faculty position. In contrast, Maggie worked full-time and was the primary bread winner in her family throughout much of her early doctoral work. The remaining six women worked part-time, holding either teaching or research assistantships during their programs. Two women, Sarah and Denise, held full-time positions as they finished writing the final chapters of their dissertations. For the women in this study employment during doctoral studies restricted the time they otherwise would have had to devote to course work, research and writing and thus employment, even part-time, had the effect of slowing their progress. Balancing the demands of part-time employment with doctoral study was a significant drain on the women's energy levels so that even when they did have some unscheduled time to work on their research they often felt too exhausted and had to push themselves, frequently going without much needed sleep, to accomplish the goals they had set for themselves. This factor added significantly to their stress levels.

The financial benefits of both teaching and research assistantships, when these were available, were significant in terms of enabling the women to complete their degrees. Without this benefit most of the women would have been hard pressed to even contemplate pursuit of the doctorate. For some of the women there were other benefits to holding assistantships. Those who held assistantships in their departments felt more integrated into their programs than those who worked outside the department and they benefited from the opportunities to gain experience teaching. However, two negative aspects of assistantships emerged in the study. One factor related to the non-academic related tasks and inappropriate demands made by assistantship supervisors. A second factor was the low pay that came with the assistantships and forced some of the women into a prolonged state of poverty. The low pay seemed to symbolize the general lack of support for and commitment to doctoral students in the program and left them feeling as if their efforts were unappreciated

by faculty. Two women noted that, especially among older or more established faculty, there seemed to be little recognition or appreciation of the impact that changing economic conditions have had on graduate students' lives. Financial status, as reflected by the qualitatively different awards – fellowships versus assistantships – was also a factor that affected relationships among doctoral students in the same department. Students who received fellowships without the obligatory work requirement were sometimes seen as privileged and this had the potential to create strained relations among the students. All the women in this study with the exception of Helen felt that issues related to finances added considerable stress to their doctoral experiences.

### Family Issues

This study found that family issues had a significant influence on the women's doctoral experiences; conversely, issues associated with pursuit of the doctorate were also found to have a significant impact on the women's family relationships.

Relationships within the women's childhood families impacted indirectly on the women's experiences. The women's position and role within the family and the nature of the relationships they had with their parents set the stage and provided important contextual perspectives for the women's subsequent doctoral experiences. In many ways these childhood family contexts shaped the women's self-concepts, the beliefs they held about themselves, the views they held about conventional roles assigned to women in our society, their perceptions and views of academe itself and their ability to situate themselves as academic scholars.

The women pursued scholarly work as a path to personal growth and to broaden their intellectual worlds beyond those in which they had grown up. For some this path also represented an escape from the poverty and dysfunction experienced in the childhood family and these women in particular experienced an intense sense of disillusionment when they encountered a highly political environment in academe with its own issues relating to dysfunctional patterns of communication, support and trust.

Five of the women in the study were first generation college graduates. Going to college, and in particular pursuit of the doctorate, was sometimes perceived by the women themselves as a rebellious act and given their backgrounds it was not something their families had expected or anticipated. The women's choices with respect to their roles as women and scholars were often in conflict, or at least not well understood by the women's families, particularly their mothers who were sometimes less likely than fathers to understand or be encouraging of their daughters' academic aspirations.

Stresses associated with completing the doctorate contributed significantly to difficulties the women encountered in the relationships they had with partners and spouses. All but two women in the study experienced significant discord in the relationships with their partners. Four women separated from their partners or spouses at some point during their studies because of discord in the relationship; for three of those women deterioration of the relationship went beyond the point of reconciliation. It may not be insignificant that the two women who experienced the least difficulty in these relationships lived apart from their partners for extended periods while completing their doctorates.

Isolation from one's adult family, one's partner and/or children, was a factor that added significant strain to the lives of both the families and the women themselves as the focus of their studies intensified. Previous patterns within these relationships were altered as the women shifted priorities from family to academe. It was often difficult for the women to make this shift, putting their own academic needs before those of their families, and the women experienced considerable strain as they attempted to balance academic demands with traditional patterns of behaviour they had in these relationships. This need to balance both personal and academic lives was a significant issue for the women – one that influenced their doctoral experiences from the beginning, even influencing their choice of institution and/or program.

The demands the doctorate placed on the women's time, especially as the focus of their research intensified as they progressed, was little understood by their families. Family members' interest in and support of the women's goals often seemed lacking just when the women needed it most. Similarly, it seemed to the women that the demands of family life were given little importance in academe and the women often felt caught between these two very different worlds. The women with family commitments often felt as though they were taken less seriously in academic circles than were their single colleagues. Significant family events such as the death of a parent and the breakup of a partnership added considerable stress to the demands on their lives.

### Class/Cultural Identity

For five of the seven women in this study class issues were a significant influence on their willingness to internalize images of themselves as scholars. Tracy, Camila, Denise, Zoe and Helen grew up with strong roots in working class culture. For Zoe, the transformation of an identity rooted in poverty was a difficult process. Growing up, she had not only believed that she *was* less, she believed that she would *always* be less and in academic circles this left her feeling like a fish out of water. Among the working class

families of these women there was at best, little appreciation, and at worst, outright disdain for intellectual scholarship. The differences between the middle-class values of the university and the working class worlds they had grown up in sometimes made it difficult for the women to negotiate the cacophony they experienced in living between these two worlds.

All the women in the study were the first in their families to pursue a doctorate and, with the exception of Camila and Sarah, all were first generation college graduates. Unlike those who grow up in families where other family members have pursued a graduate degree, these women lacked the benefit of vicarious exposure to a graduate research culture. This may have had an important influence on some women's choice of institution and/or program and advisor for reasons that were other than academic. The lack of vicarious knowledge of the doctorate as either an academic or a political process also may have been a contributing factor to the idealized preconceptions some women had of the doctorate as a 'great big coffee shop in the sky.' Most had little idea of what to expect from the experience. For some, pursuit of the doctorate seemed like an insurmountable challenge, like a mountain to be climbed or an obstacle to be overcome, and in the context of their backgrounds their unorthodox choice to pursue a Ph.D. was one they had to negotiate and renegotiate, not only within themselves, but with members of their families. For some like Tracy this may have had a counter-intuitive effect of reinforcing the resolve to persist, but in most instances this lack of prior knowledge of the political and academic aspects of doctoral study was more of a handicap than not.

#### Institutional Factors Influencing Women's Progress

A number of institutional factors including program status, department climate, department policies and practices and advisor/advisee relationships were also found to be important influences on these women's doctoral experiences.

##### Program Status

For some women, status in their programs was a factor they thought influenced their progress as well as faculty perceptions of their commitment to scholarship. Full-versus part-time enrollment, employment status and whether the women commuted long distance to their programs were all factors related to program status. Initial enrollment as a part-time student was a factor that may have contributed to Sarah being left out of the departmental information loop when others who were full-time students were notified about

the orientation for new students. This also meant she didn't make the contacts with other students 'in the know' who might have cued her about course selection strategies that were known informally by students but not articulated in university or department guidelines. Maggie's part-time enrollment throughout her program has had a long term effect of wearing her down. Balancing the demands of her multiple roles as scholar, mother and breadwinner has been an unrelenting drain on her energy – a factor that has taken much of the joy out of the day-to-day pursuit of the doctorate. Zoe believed her status as a commuter student, combined with her outspoken commitment to her children was a factor along with her age that shaped some faculty members' beliefs that she was less committed to scholarship than her younger colleagues. She felt her commuter status reinforced some faculty attitudes that women need not be taken seriously as scholars.

### Department Climate

The climate is one of the prime indicators of [an organization's] health .... If you visit a house you've never been in before, you're picking up ideas and feelings about what kind of people live there. This intangible feeling or tone is climate, which endures over time and influences the behavior of people. An organization's climate is defined by the perceptions of its members, no matter what the facts are .... In trying to build a particular climate, you must look at the total organization and see its personality (Mulder and Heimer, 1996).

Department climate was an important factor that influenced women's degree progress. Relationships with faculty and peers during the course work phase of the program, through to candidacy were primary indicators of department climate. "Trust," "fairness," "supportive," "encouraging," "competitive," "close-minded," "conservative," "overwork," "behaviours and practices that did not always serve the best interests of the students," "pretense," "egotism," "friction," "paranoia," "intimidating," "punishing," "subservience" and "unfriendly" were some of the descriptors used by the women in writing about the climate in their departments. It is worthy of note that one woman described the climate in her department, not by its virtues, but by the lack of extreme and harmful effects it had on her – as if, in the absence of a more nurturing climate, this was the best she could expect or hope for.

Trust, a collegial atmosphere and being taken seriously as emerging scholars were central indicators of a healthy departmental climate. For some of the women peer support networks filled an important void in their doctoral experiences and in some instances provided a refuge for students in which they could revitalize their forward momentum. For the women who either worked outside the department or commuted, the lack of opportunity

to socialize with colleagues and/or faculty was a factor that seriously detracted from some of these women's doctoral experiences.

The kind of climate the women described as enhancing their degree progress was one in which they had frequent opportunities to engage in stimulating conversation with faculty and colleagues who were able to challenge and extend their thinking without competing to 'one-up' the other or resorting to intimidating, adversarial tactics that put others on the defensive. The women sought genuine intellectual engagement of their ideas and they felt supported and encouraged when professors took the women's ideas seriously, were sufficiently confident about their own abilities and didn't feel threatened by the expression of students' ideas that differed from the mainstream. Rather than presenting knowledge as something that was subject to challenge these women described the desire for a process in which knowledge was explored and allowed to emerge through reflective conversation. More often than not, however, the women in this study were disappointed by the absence of this kind of "connected dialogue" between students and faculty in their programs.

A supportive climate for students was one in which faculty were able to set aside individual differences and personal agendas and focus on the needs of the student without resorting to tactics of intimidation. The climate, whether it was adversarial and competitive or collegial and growth oriented was a central indicator of the overall well being of the department and may well be an important indicator of the quality of doctoral experience that future students could expect.

#### Department Policies and Practices or What You Don't Specifically Ask, They Won't Tell You

A number of factors related to departmental policies and practices sometimes had the effect of leaving the women in the dark and uninformed about various aspects of their programs. Most often these factors centered around admission practices, program requirements and/or expectations and candidacy exams. It is worthy of note that two women, Denise and Helen, experienced difficulty with regard to the paucity of accurate and available information about language requirements for degrees. In both cases it was only after-the-fact that they discovered alternative and more appealing options for fulfilling these language requirements. In Denise's case not having access to this important information in a timely way was a contributing factor to her premature departure from the seminary. This left her with a lot of fear and baggage around language that she carried into her doctoral

program. In Helen's case it influenced her choice at the time not to pursue a doctorate at one institution.

Both Zoe and Denise found the way their respective departments represented their programs and course offerings to prospective students to be misleading. This caused these women a good deal of consternation. Only after admission did Zoe discover that certain courses she had identified as central to her program were not available. This left her scrambling to put together a program that coincided with her interests. Denise too, felt she'd researched potential doctoral programs very carefully and she knew that in most doctoral programs the regulations stated in the calendar at admission are binding on students. However, she found the university calendar and departmental requirements were not the same and when her department revised their guidelines the method of preliminary examination "had totally changed." Although Denise found the new approach to exams made a lot of sense she felt as though the rug had been pulled out from under her – as if yet another obstacle had been placed in her path. She had made what she thought was an informed decision based on material the department provided, only to discover after-the-fact that information about ongoing changes had been withheld. Unnecessary obstacles were also part of Sarah's experience. She was required to take the GRE as part of the admission process and then admitted to the program the day following the exam, long before results could possibly have been tabulated, let alone be used in consideration of her application for admission.

Sarah and Zoe in particular expressed concern about the general lack of information and guidance in charting their programs. Sometimes this resulted in non-strategic decisions and/or choices that had less than favourable outcomes. The failure of a department to provide students with critical information was also a factor for Denise who had been encouraged to apply for a student assistantship but discovered only when she approached her preliminary exams that the department had stopped all hiring a year earlier.

The lack of clarity surrounding performance expectations and evaluation in the women's classes and their qualifying exams was also a factor that added stress and uncertainty to some of the women's experiences.

Most of the women experienced uncertainty in negotiating specific tasks of the doctorate such as appropriate strategies for approaching candidacy exams, deciding what constituted important and/or significant research questions and developing research proposals. Two of the important subtasks in developing a research proposal include focusing on what constitutes an appropriate conceptual framework for a study and framing the epistemological, ontological and methodological foundations of one's research. In some

cases the women were able to develop the knowledge and skills to integrate these perspectives into their own research through readings and formal course work. For some kinds of tasks such as preparing oral presentations or learning how to write and submit papers to refereed journals, no formal instruction was provided. In its absence the women sought help from their advisors or other committee members or, worse, they were left to discover these things on their own. Swimming around in a sea of uncertainty without specific strategies or advice from experienced scholars to guide them sometimes left the women feeling stuck and they were often quick to attribute this to their own shortcomings.

Departmental policies vary in complexity and specificity. Highly detailed policies may lead to rigid and inflexible practices that provide little room for considering individual student needs; as such, highly structured policies may better serve to protect faculty needs than those of students. In contrast, loosely structured policies while providing more room for individual interpretation that better serves the needs of students may have the unintended effect of creating perceptions of unequal treatment or unfair application of the policies. A careful balance between these two extremes, shaped by open discussion that includes student input may serve departments well.

#### Advisor/Advisee Relationships

Of central influence in all the women's doctoral experiences were the relationships they had with their advisors. Women in this study chose their advisors for a variety of reasons. Four women chose advisors because of expertise in their respective fields of study. However, other factors such as rapport and a shared interest in research methodology were also important. Not only was the advisor/advisee relationship the most influential relationship the women had in the department while pursuing the doctorate but relational issues of trust, power, authority and control in these relationships were central factors that either enhanced or diminished women's progress in significant ways.

Of the seven women in this study only Sarah had a male advisor. Three women, Denise, Zoe and Helen, had relationships with their advisors they described as collegial and supportive. These relationships were central to enhancing the women's experiences and facilitating their progress. For these three women there seemed to be a close match in the advisor/advisee relationship between conceptions and uses of power and the degree of structure and involvement the women needed with their advisors to facilitate degree progress in a way that was satisfying and meaningful to them. On the other hand, Tracy, Camila and Maggie had significantly less collegial and supportive relationships with their advisors.

The central difference between the experiences of these two groups of women centered around the women's ability to negotiate the structural imbalance of power in the advisor/advisee relationship. The fact that Tracy, Camila and Maggie had female advisors did not seem to protect them from feeling as though they were victims of the power differences in their advisor/advisee relationships. Tracy had to maintain a safe emotional distance from her advisor for fear that her emotions might be seen as a weakness and used against her. Camila's advisor also asserted control and power in their relationship in ways that often served her own needs more than Camila's. Maggie's relationship with her advisor symbolized the ultimate breach of trust in the advisor/advisee relationship and Maggie felt powerless to address the issue. There were no institutional structures in place that could possibly protect Maggie from her advisor's use of power to serve her own ends. Maggie felt that even speaking with her advisor about her concerns would have jeopardized her position completely.

Without appropriate institutional structures or systems of accountability to protect students who face these kinds of circumstances the advisor/advisee relationship rests solely and squarely on trust alone. When this trust is violated students often have little recourse but to leave their programs or to submit and remain silent. It is this ultimate breach of trust within the advisor/advisors relationship that many doctoral students fear. It was clear from the opinions voiced by women in this study that students know only too well how they can be victimized by the uncontrolled abuses of power by tenured professors in the academy. Power, as the institutional use of one's authority to maintain a one-up position in relation to the student, rather than gender, was a central factor that diminished the quality of these three women's doctoral experiences and seriously impeded their progress.

The ability of three women in this study to successfully negotiate the structural differences of power in the advisor/advisee relationship was due not only to their own interpersonal skills but to their advisors' willingness to assume collegial relationships with their students.

It is unlikely that any doctoral student, be they male or female, is able to assume a role of junior colleague unless the advisor is also willing to assume a collegial relationship with the student. For female advisees who want to work with male advisors this may present a double-bind. The male advisor must not only be willing to enter into a collegial relationship with the student; he must also be willing to do so with a woman. Because we live in a culture that historically has assigned more power, prestige and privilege to males than females, it may be just as difficult for male advisors to negotiate a collegial advisor/advisee relationship as it is for female advisees. The shortage of female advisors in

the academy is a recurring theme throughout the literature on advisor/advisee relationships. Women's need for a collegial advisor/advisee relationship in which they may be less likely to place themselves in a deferential position in relation to men may be a significant reason for seeking female advisors. However, as the findings in this study illustrate gender may not always be the prime indicator of whether or not advisors are willing to assume collegial relationships with students. Sarah's advisor who was male did not use his power/positional authority to intimidate or create distance in their relationship. Tracy, Camila and Maggie had female advisors and based on their experiences female advisors may be just as likely as men to use their power to serve their own private agendas rather than the needs of students. For Tracy, Maggie and Camila the structural imbalance of power embedded in the advisor/advisee relationship, rather than gender, was a significant factor that diminished the quality of their doctoral experiences and at critical times seriously impeded their progress.

#### Advisory Styles

As the women in this study wrote about the relationships they had with their advisors they described different ways in which advisors related to students and used their power either to serve their own agendas and/or to serve the needs of students. Six styles of advising emerged from their descriptions and are summarized below.

##### The Uninvolved Advisor

Often too busy with own agendas to even notice the students unless they happen to share similar research interests; gives low priority to involvement with or supervision of students' work/progress; is often unavailable or too busy to meet with students; provides little guidance; students are left on their own to learn by trial and error.

##### The Laissez-faire/Hands Off Advisor

Provides little constructive feedback to students; quick to provide critical feedback; may have an open door policy for meeting with students but assumes the responsibility/initiative belongs entirely with the student; may be reluctant to engage in substantive dialogue with students about their work.

##### The Negotiator

Helps students to discover their own relationship to research; engages in mutual negotiation with students; balances guidance and direction with students' expressed needs; allows students to take the lead and is willing

to provide guidance when needed; uses power and authority to benefit the students; gives constructive feedback.

#### The Proactive Advisor

Very similar to the negotiator but takes more of a leadership role; meets regularly with students to set/negotiate goals and timelines; expresses clear performance guidelines; gives constructive feedback; uses power and authority to benefit the students.

#### The Symbiotic Advisory Style

Often uses power and authority to benefit students but may be more authoritative and demanding than the proactive advisor; will also use power and authority to get something he/she needs from the student; may be moody and/or unpredictable; may be hostile and/or vindictive toward students.

#### The Autocratic Advisor

Consistently authoritative; often demanding; tends to use power and authority for personal benefit; may want to shape the student in his/her own image or use students to serve a personal agenda; student needs play a secondary role to advisor's needs or may not enter into the picture at all.

The above taxonomy represents the dominant advisory styles that emerged from the women's descriptions of their advisor/advisee relationships and illustrates the variety of ways in which advisors can use power within these relationships. It is important to note that some of the women, in particular, Camila and Tracy, described advisory styles which at different times in the relationship shifted from one style to another or crossed over the above categories.

Some of the above styles are clearly more or less desirable than others. None of the women in this study would have found it easy or pleasant to work with advisors whose styles were characteristic of autocratic, symbiotic or uninvolved advisors. It is one thing for students to learn from mistakes and to overcome the normal obstacles along the doctoral path; it is quite another matter to overcome obstacles that are placed either intentionally or thoughtlessly in one's path. In some of these women's experiences it seems the advisor/advisee relationship was sometimes such an obstacle. The critical personal, social and institutional factors that emerged in this study as influencing women's degree progress are summarized in Table 19.

Table 19

Summary of Factors Influencing Women's Degree Progress


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<u>Personal and Social Factors</u>	<u>Institutional Factors</u>
Academic Self-concept	Program Status:
Gender	• part/full-time enrollment
Age	• employment, on or off campus
Health Factors	• commuter student
Financial Status	Department Climate:
Family Status	• faculty relations that are competitive or intimidating vs. stimulating and challenging
Class/Cultural Identity	• collegial support networks
	Department Policies and Practices:
	• inaccurate/incomplete representation of programs and requirements
	• inadequate program advisement
	• inadequate advisement on strategies for completing tasks specific to the doctorate
	• lack of clarity re performance expectations
	• policies that are weak or overly rigid
	Advisor/Advisee relationship
	• power, authority, control, trust, accountability
	• match between advisory style and student needs for advisement

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## Transformation of Self

Relationships were central to both the successes and the stresses the women experienced in pursuit of the doctorate. For the women in this study induction into academic culture reflected a transformation of one's identity which, through human interaction and relationship, connected the personal self with a newly emerging academic self. Their relationships served as the primary conduit through which they negotiated this transformation.

The nature of this transformative experience – the extent to which the personal self is estranged from, or honored and respected, in the process of reconstructing one's identity as an emerging scholar – was central to the women's persistence. This transformative quality of the doctoral experience reflects a woman's ability to locate an emerging identity within the academic culture – the ability to see oneself as being good enough to measure up to the requirements of the degree (the terms and conditions under which one is permitted to

fit) – and the willingness to locate an emerging identity within the academic culture – a balancing of the associated rewards and costs.

Women in this study were sometimes unable, but more often unwilling, to locate their emerging identities within the prevailing academic culture, a factor that sometimes slowed degree progress and often significantly influenced the quality of their doctoral experiences. This was reflected through an on-going, inner process of negotiation in which the women continuously examined and re-examined who they were and who they were becoming as a result of their experiences. Their willingness to participate, contribute to, or perpetuate a system they saw as concerned more with the politics of education than with genuine concern for learning and scholarship – a system they saw as uncaring, lacking collegiality and, in many instances, harmful to their physical and spiritual well being – contributed significantly to their sense of disillusionment with academe.

i feel as if the “me” was eroded rather than allowed to emerge in all it could have been.

The women in this study were eager to *push*, but not *test*, their own personal limits. They described numerous situations and experiences that contributed to their sense of disillusionment with academe including attitudes about intelligence and knowledge and academe as a repressive and competitive enterprise in which neither multiplicity nor values that differed from the mainstream were honoured. They cited examples in which women faculty who served as role models were denied tenure and/or treated badly in academe. They described both their fear and unwillingness to submit to, or seek validation from a system in which, ultimately, they would be judged by unknown standards. They were reluctant to submit to a process or to be transformed into the kind of person who puts a private agenda first and the needs of the larger academic community, including students, last. This disillusionment with academe, as an unanticipated outcome of the doctoral experience, was a factor central to the women’s willingness to locate an emerging identity within the academic culture and to the transformation of self each woman experienced. This sense of disillusionment with academe is not limited to the women in this study. It is an unanticipated outcome that may be far more wide spread among doctoral students and women in particular than those in higher education realize (see Chapter 1, page 1. and Appendix H.)

## Elements of a Theory of Women's Doctoral Persistence

What can we learn from these women's experiences that informs our understanding of factors that may influence women's doctoral persistence?

1. A unique combination of personal, social and institutional factors shape women's perceptions of their doctoral experience.

The unique interaction of personal and social factors (including academic self-concept, gender, age, health, finances, family status and class/cultural identity) and institutional factors (including program status, department climate, department policies and practices, advisor/advisee relationships) were central in shaping women's perceptions of their doctoral experiences. If we are to deepen our understanding of women's doctoral persistence, faculty, departments, researchers and students themselves must examine more closely the ways in which each one of these personal and institutional factors shape the doctoral experience.

2. Department climate was an important factor that influenced women's doctoral experiences.

Department climate was reflected in the perceptions of the women doctoral students. The way in which departments present their programs to prospective students and the degree to which information about program requirements and expectations (student handbooks and program orientations) were made accessible to students were important factors that influenced students' perceptions of department climate. This may be particularly important for students who are first generation college graduates and have little prior exposure to graduate research culture.

Relationships with faculty and peers were primary indicators of department climate. A supportive climate and "connected dialogue" among students and faculty were central to maintaining a department climate that enhanced women's doctoral experiences. Student and faculty perceptions of the department climate may differ greatly, in part, because of the structural differences in power between these two groups. A department in which policies and practices were used to benefit students was more likely to create a climate that enhanced women's doctoral experiences.

3. Relationships with others in and out of academe were the conduit through which women negotiated the various demands associated with completing the doctorate. These relationships were a central influence on these women's doctoral experiences.

The tasks associated with completing the doctorate were negotiated through women's relationships with others. In negotiating these tasks, relationships with those in and outside academe were a significant factor that enhanced and/or diminished women's abilities to complete doctoral tasks. The demands of the doctorate diminished women's opportunity to maintain relationships with family and friends at the same pre-doctoral level of intensity, frequency and/or duration. These pre-existing relationships were renegotiated within new limits and boundaries. New relationships with academic peers, faculty and advisors were also negotiated and sometimes complemented and/or replaced pre-existing relationships, even if temporarily. Isolation – the reduced time available to attend to important relationships in their lives was experienced by the women as a significant loss which negatively influenced the quality of their doctoral experiences and caused them to question and reexamine their values and goals.

4. Through relationships with others woman doctoral students engaged in an ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of their self-images as individuals and as emerging scholars. This was a transformational process that was central to the women's doctoral experiences.

Self-knowledge is an essential part of the doctoral experience for many women. This self-knowledge reflects an ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of who one is and who one is becoming which occurs to a large degree in the context of one's relationships with others. For some women, the need to "process" their experiences with others is central to developing this self-knowledge. Doctoral support groups can provide an important means for processing one's experiences and developing self-knowledge and can be invaluable to women doctoral students. In the absence of a good match within the advisor/advisee relationship, such support groups may be a critical factor in a student's progress.

5. Women doctoral students who come from working class backgrounds may be more likely than those from middle or upper class backgrounds to experience difficulty negotiating their identities as scholars.

Doctoral students who come from working class backgrounds may be less likely to receive encouragement and support for academic pursuits from their childhood families. Because self-knowledge is central to the doctoral experience for many women, some women doctoral students may be more likely to experience difficulty bridging differences between the value systems reflected in their working class backgrounds and the culture of the university.

6. Relationships that enhance or diminish one's self-image as a person or as an emerging scholar have an important influence on women's ability and/or willingness to identify with the culture of academe and thus to see themselves as emerging scholars.

The quality of the relationships the women in this study encountered in the day to day events associated with completing the doctorate had an important influence on their ability to see themselves as emerging scholars. The women's observations and perceptions of the relationships and interactions among faculty and/or students, particularly those relationships and interactions that were seen to be injurious or disrespectful, had an important influence on women's ability to identify with the culture of academe and thus to see themselves as emerging scholars.

7. The advisor/advisee relationship was a central influencing factor in women's degree progress. A good match between advisory style and students' individual needs around advisement may be central to time to degree and completion rates.

Finding the "right" advisor was critical to degree completion. A good match between student and advisory styles with respect to the task and interpersonal dimensions of the advisor/advisee relationship may be even more important than a close match between an advisor's area of expertise and a student's research focus. Compatibility with respect to one's research paradigm or genre may also be more important in facilitating completion than closely matched interest in a particular subject.

Access to one's advisor and to appropriate feedback enhanced student progress. Among some women doctoral students there was a critical need for open communication with respect to both the task and relational dimensions of the advisor/advisee relationship. The willingness of advisors to engage these aspects of

the relationship may be central to the success of some women doctoral students and may be characteristic of faculty who are perceived by women doctoral students as effective role models.

The women were less likely to encounter roadblocks to completion when matched with faculty who used institutional power and authority to benefit students and the larger common good rather than their own personal agendas. Having an advisor who was female was no guarantee that women doctoral students would be less likely to experience inappropriate uses of power at the hands of the advisor. In this regard, the way advisors used their power and authority and managed conflict was more important than gender with respect to the quality of the advisor/advisee relationship. The degree of support and trust and/or vulnerability a student experiences within the advisor/advisee relationship may be an important factor that can enhance or diminish the quality of the doctoral experience and influence time to degree.

8. Women who experience negative issues around relationships, particularly advisor/advisee relationships, may progress more slowly and experience longer times to completion. In turn, longer times to completion may impact negatively on students' likelihood of completion.

For women doctoral students the challenges associated with negotiating various tasks, issues, disagreements and points of conflict within advisor/advisee relationships were made more difficult when advisors used the structural imbalance of power extant within these relationships to reinforce a one-up/one-down relationship. The women in this study whose advisors encouraged and supported the women's efforts and worked to diminish the importance of the structural imbalance of power were less likely to encounter severe and/or negative conflicts with their advisors.

All the women in this study periodically entertained thoughts about withdrawing from their programs – thoughts that were connected to their identities as emerging scholars. Women who had more collegial relationships with their advisors were more easily able to come to terms with these experiences, move beyond them and refocus their energies toward the tasks at hand. Where negative issues and events occurred in the context of the advisor/advisee relationship and remained unresolved, the women were less likely to successfully negotiate the transformation of their identities as emerging scholars. Women who experience

negative issues around relationships, particularly advisor/advisee relationships, may be less likely to complete the doctorate.

9. Critical events in women's personal, professional and/or academic life shape their perceptions and experiences and may be the ultimate determinants of whether or not they finish.

Critical events such as the death of a family member, ongoing harassment in one's professional life, or the betrayal of trust in the advisor/advisee relationship may be of sufficient significance as to cause women to reprioritize their values and goals and to consider withdrawing from their programs.

Hidden rules associated with completing the doctorate – discrepancies between student and faculty understandings of the task and relational dimensions of the process – can significantly influence students' doctoral experiences. When such discrepancies in understanding occur students may be more likely to interpret these experiences as turning points or critical events.

10. The accumulative effect of isolation and exhaustion significantly diminish the quality of women's doctoral experiences.

The accumulative effect of isolation and exhaustion was a factor in this study that significantly diminished the quality of the women's doctoral experiences. It also diminished the women's capacity to deal more constructively with critical events that occurred during their programs. Women who experience this gradual kind of wearing down may be more likely either to give serious consideration to withdrawing from their programs or to experience depression as a result of the doctoral experience.

11. It may be that for women relationship issues are the primary determinant of progress – both time to degree and completion rates.

Issues round relationships, both in and out of academe, are central to women's doctoral experiences. The quality of the advisor/advisee relationship is particularly significant. For women, successful resolution of relationship issues may be a critical determinant of both time to degree and completion rates. However, it would be inappropriate to assume that the responsibility to resolve such issues belongs solely to women doctoral students. It is faculty who create the climate in

the department and these relationships are as much the responsibility of faculty and the institution as a whole as they are the responsibility of the women.

### Implications and Conceptual Contributions of this Study

This study examined the personal accounts of seven women doctoral candidates over a 12 month period in an effort to understand the meanings these women attach to events that occurred in the context of pursuing the Ph.D. Two trends in doctoral education, increased time to degree and increased rates of attrition from doctoral programs, have given researchers cause to be concerned about factors that influence doctoral persistence at various stages of degree progress. Among the limitations of much of the current research on doctoral persistence has been the fact that the findings reflect *researchers'* understandings of the factors influencing persistence. This study addressed this limitation by focusing on the understandings that women doctoral *candidates*, rather than researchers, attributed to their experiences.

Doctoral persistence cannot be characterized as a solitary event; nor can it be attributed to a singular cause. Rather it is a process characterized by a complex interaction of factors that vary from one individual to the next. An important contribution of this study has been the opportunity to dialogue with the study participants in the privacy of their own milieu over an extended period of time and thus to move beyond what Jacks, Chubin, Porter and Connolly (1983) referred to as 'stock explanations' of students' experiences. The in-depth focus of this study and the rich detail in these women's stories has provided a unique window through which we have been able to learn about and experience vicariously the meanings women attach to their doctoral experiences. It is through their stories that we have begun to uncover some of the more subtle and complex interactions among the factors influencing persistence.

Many studies on graduate education have identified individual behaviours that may slow or inhibit degree progress. Hanson (1992), for example, identified in the literature a number of "internal" barriers to women's degree progress such as perfectionism, procrastination and compulsiveness. Among the important conceptual contributions this study makes is to reveal, through the meanings these women attributed to their doctoral experiences, the complex interaction of personal and institutional factors that influence persistence. This is significant because it necessitates a shift in our understanding of student behaviours which the literature has labelled as "internal" barriers to degree progress, an interpretation which has the effect of blaming the victim. Rather than

interpreting student behaviours as *problems* per se we can see through these women's experiences that these "internal" barriers must be understood as *symptoms* of a much more complex interaction of personal and institutional factors that influence persistence.

In this study the emergence of the construct of "academic self-concept" provides an important *context* for understanding individual behaviours of students. Without such a context labels like perfectionism, procrastination and compulsiveness do little to explain or enhance our understanding about why such behaviour might be manifested and therefore what strategies might best be used to address them. When such behaviours are understood in the context of a student's life history, in the context of one's upbringing and educational history – the context from which the academic self-concept has emerged – we are better able to understand students' responses to particular events and the difficulties they experience in both the relational and task dimensions associated with completing the doctorate.

Further, the interaction of two constructs, academic self-concept and departmental climate (as reflected in departmental policies and day-to-day practices and whether or not students have a clear understanding of the tasks associated with completing the doctorate), does much to explain the meanings doctoral students attribute to their experiences – to the various interactions and relationships within their departments. Tinto (1993, p. 235) stated that "events are continually being shaped by past events and, to some degree, molded by the anticipation of future events." Not only does much of the literature on graduate education fail to take into consideration the influence of students' understandings about their backgrounds and prior experiences before entering graduate school, particularly as it relates to academic self-concept, but based on my own knowledge of other students' graduate experiences acquired through online discussion groups like GradTalk and DocTalk, it is a rare graduate program that places any value or importance on understanding the personal contexts and understandings students bring to their programs. If, as this study has illustrated, self-knowledge is central to the transformational nature of the doctoral experience for many women it may be critical, not only for women to reflect on and to explore the evolution of their own academic self-concepts throughout the doctoral experience, but it may be equally critical for faculties and departments to acknowledge, encourage and support processes that would promote these kinds of learning opportunities.

Understanding this complex interaction of personal and institutional factors that influence persistence through juxtaposition of the constructs of academic self-concept and departmental climate has important implications for thinking about extant models of doctoral degree progress. In the model tested by Girves and Wemmerus (1988, see Figure

3) it was found that grades were not a meaningful predictor of doctoral degree progress, because, they hypothesized, doctoral students come from an already highly selective pool of applicants. They suggested that scholarly activities such as performance on qualifying exams and the ability to conduct independent research might be more influential on degree progress. However, in view of the findings from my own research with respect to the interaction of academic self-concept and departmental climate (policy and practices) a singular focus on student-centered variables serves only to limit our understanding of degree progress. Using the example of exam performance provided by Girves and Wemmerus to further this point, we know that students develop academic self-concepts long before they enter graduate school. We also know that performance anxiety can be a significant factor in students' academic self-concepts. When students' futures are dependent on exam results the stakes are high and the anxiety students experience can be tremendous. Faculty attitudes and department practices can have an important influence on students' academic performance and self-concepts through interactions that either elevate students' anxiety levels or support students and promote confidence building as they develop the necessary skills to complete such scholarly tasks. It is, therefore, critical that models of degree progress reflect this complex interaction of personal and institutional factors and not place the onus of responsibility for degree progress solely on the shoulders of students.

Departments and faculties have a strong role to play in this regard. Gender and age bias and bias toward full- versus part-time enrollment and women with families is alive and well in the academy and although not all women experience these more blatant kinds of bias, all the women in this study did develop a heightened awareness of and distaste for the political aspects of pursuing a doctorate. Department and faculty attitudes toward students vary tremendously across departments and institutions. Policies and practices that actively promote a competitive, one-up/one-down ethic may provide less desirable learning environments for women who place a high value on self-knowledge and personal growth as part of the doctoral experience. Prospective doctoral students would be well advised to familiarize themselves with the departmental policies, practices and power relationships in institutions where they are considering doctoral study by talking with other doctoral students who are at different stages of their degrees.

Several studies in much of the recent literature on doctoral education (Braun, 1990; Hanson, 1992; Heinrich, 1991, 1995; Jacks, Chubin, Porter and Connolly, 1983; Nerad and Cerny, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Tluczek, 1995), identified the importance of advisor/advisee relationship as a central influencing factor in the doctoral experience. Findings from this

study suggest that the advisor/advisee relationship may be the *most* influential relationship women have in their program while pursuing the doctorate. While recognizing, as Tinto suggested, that the advisory role may be particularly critical during the final writing stage of the doctorate, findings from my own research would suggest that the quality of the advisor/advisee relationship is critical to student success and continued persistence regardless of one's stage in the program.

Many researchers including Braun (1990), Breslauer and Gordon (1989), and Heinrich (1991; 1995) have examined gender issues in the advisor/advisee relationship. Braun found that having a same-sex mentor was far more important to women than to men. However, findings from this study would suggest that gender in the advisor/advisee relationship may be less important than the nature of the relationship itself, in particular, the way faculty use power within the relationship. Some advisory practices reflect a clear abuse of power that, regardless of the stage students are at in their programs, is a negative influence on motivation and persistence. Until institutions recognize this and provide safeguards to protect students from the potential harmful effects of this imbalance of power such abuses undoubtedly will continue. Women doctoral students in search of advisors are likely better served by observing and studying the ways in which faculty use power in their relationships with colleagues and students than by choosing advisors primarily on the basis of gender.

Heinrich's (1991) typology of mentoring or advising styles identified masculine, feminine and androgynous approaches to advising and suggested that an androgynous approach was of greatest benefit to women advisees. Advisors' sensitive use of power in the advisor/advisee relationship was central not only to Heinrich's model but to the findings in this study. However, rather than cast advising into a model in which "one-style-fits-all" this study identified a variety of ways in which faculty used power within the advisor/advisee relationship. It would be overly simplistic to assume that such a taxonomy might reflect the full range of possible advisory styles or that an individual advisor's style could be characterized solely by a single category within the taxonomy. It is also important to acknowledge that no relationship, especially those in which there are structural power differences, is problem-free or without its challenges. If, as this study would suggest, a close match between students' needs with respect to the task and relational dimensions of the relationship is central to degree progress, doctoral students in search of advisors may do well to examine closely their own needs around both task and relational dimensions of the advisor/advisee relationship and choose advisors whose predominant style most closely matches their needs.

Stress, mental and emotional fatigue and depression emerged in this study as critical factors in these women's doctoral experiences. These findings were not significantly different from those of other research studies. However, unlike other studies that have tended to view health issues as the failure of the individual student to adjust to the demands of doctoral study, for example the inability to effectively manage one's time, this study illustrated clearly how dysfunctional relationships among students and faculty, reflected in the department climate, contributed significantly to much of the stress the women experienced in their programs. This would suggest that stress and health related issues women encounter in their programs might better be understood as symptoms of a more complex interaction of factors rather than as shortcomings of the individual student. Departments need to take heed of this and develop strategies to ensure that substantive issues, rather than the politics of knowledge production, command the highest priority for both faculty and students.

The Ph.D. symbolizes the highest level of achievement in North American educational systems. As students climb each rung of the academic ladder, increasingly they are expected to be self-directed, independent learners and by the time they approach the doctorate they are expected to know the rules of the game. Pursuit of the Ph.D., however, is characterized by tasks, processes and experiences that are unique to particular fields of study, to institutions, to departments and to individuals. Not only must students define and demonstrate mastery of a very specific body of knowledge, they must also learn and master the sometimes hidden rules that govern the process. Tradition dictates that faculty will lead students safely along this path, but it is a responsibility with few guidelines, controls or rewards to frame the process. When it works well everyone wins. However, for many, academe has become a hostile environment in which the intellect is treated like some sort of appendage detached from the self. When words like "loneliness," "isolation," "exhaustion," "stress," "anxiety," "hazing," "ridicule," "sexual harassment," "benign neglect" and even "abuse" are central to women's descriptions of their doctoral experiences we need to ask what it is that is being taught in the academy. There has been an assumption in academe that the best and brightest among us will survive. However, for many women, the question is not whether we can *survive*; rather it is whether we are willing to persist to completion when we experience conditions in the academy that are injurious to our emotional, intellectual and physical well being. A system that is injurious to its progeny endangers the very foundation upon which it rests and ultimately gambles with its own future. If women are to thrive in the academy then the politics of knowledge production

must give way to a genuine concern for the next generation of emerging scholars and individual egos must yield to the greater common good.

### Methodological Contributions of this Study

This study makes an important contribution to our knowledge about methods for conducting qualitative inquiry in its the use of electronic media like the Internet and World Wide Web for gathering, storing, presenting and sharing information. In this regard a number of issues relative to the advantages and limitations of the methodology are worthy of discussion.

#### Locating Participants

One of the advantages of using electronic mail to conduct this inquiry was the speed and relative ease with which I as the researcher was able to locate women who were interested in participating in a study of this intensity and duration. The informality and ease of response made possible by electronic mail provided women who were curious and/or hesitant about participating in the study with the opportunity to make further inquiries without much risk to themselves before deciding to participate. To conduct a similar inquiry using surface mail would have required much more time and expense. Thus, I was able to identify participants from geographically dispersed institutions who I otherwise might have had great difficulty locating.

#### Time and Place Considerations

Using electronic mail and the World Wide Web to conduct the study removed time and place constraints that have traditionally characterized communication. This had benefits for both me as a researcher as well as the participants. The cost of conducting face-to-face interviews with participants who are geographically dispersed across a nation would normally have made a study of this duration impossible. Further, using electronic mail reduced the need for synchronous communication. This was an important benefit to the participants because they were able to participate in the study at times that were convenient to them and less disruptive to their personal schedules. It also afforded the women greater control over their participation in the study. This posed something of a risk to me as a researcher because I was dependent on their continuing participation and any of the women could have withdrawn from the study at any time simply by not writing. However, I drew

comfort from the feminist ethic reflected in such a methodology because it placed the greater burden of risk on the researcher rather than on the participants. The women's control over their participation in the study was also important from another perspective. That the women could write at times that were convenient to them afforded them the opportunity not only to reflect on their experiences between communication exchanges but it also afforded them the opportunity to reflect on the way in which they expressed their thoughts in a manner that would otherwise not have been possible in face-to-face communications. It was, in part, this opportunity to reflect deeply on their experiences and the writing of their experiences that has contributed to the depth and richness of these women's stories.

### Privacy and Security Issues

I exchanged written communications privately with each of the women in the study. After their stories were told I synthesized each of their accounts into individual stories which I then posted to my Web site. I gave the participants the Web addresses for these documents and after each of the women had read my synthesis and provided me with corrective feedback I shared these stories with the other participants in the study. Neither electronic mail nor the Web is a totally secure medium of communication. Although illegal and unethical, it is technically possible for someone with the appropriate knowledge and skills to have intercepted and read our electronic mail messages. This potential risk to the participants was one I informed them about prior to beginning the research. From a technical perspective the women's skills with using electronic mail varied but all were comfortable with basic skills such as writing, sending and receiving mail. Camila was uncomfortable at times with the security of electronic mail and at times chose to write by surface mail. More often, however, her concerns about using electronic mail were related to the greater freedom of expression that other media allowed rather than to privacy issues and she used surface mail in to send some of her colourful drawings and art work as well as tapes of music from her country which she elaborated on in her letters. Maggie was very concerned about the lack of security afforded by electronic mail particularly when writing about her experiences with her advisor. She chose to send her more confidential communications to me on disk by surface mail. The lack of security afforded by electronic mail may have been a factor early in the pilot study in one woman's reluctance to participate in the study.

### Collecting Online Data

From a researcher's perspective the time and costs associated with transcribing audio-taped conversations are immense and the potential for researchers to introduce transcription errors into the text are reduced significantly by having participants record their own thoughts in an electronic medium. In addition, the archive or transcripts of one's thoughts is available to both researcher and participant for ongoing review and reflection. Inconsistencies can be identified and clarification of meanings can be sought.

Technically, the international standardized ASCII character set for electronic mail and browsers used to access the World Wide Web make the differences associated with communication between different hardware and software systems all but inconsequential.

### Developing Trust and Rapport in an Electronic Medium

Among the advantages of collecting data online is that message content rather than one's physical presence or status becomes the focus of attention for both interviewer and interviewee. Participants are not under the same pressure to respond immediately to the researcher's queries as they would be in face-to-face communication. In a virtual interview the physical separation from the researcher has the advantage of providing an emotional safety zone for participants as they relive sometimes painful experiences through their writing. This emotional safety zone may be an important factor in facilitating disclosure that, which in a face-to-face interview, participants might otherwise be reluctant to share. Despite what might seem on the surface to be a rather impersonal medium of communication, electronic mail and computer conferencing can also be highly conducive to sharing personal information. Hiltz and Turoff (1978, p. 28) have suggested that the inclination to self-disclose might be related to the 'stranger' effect and they offered the following quote from Simmel (1950) by way of explanation:

The stranger is close to us, insofar as we feel between him and ourselves common features of a national, social, occupational, or generally human nature. He is far from us, insofar as these common features extend beyond him or us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people .... Objectivity ... is a particular structure composed of distance and nearness, indifference and involvement .... With the objectivity of the stranger is connected ... the fact that he often receives the most surprising openness – confidences which would be carefully withheld from a more closely related person (p. 404-406).

I have witnessed this kind of self-disclosure in courses I delivered using computer conferencing. Two comments posted by students in one course illustrate their own awareness of self-disclosure in online communication.

... I learned more about Clive by reading his introduction tonight online than I did in our entire course together last semester ...

[Learning Log Note 7 (of 282) by Sue on Jan. 15, 1992 at 13:23 PDT]

... I agonize over term papers and although the end result is satisfying it reveals little of who I am as a person. I think I've revealed more about myself in the short time I've been online than I have in the past three months of course work.

[Learning Log Note 42 (of 282) by Mary on Jan. 24, 1992 at 14:39 PDT]

At the outset of my study one of the most important challenges I saw before me was developing rapport with and earning the trust of the women who had volunteered to participate. I saw this as a critical foundation of my relationships with the women since I anticipated asking them to share highly personal information that might not always be flattering to disclose to another. While I can only hypothesize as to how difficult it might have been to establish rapport had I already completed my degree, my own status as a doctoral candidate placed me on equal ground with the participants and I believe because of this I was received less as a 'stranger' by the women. At the very least, my status as something of an insider was not something I thought would work against me. My experience teaching courses online, in addition to having first met my husband on the Internet, had also taught me about other characteristics of online communication media that I thought might well accommodate a balance between closeness and distance – between the 'personal' and the 'stranger' – and thus provide the women with an environment that was conducive to telling their stories. One feature of the medium, synchronous communication, allows participants to bridge the physical distance that characterizes online communication: messages exchanged in rapid fire have the potential to convey a momentum and intensity that simulates the presence of face-to-face exchanges. Second, using electronic communication to bridge our physical distance also afforded the women a degree of safety that would not have been possible in face-to-face interviews: as a researcher I wasn't going to be "in their faces." The women, if they wanted, could 'delete me' without notice. Thus, I knew that learning their stories would depend on my ability to earn their trust and be an active listener.

How does one demonstrate the capacity to be an active listener using a medium like electronic mail? I employed a number of strategies that served me well in this study. The first was to monitor my mail several times daily and reply to the women's in a timely

manner. Reading and replying to their messages was a top priority that I believe demonstrated my attention and commitment to learning about their experiences. The second strategy I employed was to read their messages several times and pose thoughtful, well-phrased questions and responses that reflected my close reading. When probing for more information I tried to put myself in their shoes; I tried to experience what they were describing as if their stories were my own; I tried to understand and be sensitive to their feelings; I looked not only at what they had written but what they had left unsaid. In my responses I chose my words carefully to accurately convey my intended meaning and where possible I used words and colloquialisms the women themselves had used in reflecting my queries back to them. When I was uncertain about a point they made I asked for clarification. Yet another strategy was the position I took with respect to personal questions the women asked of me. Ethically, I felt it inappropriate to ask them rather personal questions if I also was not willing to answer whatever questions they directed my way; I therefore answered all their questions as openly and honestly as I could. I also tried to match the amount of detail in my response to what I thought was the amount of detail they sought so as not to overwhelm them with detail they hadn't really wanted or 'underwhelm' them by providing less information than they wanted. To ensure I had correctly understood and represented their experiences I requested corrective feedback throughout the study. I first synthesized each of their stories individually to ensure I had accurately presented the details of their experiences and posted these stories to the World Wide Web. Each of the women gave corrective feedback and made suggestions that only improved this work.

In the process of our conversations these seven women have invited me into their lives and have become my friends. In telling their stories they revealed parts of themselves which previously they hadn't shared even with their most intimate friends and partners. Their willingness to break this silence is both evidence of the commitment to their own personal growth and a testament to their persistence.

#### SELF-AWARENESS

*Until the missing story of ourselves is told, nothing besides told can suffice us: we shall go on quietly craving it.* (Laura Riding)

Probably the most important journey we will ever take is the journey inward. Unless we know who we are, how can we possibly offer what we have? Each of us is a unique combination of heredity and experiences. No one else has to offer what we have to offer. Yet, if we do not have the self-awareness to undergird our uniqueness, we never make our contribution. I need to know my story ... all of it.

(Anne Wilson Schaeff, 1990, April 21)

## Suggestions for Further Research

In this dissertation I examined a wide range of factors that influenced the progress of seven women enrolled in doctoral study. I have identified a number of implications that would assist in developing a theory of women's doctoral persistence. While the in-depth nature of this study has enabled a far greater understanding of the factors shaping the perceptions of these women's experiences far more research needs to be carried out among different populations of women and men to expand on the implications identified in this study. Such research need not be limited to qualitative modes of inquiry, although as I have argued in this study, the qualitative mode does lend itself to increased understanding of the contextual factors associated with doctoral study in a way that many quantitative research studies have neglected to address. A number of additional areas of inquiry are worthy of further investigation. The following list, although not exhaustive, is intended to provide examples of questions that need greater attention by researchers.

### Preconceptions and Expectations of Academe

- What preconceptions and expectations do women generally hold with respect to graduate research culture?
- To what extent do women view academe as a sanctuary for scholarship and personal growth versus a career training ground?
- Do women's preconceptions and expectations of the doctoral experience differ in important ways from those of men? Do women tend to place greater emphasis on intrinsic personal growth during the doctoral years than on external indicators of achievement? How might this influence men's and women's progress at various stages of their doctoral programs, i.e. with respect to course work, candidacy exams, approval of the proposal, data collection and analysis and writing?
- To what extent do class, age and gender have a bearing on one's conceptions and expectations of academe and the graduate research culture in doctoral programs?

### Choice of Institution and Program

- Are women less strategic than men in their choice of institution or programs?

### Socialization Process

- There is much evidence to suggest that different socialization processes are at work for men and women with women being socialized more toward gender role behaviours than achievement and men being socialized more toward achievement than to gender-based roles. To what extent do differences in these socialization processes influence the way men and women view academe?

- What are the implications of these socialization practices for the academic self-concepts of men and women doctoral students?

#### Academic Self-Concept

- To what extent do the academic self-concepts of men and women doctoral students differ? Are men more likely than women to see themselves as scholars? Is it more difficult for women to view themselves as scholars? Are graduate women disadvantaged by this socialization process?
- Do gender differences in academic self-concept contribute to women doctoral students being a more highly self-selective group than men?
- What are the influences of gender, class and age on academic self-concept?
- Are there important differences in the academic self-concepts of first and second generation college students? Are first generation college students disadvantaged by a lack of prior socialization in the graduate research culture?

#### Competing Demands

- How do competing demands outside academe influence degree progress and to what extent to these factors differ for men and women?

#### Competition

- Are women less comfortable with and/or accepting of competitive notions of learning in academe than men?
- Do women have a greater need than men for collegiality, connected dialogue, reflection, discussion and a sense of belonging?
- Are women students more likely than men to avoid or take steps to modify competitive aspects of their environment?
- Do women who pursue doctorates typically thrive less well than men in competitive environments?
- Are women who pursue doctorates in the arts and humanities more or less likely to have disdain for the competitive aspects of doctoral study than women who pursue doctoral study in the hard sciences or traditional male fields of study?
- Are women who complete doctorates more likely to thrive in competitive environments than women who do not pursue doctoral study?

#### Collegiality and Support

- What kind of support do men and women want during their programs and to what extent are their needs similar or different?
- What kinds of support are most effective in facilitating degree progress? Are there differences for men and women?

- What different types of support are most helpful at different stages of degree progress, for example, during course work, candidacy exams, approval of the proposal, data collection and analysis and writing?
- Do women typically receive less support than men in the pursuit of academic goals?
- Are women who pursue doctorates more self-reliant than women who don't?
- Are women more likely than men to experience feelings of isolation during doctoral study and if so, to what extent is this correlated to field of study, higher rates of attrition, longer times to degree and reduced satisfaction for women?
- To what extent are peer support groups important for women's progress? Is this different for men?
- Are women more inclined than men to want or to seek support during doctoral study or are they simply more inclined to vocalize such needs?

### Field of Study

- In what ways do women's doctoral experiences vary by field of study? Are there important differences between women's experiences in the arts and humanities in contrast to traditional male fields of study?
- Are there particular practices associated with traditional male or female fields of study that have the effect of slowing or enhancing women's degree progress? To what extent are these similar for men?

### Department Climate: Policies and Practices

- What kinds of relationships do male doctoral students have with colleagues and faculty in their departments and in what ways to their relationships differ from those of women doctoral students?
- In what ways do men and women experience department climate differently, particularly when the climate is experienced as more dysfunctional than supportive for doctoral students?
- What is the relationship between the size of entering cohorts and doctoral attrition and increased time to degree?
- What departmental policies and practices best convey a learning climate that is supportive of students' needs and interests?
- To what degree is gender discrimination and sexual harassment still present in the academy? To what extent do sexual harassment policies protect women? Are victims of discrimination and sexual harassment adequately protected by these policies and do they feel able to voice their concerns without fear of retaliation or backlash? If not, what other avenues of resolution are available to them?
- Do women experience more conflict than men in dealing with the hidden rules of the academy – the discrepancies between departmental policies and practices?

- Where do individual and department responsibilities begin and end with respect to student progress? To what extent and in what ways do departments see themselves as contributing to student progress? Are departments more likely to attribute poor progress to student inadequacies while at the same time attributing successes to the department or the demands of the program?
- To what extent do beliefs about the influence of personal factors on student persistence (such as commitments to family, work and community) have the effect of absolving departments/faculty of the responsibility to provide instruction and guidance?
- What policies and practices are characteristic of departments with low attrition rates and short times to degree? How do these differ in departments with higher attrition rates and longer times to degree?
- To what extent do institutional and departmental recruitment practices serve the needs of departments rather than students?
- In what ways might department climates, policies and practices have changed over the past 30 years? To what extent might these changes have had the unintended effect of increasing time to degree? Has pursuing a doctorate become a more political process over the years? Are greater demands being made of doctoral students now compared to 30 years ago?
- To what extent does doctoral training continue to be considered the academic equivalent of an apprenticeship? If apprenticeship is to be considered an appropriate model for doctoral study what inherent obligations and responsibilities does such a model place on faculty and departments and to what extent are current faculty adequately fulfilling these obligations and responsibilities?

#### Ethical Conflict

- Are there differences in the way men and women doctoral students perceive ethical conflicts in their departments?
- In what ways do men and women doctoral students' experiences with ethical conflicts with faculty or department practices differ?
- In what ways do men and women's strategies and or coping mechanisms for dealing with ethical conflict differ?
- What avenues of resolution are available to students when they encounter ethical conflicts with members of their department or committee? To what extent are students able to voice concerns without fear of retaliation or backlash?

#### Advisor/Advisee and Committee Relations

- To what extent do women and men experience differences in their working relationships with advisors and committee members?

- To what extent are differences and/or conflicts between students and advisors attributable to communication problems versus substantive differences in points of view?
- What conflicts commonly arise among students, advisors and committee members?
- What strategies have been used successfully by students and faculty to resolve such conflict?
- Do men and women doctoral students differ in the strategies they use to negotiate or resolve conflicts with advisors and committee members?
- How can the study of advisors' and committee members' understandings about student/faculty conflicts contribute to our better understanding of the complexity of these relationships?

### Financial Support

- Are women more or less likely than men to receive financial support during doctoral study from family, parents, spouse or other sources?
- Are women more or less likely than men to receive teaching or research assistantships or other forms of support from their departments?
- Are women in the hard sciences or traditional male fields of study more or less likely than men to receive financial support from their departments?
- What is the relationship between sources and amounts of financial support and (1) time to degree and (2) completion rates for men and women doctoral students?
- Are women more likely than men to support themselves through part-time employment during doctoral study?
- Are women more likely than men to enroll part-time in doctoral programs because of financial need or are other role demands a more significant factor in part-time enrollment?
- Are women more likely than men to support their spouse or partner financially through doctoral study?

### Transformation

- Do all Ph.D. students, both completers and non-completers, experience the degree process as transformational? What different forms does such transformation take?
- Do men and women experience transformation differently?
- Are students in the arts and humanities more likely than those in the hard sciences to experience transformation as a result of the doctoral experience?
- Under what conditions is transformation experienced as a crisis?

- To what extent is crisis and its resolution an inherent part of the doctoral process? Are some students such as those from working class backgrounds or first generation college students with inadequate prior socialization to graduate research culture more likely to interpret the significant cognitive shifts demanded by doctoral study (for example, shifting from a 'class-taking student' to a 'book-writing researcher') as crises?
- What enables students to move beyond transformational crises and to what extent do students remain stuck at the crisis stage?
- Are transformational crises more likely than other forms of crisis to lead to early withdrawal and if so, to what extent do unresolved crises have a long term negative influence on one's self-concept?
- To what extent are thoughts and/or dreams about failing or withdrawing from one's program inherent in the transformational process of renegotiating one's identity as an emerging scholar?
- Do class, age or gender factors influence the nature of the transformational process and if so, in what way and to what extent?
- To what extent are creativity and the voices of women doctoral students valued and nurtured in the academy of the 90s? How prevalent is the concern among women doctoral students that conforming to the demands of the academy requires women to relinquish their own voice? Who gets to define what knowledge and research methods are acceptable? Are women's voices being silenced because they don't conform with traditional patriarchal conceptions of knowledge and research methods?
- To what extent do women and men experience the doctoral process as one that is conforming rather than transformational?
- Are more prestigious programs and institutions more likely to value conformity over a process that is transformational?
- What are the characteristics of programs that value creativity and transformational experiences over conformity?

### Health

- How common is it for doctoral students to experience mental and/or physical health problems, particularly stress-related problems, either during or following completion of their degree? What proportion of doctoral students seek counselling or use medications to cope with stress related to their programs?
- To what extent do men and women experience health related problems? Are women more likely to experience health problems or are they simply more willing than men to voice such issues?
- To what extent are class differences, advanced age and gender related to stress-related health issues during doctoral study?

- What is the effect of burnout on doctoral attrition?

#### Satisfaction

- To what extent are women satisfied with the overall quality of their doctoral experiences?
- Do men and women differ in any important ways in their satisfaction with the doctoral experience?
- To what extent is the failure of the doctoral experience to live up to one's preconceptions and expectations related to slowed degree progress and early withdrawal?
- To what extent does women's need and/or desire for creativity in the doctoral process conflict with perceived demands of the department to conform to traditional structures and processes for completing the doctorate?
- To what extent does women's disenchantment with the politics of doctoral programs influence their satisfaction and what effect might this have on attrition rates?
- How do women who have very positive doctoral experiences differ from those who have less positive experiences? What factors make a difference? Are these factors different for men and women?

In conclusion, much more research on doctoral education is needed particularly in this era where significant numbers of professors will be retiring and a younger generation of scholars soon will be taking their places.

## EPILOGUE

From: "Zoe"

Date: Sat, 15 Feb 1997 08:05:46 -0500 (EST)

Greetings, dear friend. It was so very nice to hear of your latest news--the d, the travels, the job hunt, and the new puppy. We are both so busy we seldom really talk anymore, but it is always nice to know there is a true friend and soulmate out there; and you are both of those. As to the reflections:

It has now been two and one half years since I successfully defended my doctoral dissertation. And it has been several months since I have even been asked to reflect, again, upon the experience. Now, as I sit in front of my computer thinking about the experience, I find that it almost feels as if I am replaying a movie; I am watching someone else's experiences and attempting to "touch upon" someone else's feelings. It all seems so very long ago-- perhaps a lifetime ago.

In the rare times I do return to the whole experience I always find myself asking one questions: If I had it to do over again, would I? And, without a doubt, the answer is "yes." But, I would hope to go into it much wiser than I did before; I would hope to have more insight into the trials I would encounter, the potentially damaging confrontations that awaited me, and the toll it would all, eventually, take on my self-esteem. In a word, I would hope to be less naive than I was before.

Did I learn from the experience. Yes. But, the question becomes-- exactly what did I learn? Yes, I learned the "stuff" of my discipline. But, more than that, I learned how cruel people can be to one another as each attempts to massage his or her own professional ego-- often times at the expense of another. I learned along the way what I DON'T want to be as a teacher and as a social scientist. I don't want to exploit others for my own achievements; I don't want to demean and denigrate in the classroom; I don't want to put my professional life so high on the totem pole of priorities of life that I lose sight of my personal life or the people I consider important. There is so much more to learn in graduate school than what I learned originally. There is, and at all times should be, the "lessons of humanity" to be learned along the way. For, regardless of our chosen disciplines, we will conduct ourselves, both personally and professionally, within this arena of humanity for our lifetimes. All too often graduate programs not only forget to teach the lessons of humanity, they actually teach something almost antithetical to the very notion of "humanity." For me, it will be enough to know I have taken the lessons and conducted myself differently than most of my teachers and mentors. For me, it will be enough to know I have ENCOURAGED, rather than discouraged those I have taught and mentored. For me, it will be enough to know I have lived my professional and personal lives according to MY standards, with integrity and dignity. It has taken me the past two and one half years to integrate the "lessons of graduate school" with the person that has always been "me."

From: "Camila"

Date: Sat, 15 Feb 1997 08:50:55 -0800 (PST)

my doctoral experience has been a very rewarding yet difficult journey. it has been full of challenges and --because of my condition as alien in the usa-- my post-doctoral experience continues to be. many times i wonder why i pursued my degree; after all, things have not changed significantly for me in terms of my access to an established position. moreover, the kind of work i seem to be interested in doing seems to be at odds with academia in so many fundamental ways that it strikes me as amazing that i am still "in it". i have developed new ways of looking at research and at the relationship/ contact with the people with whom i work that would not have been possible had not i gotten the degree, i think; yet, i have found that the ways i want to really work are not well suited for academia. this bind has been the one that permeated my doctoral experience and it is the one that has fully developed into my post-doctoral appointment.

as you may remember, i like to draw. this year i got a grant to do work with the local schools. the research is focusing on how kids bring their native resources to school, on the one hand, and on the other hand, on how kids mentor other kids across school dimensions-levels (elementary thru college). so our project is both instructional (we teach or model something, id est mentorship or outreach) , and research-based (we study the effects of this mentorship model, and we study the ways in which kids who are not your typical anglo european american kid navigate school). the reason why i started telling you this story by saying "remember i like to draw" is because i have found that presenting my art to the students brings immediate zones of comfort to discuss life. it is amazing how much we can do with a simple "drawing" in regards to understanding where kids are at. i showed my drawings to 8 graders for example and said i was interested in writing stories for them to have a book for the class (illustrations and stories). would they please tell me what kinds of stories do they like? or would they like me to write? the information i got from this exercise (meant as the researcher giving-contributing something to the kids) was amazing: their challenges, ideas, and questions for life opened up like click\*\*this! so i questioned again and deeply the methods we use to "do research". this information, coupled with a lot of observation i do, taping conversations and videotaping, has opened a new understanding for me: kids "do" a lot of stuff in school, even if we, adults, think about it in very limited ways; kids "bring" a lot to school, even if we, adults, are so focused on certain aspects (and thus repress other aspects) that we can not see what is it that they bring. for example, one of the students asked me whether he could help me with the book of stories and he did drawings and wrote some sentences re: what he knows about gangs. it was pretty amazing again; all these things are floating around them and us and we do not have a way of interpreting or seeing them IN RELATIONSHIP to school. i mean, how, in what ways, are these thoughts, challenges, cultural knowledges, etc. influencing a kid's everyday life experience minute by minute at school? i dont mean the typical "they come from this background, therefore they [whatever]"; i mean: "given that their ways of knowing are developing minute by minute in an ever changing constellation that incorporates what they bring and what they are introduced to in school, constantly, how does learning occur in school? what are they learning? how?"

i know it sounds confusing b/c reality is complex and confusing. there is not a method yet that i have found to be good in explaining or interpreting what i am finding, which is really amazing. in two ways: 1. i would have never thought about certain things hadnt i tried intuitively specific ways of relating to the kids; 2. i can not really find a way to interpret what i see ---yet--- and i think (from the reactions i have seen so far) that people in academia tend to think that what i say is nonsense and that i must concentrate on formulating my question of study, my methods and my anal results.

camila

From: "Tracy"

Date: Sat, 15 Feb 1997 11:59:37 -0600 (CST)

Dear Bobbi,

The thing that comes immediately to mind as I bring this rather long project to a close is how emotionally strenuous this has been. I wrote a lot in my previous reflections on academia about how destructive this process can be to relationships. I've had to struggle this last year with figuring out my own priorities, professional and personal. I have often felt like this profession I've chosen (even before it was an issue for me) won't permit a balance of the two, especially for where women are concerned.

I have been prone to depression and very emotionally confused during the last stages of my writing. It seems difficult for me to get in touch with any feelings other than the strong desire to finish my diss. and get away from academia for a period of time.

I will be graduating this May. I have set my defense up for April 1st. But I am planning to stay where I live now to take some time to reflect on my personal goals. I seem to have lost sight of them in the midst of all this intense work. I no longer know what in my life is most important to me outside of finishing the dissertation. I feel that stepping away from all of this to look back at it from a different perspective will help me figure out where to go from here.

I want to get back in touch with the part of myself that used to feel empowered by the many possibilities that the world has to offer me. I want to be able to express my whole self again. I want to feel whole again. So for the next year I will be searching for these things.

Here's a poem that I wrote right after I finished my comps 3 years ago.

Courting Academia, or Lullaby for an ABD

It has been as buying a new skirt,  
a caged bird's chatter,  
a courting boy with flowers in hand  
approaching the door of the princess.

Good heavens the monster that opened it!  
Have I marched into a can of worms?  
The grizzly giant has ushered me in  
and expects I will make a good mate for his daughter.

So I look around at papered walls  
in a family room complete with barometer,  
search the shelves for familiar titles  
and am at pains to recall the image of the beauty I await.

I would she descended the staircase  
with the grace of a gliding waltz  
and flashing the smile of a thousand suns  
reached out to me as her partner.

But what I know is what I dread.  
That she is guarded by this bear-like Caesar,

this patriarch whose territorial nature  
quells any embellishment of my gentle fantasy.

So that all I may hope for  
is to leave this solemn house,  
bear my soul to the lady with wit and candor,  
and pray for her granting me a warm and kindly kiss good-night.

--

Now, that I'm so close to getting the "kiss" I was thinking of in this poem. I can't wait to get back in touch with my dreams.

Tracy

From: Denise

Sun, 16 Feb 1997 19:01:03

Wow! I just read the other "recaps" and I have to say, I feel incredibly lucky. Somehow I've escaped. At least that's how I feel. Maybe it's just that I'm not focused on looking back at the actual process of getting my PhD. But that's where I am, so let me tell you a little about it...

I've been thinking lately about writing a piece on how "power" alters on the other side of the dissertation. I'm not in a "faculty" position, which may have something to do with it, but I have a sense that I have respect. I'm no longer being "watched." I'm no longer carrying the weight of a mountain on my shoulders. My colleagues, faculty and administrators alike, ask my opinion, listen when I speak, want me on committees. My voice matters.

As a writing center director I always say I work with the best and the brightest. The students who tutor in our program are wonderful people. I enjoy helping them as they struggle with thoughtless teachers wielding power over their grades and seemingly their lives. I take seriously the job of counseling them about graduate schools and telling them some of the "real" story without sugar coating and without calling it hopeless. I write them individualized letters of recommendation. And I try to take time to just sit and listen to them, to hear their voices.

I regularly deal with others who are struggling with the academic bureaucracies, hierarchies and cruelties. I know these evils well. But I find that I am one of the people that makes up the place we call academe. I participate in the structure of it and I challenge the system to change as I voice my concern for these others. Sometimes it actually makes a difference.

Denise

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From: Denise  
Subject: maybe I'm changing my mind

Tue, 18 Feb 1997 11:18:58 -0500

Since my post over the weekend things have erupted at school. What I thought was safe water has become a cesspool of danger. Voicing my opinion to a group on Friday has resulted in being chastised by the powers that be. So much for academic freedom. So much for discussion among peers.

Guess the evil that is done to grad students doesn't stop there. I was temporarily deranged. Please excuse my outburst of hopefulness.

Denise

From Helen

Thu, 20 Feb 1997 15:21:10

Bobbi, well, a few moments to think about how I might, in even several paragraphs, reflect on my experience at this stage. More difficult than my earlier talk about it.

The practical: I have shared two lengthy sections (one committee member: you're not doing chapters, I hope) with my committee and all of us together sat around a meal and chatted about each one. I hope to give them within the next week a plan for the rest of it -- no small matter considering I had no idea when it began either how long it would be or what it would include. That plan will be an arrangement based on my current metaphor from music of a concert -- have chatted with a conductor friend who explained in useful terms how she chooses and arranges pieces for a concert. Also I hope to have either beginnings or extensive notes about remaining sections. Much of this process involves looking at all the things I've said I'll do (or would like to do) and deciding which among them are possible -- given time, energy, the necessity to complete this some time. Don't know what they'll think of it all as it's perhaps the most experimental -- a passacaglia and fugue on autobiography and its necessity in this project. My advisor suggested awhile back that I might think of "something fugueish" as I contemplated how to arrange the whole diss -- wonderful, playful advisor has kept this interesting. Thus the concert / fugue metaphors -- hope to include an intermission in the defense during which there is an audience participation, small-group activity designed to encourage meaningful questions. Plan to defend in October 1997 ... at least for now that's the plan if not the metaphor -- present, offer, ???, the dissertation.

Other things: I've had a difficult time holding together the theory, the autobiography, the discussions with study participants, the various pieces. I'm really hoping my study participants remember who I am when I contact them for permission to use their words.

I see my dissertation at work unsettling the dissertation process already and am pleased at this. I'm engaged in discussions here to formalize the notion of peer readers on dissertation committees. Having put a question about the possibility of peer readers out on the CGS Dean's e-discussion list, I know that over three hundred dean-type people have heard about someone wanting a peer reader as a committee member (actually I have one, but the second request came at a bad time -- confluence of other issues -- and the grad committee was apparently on the verge of deciding there'd been a mistake made in my case). Some positive response from the deans' list, though mostly dubious, but my own dean was receptive ... and hence the discussions mentioned above.

It occurred to me a few days ago that I'm finding it almost impossible to think of myself as a student any more -- I've been enrolled in classes since I'm back on campus anyway, but find the "being a student" in some ways confusing. This troubles me as I've always enjoyed being a student and find the ability to "be" one important to my teaching. However, I'm not teaching this year -- rather am the grad fellow in the office of the Dean of the Graduate School -- and am also troubled to find that I don't miss teaching. I'm told by friends that I will long for it after a time. I'd taught nine years without a break prior to this year -- part time sometimes, but consistently, and have wondered what I might do besides teach.

I also wonder about the future of my marriage of 30+ years ... the separation (I'm 400 miles away finishing while my husband is back at home), and probably my work and his, change us in ways that are difficult to bridge. We talk about it tentatively, but are both uncertain about what it will be like to live together again after my two-year appointment

here is up. We talk, too, about a long-distance marriage until he is able to retire, and then he'll say something like, "if we get together again ..." sigh ...

All of this is made painfully daily by the autobiographical nature of my dissertation. It's not supposed to be easy, my advisor says. She sustains me. Does this tell you where I am in my work? I'm tempted to ask, if it does, that you let me know ... I could perhaps meander through quite a lot more, and will if you have comments, questions. But now, back to other things.

Glad to share your friendship,  
Helen

From Maggie

Mon, 24 Feb 1997 09:25:52 -0600

Hi Bobbi,

Please forgive me for not answering sooner. I so enjoyed speaking with you this morning. Somehow it provided a little sanity into my world or at least a reminder that I am still in the world of doctoral experiences. I am so happy to hear of your progression and know that it will be wonderful. After all these hurdles you will be fini! And I do believe it is nothing more than constant hurdles at many times.

I believe, in reflection, that your work is so meaningful and helpful to the discipline of women's studies. I am at a phase where I feel my work is quite insignificant. It is nice to keep in mind how your work has been so gratifying to me as a participant and also to see how meaningful it is to you. You have been nothing but professional, courteous, sensitive, thoughtful, protective, and I could go on.

>And now my request. I'd like to add one more section at the end of the  
>dissertation ... an Epilogue ... and I wonder if each of you would like to  
>write a short paragraph or two (or three -- whatever strikes your fancy at  
>this point; space is not an issue) about your reflections on your doctoral  
>experiences at this stage -- perhaps what the experience has meant for you  
>-- and it would be neat if you could include something about what you're  
>doing now and what you see (or would like to see) in your future.

My doctoral experiences now have been put on the shelf. I try not to think about it. Unfortunately, as I continue to plan my interviews and conduct them I am reminded that there is more than just me to this endeavor, I am working with some very wonderful people. So, somehow I believe it will develop into something new, something I am hoping to create apart from my original intent since it is now not so new to the discipline. I still fight anger, bitterness and hopelessness. I find when I have time to work I often avoid it. My husband has been gently encouraging me, asking me how he can help. I guess this is just another phase I must endure. I find it interesting that the women in my study provide me with hope and another perspective. It is as if they make the study worthwhile and give it meaning that my doctoral experiences could never do. Perhaps it is the solidification of those experiences. Perhaps, this is real life and not so much politics. I only hope that I can capture their spirit and that it won't get embroiled in another political arena with my advisor.

As for my future, I don't know. I know I will feel better when it is all over because I know I will make it an accomplishment that I will be happy with. I look at the future as a blank page much like now. I am continuing to work on a publication and will hope to have a contract for a women's studies text soon. I will contribute a chapter on dance and women. I have been reflecting on other research topics and would like to write. I had the opportunity to present at another women's studies conference in March but circumstances warrant that I just can't go at this time. I have considered looking for another job and if things work out, I think I will do some curriculum development for my brother's business in distance education for children. I may also be able to get some graphic experience in. I hope to further my work in computers with web stuff but feel very inadequate.

I know I am in a difficult space, a sense of limbo but I know that this 'place' will not last forever. As I continue to go through each day, I am beginning to realize that I have interests

to pursue. Perhaps this is the period of intense reflection preparing me for change. Perhaps I live in perpetual change now and can't quite keep up. At any rate, I hope to be open to opportunities, whether it is at a University or freelance, or whatever. I have been thinking about choreographing more and a company and even myself performing more. I am fastly approaching 40, just turning 37 and have many things on my mind about my direction.

I don't know that the doctoral degree has done anything for me but tempered me and refined me. It definitely has jolted my life, it has hurt me, it has made me feel like I am an intelligent individual. Now I just need to find out who I am as a consequence. I am a jumble of people and I am trying to find the right fit. I am a mom, a scholar, a career woman. I am a woman who seems to think she must do everything and often does. My strength lies in the accomplishment of many things that a doctoral degree can never match, unless we want to compare it to birthing, etc. The tangible, physical, and emotional extensions of myself are all tied up in the degree but I am trying to make it less important. The doctoral experience will always be a part of my life. I just won't be able to make complete sense of it until it is all over and I am at least 85. (if my children let me live that long) For now I am connected by a thread, my participants in the study. They are the reason for continuing and probably in the long run will be the redeeming factor for me in helping me make 'sense' of the doctoral experience.

Bobbi, Thanks for all your help. I hope this isn't too much rambling. Since your posting and some of the other women's reflections, it has given me a little time for thinking. I am not sure if I am very coherent and I do hope this doesn't hold you back. I am glad you liked the Christmas card. It meant a lot to me to show you a part of my world. I know you are swamped and wish you the best. Take care and I look forward to the good news soon! Hang in there!

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## APPENDIX A

Female Doctoral Enrollment in Canada by Registration Status, as a Percent of Total Enrollment, 1973-94.


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<u>Year</u>	<u>Full-Time</u>	<u>Part-Time</u>	<u>Total %</u>
1972-73	18.8	21.3	19.5
1973-74	21.2	22.9	21.7
1974-75	22.7	22.7	22.7
1975-76	23.9	23.8	23.9
1976-77	24.8	25.2	24.9
1977-78	26.2	25.6	26.1
1978-79	27.5	27.4	27.5
1979-80	29.2	28.8	29.1
1980-81	29.9	30.2	30.0
1981-82	31.0	31.5	31.1
1982-83	31.8	32.3	31.9
1983-84	32.4	33.7	32.7
1984-85	32.6	35.5	33.2
1985-86	33.2	37.4	34.0
1986-87	34.0	38.2	34.8
1987-88	34.8	39.1	35.6
1988-89	34.7	38.3	35.3
1989-90	34.8	39.0	35.6
1990-91	34.4	40.5	35.5
1991-92	34.6	41.6	35.8
1992-93	34.9	43.2	36.2
1993-94	36.6	43.8	37.7

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Source: Education in Canada, Catalogue No. 81-229, Statistics Canada.

## APPENDIX B

## Letter to Prospective Study Participants

Subject Header: Invitation to Participate in Study

Posted December 18, 1994 to WMST-L (Women's Studies List)

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To: doctoral students/partners/friends

Dear WMST-L Members:

I am writing to seek your assistance with my ongoing research about doctoral students' experiences in graduate school. I am interested in learning more about students' accounts of their doctoral experiences and the ways in which graduate school socializes women and men into the academic profession. It is my purpose to understand better, the many personal and professional issues that may impede completion of the doctorate in a timely fashion.

If you are a current or former doctoral student who has completed your course requirements I would very much like to correspond with you (even if you have temporarily or permanently withdrawn from your program).

I would also like to hear from partners of doctoral students who may wish to discuss the impact of their partner's doctoral experience on their relationship and/or family life.

If you fit any of these descriptions and have a story to tell, or know of someone else who does, I invite you to write to me privately and in strict confidence.

Bobbi Smith, Ph.D. Candidate  
Faculty of Education  
University of Victoria  
British Columbia  
Canada  
smithba@sol.uvic.ca  
(604) 598-0247 (home)

Co-moderator of:  
GRADTALK and  
AERA-GSL (Graduate Studies List)

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

#### OPENING QUESTIONS

1. I would like to know what motivated you to do a doctorate...why you wanted to do the degree in the first place.
2. I'd like to know a little about your background ... how you came to be oriented to your field of study.
3. Regarding your expectations of the doctoral experience, if you think back to the days before you entered your doctoral program, can you describe what the degree represented to you then and what you thought the process would be like?
4. Now that you have progressed to the point you are in your program, in what ways have your views about the degree and the degree process changed?
5. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, the story of your doctoral experience, giving particular attention to the critical events and challenges you have faced and the way in which these events have influenced your academic, professional and personal development.

#### INTERMEDIARY QUESTIONS

The following questions focus on specific aspects of the doctoral experience that participants may want to consider including in their stories:

6. As you think back to the course work phase of your program are there particular people, experiences or events that stand out in your mind as being significant?
7. Can you describe how you selected your dissertation advisor and the ways in which your relationship with your advisor has exceeded and/or fallen short of your hopes and expectations?
8. I'd like to know how you formed your dissertation committee: how you decided who you wanted on your committee, how you negotiated this with your advisor and/or members, whether you found it necessary to restructure your committee at any time during your studies and the factors related to those events and your feelings about it then and now.
9. Can you describe your relationship with your committee: the ways in which it has exceeded and/or fallen short of your hopes and expectations? Are there ways in which your relationship with your advisor and/or other committee members or other aspects of your doctoral experience have recapitulated family or childhood issues for you? What strategies did you find to be successful and/or less useful, in negotiating different aspects of your dissertation with your committee?
10. I'd like to know about your experiences with comprehensive exams and orals: how you prepared for them and what you felt were the high and low points of these experiences.

11. I'd like to know the topic and/or title of your dissertation and what factors, whether they be people, specific experiences or other influences led to you choose this specific topic.
12. Can you describe the significant events and your thoughts/feelings as they relate to the data collection phase of your work as you either anticipate or experienced them?
13. What factors, events, people or thoughts stand out in your mind as being important during the analysis and writing phase of your work?
14. What are your thoughts about the final oral defense: what do you expect the experience to be like for you, or, if you have already defended, in what ways did your experience exceed or fall short of your expectations?
15. What impact has your doctoral experience had on your relationship with others in your life? (for example, your family, partner, employer, colleagues, etc.)
16. Can you identify aspects of your doctoral experience that might be described as your 'highest high' and your 'lowest low'?
17. Looking back over your doctoral experience to date, what would you describe as the "unanticipated outcomes" of this process? Have you had particular experiences that you hadn't anticipated or expected when you began your studies?
18. What has been the general state of your physical and mental health during your doctoral studies and in what ways has your pursuit of the degree enhanced or detracted from your health? Have your sleep and/or exercise patterns changed during your time as a doctoral student?
19. Can you describe, either during or following your program, any experiences you have had with regard to your own confidence in completing your work. For example, have you experienced a 'crisis of confidence' wherein you questioned or doubted your own ability to finish? At what phases in your program did you experience these thoughts and feelings? How have you managed to get through these experiences? Who were your greatest supporters through these times? What was it they did that you found to be helpful? In retrospect, were there other things they could have done to aid your progress? What did/would you find to be the least helpful at times like this? What advice would you give to others who might experience similar self-doubts?
20. Are there aspects of your doctoral experience that you have never discussed with your friends, family, academic colleagues and/or your advisor/committee members? Would you mind describing these issues and/or concerns and your reasons for not discussing these matters with others.
21. What role have finances, or the lack thereof, played in your doctoral experience? Have funding issues been central to particular hardships that you experienced in your doctoral program?

(What funding sources have you used to pay university fees and living expenses? Have you received assistance in the form of awards, scholarships or tuition waivers? Have you received teaching or research assistantships? Did you find that these experiences enhanced your intellectual and/or academic skills? Was the remuneration

appropriate to the work expected of you? Were the assistantships distributed fairly in your department? Did you find the timing of the assistantship enhanced or detracted from your studies? Have you been employed either full or part-time during your degree? Has this employment enhanced or detracted from your studies?)

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS

22. In what ways has your doctoral experience exceeded and/or fallen short of your expectations?
23. What would have made the doctoral experience more meaningful for you?
24. What do you know now that you wished you'd known or been told before you began your program?
25. If you were to begin a doctoral program now, what things might you do differently?
26. What factors do you see as critical to the successful completion of the doctorate?
27. In what ways have you changed and in what ways do you see yourself differently as a result of your doctoral experience?

#### ABOUT WRITING YOUR STORY

28. Would you please reflect for a moment, on what the experience of writing about your doctoral story has meant for you? Has reflecting and writing about your experience changed the way you think about yourself and your doctoral experience in any way?
29. How likely is it that you would have written your story on your own? How important was it for you to have an audience (albeit an audience of one) actively listening to your story?

## APPENDIX D

## Human Subjects Research Consent Form

University of Victoria

Faculty of Education

Letter of Informed Consent

December, 1994

I, (print name in full) \_\_\_\_\_  am  was a doctoral student registered at (name of institution) \_\_\_\_\_. In signing this consent form, I agree to volunteer in the Graduate Studies research project being conducted by Bobbi Smith beginning December, 1994.

I understand that the research being conducted relates to the experiences of doctoral students that contribute to attrition and doctoral persistence. I understand that excerpts from my written transcripts and tape-recorded verbal communications with the researcher will be studied and may be quoted in a doctoral dissertation and in future papers, journal articles and books that will be written by the researcher.

I grant authorization for the use of the above information with the full understanding that my anonymity and confidentiality will be preserved at all times. I understand that my full name or other identifying information will never be disclosed or referenced in any way in any written or verbal context. I understand that transcripts, both paper and floppy disk versions, will be secured in the privacy of the researcher's home office and that any audio tapes of my conversations with the researcher will be erased at the conclusion of the study.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw my permission to participate in this study without explanation.

I grant permission to use one of the following:

My first name only, or  Only a pseudonym

Signature

Date

## APPENDIX E

## Protection of Human Subjects

Abstract approved by  
Committee on Research and Other Activities Involving Human Subjects

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Purpose of the Study

This study examines the stories of graduate students' lives and the factors which have a major impact on doctoral degree progress and, ultimately, on degree completion and student attrition. Using a critical feminist perspective (Olesen, 1994; Young, 1990) and grounded theory methodology (Conrad, 1982; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), this study is intended to contribute to the development of a model of doctoral persistence in response to calls by Tinto (1993), Baird, (1993), McCloskey (1994) and others for much needed research on the doctoral process.

Rationale for the Study

While much previous research has focused on factors influencing undergraduate models of student retention (Tinto, 1993) very little is known about graduate student retention or degree progress (Girves and Wemmerus, 1988). In recent years there has been a growing concern about the rate of attrition in doctoral degree programs that has been estimated to be in the range of fifty percent (Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992; Tinto, 1993). There is also concern that the steadily increasing length of time necessary to complete degree requirements has reached an all time peak in American higher education (Baird, 1990; Ploskonka, 1993; Tuckman, Coyle, and Bae, 1989), a trend which is paralleled in Canadian higher education (Caplan, 1994; Council of Ontario Universities, 1991; Cude, 1988).

Methodology

This study examines the stories of graduate students' lives and the factors which impact on doctoral degree progress and student attrition. Electronic mail, using the Internet, will be used to conduct in-depth unstructured interviews designed to elicit stories of the graduate student experience as told by current and former graduate students. These electronic interviews/storytelling sessions will be conducted at times determined by the participants between November 1994 and January 1995. Critical feminist theory (Olesen, 1994; Young, 1990) will provide the theoretical framework for the study and the grounded theory method (Conrad, 1982; Glaser and Strauss, 1967) will guide the research process and subsequent data analysis. The grounded theory method includes techniques for open coding, categorizing, (contrasting, aggregating and ordering of classification schemes) concept formation-development-reduction and theoretical sampling which will lead to the identification of major themes, issues and patterns within and among the individual stories of students' lives.

A total of six current and/or former graduate students (from other than the University of Victoria) will be invited to volunteer (with no monetary compensation) as participants in the study. The study will contrast students who are currently pursuing their doctoral studies with both students who have completed their studies and students who have withdrawn from their programs prior to completion.

The following questions will guide the data collection:

1. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, the story of your doctoral experience, giving particular attention to the critical events and challenges you have faced along the way.
2. Please describe the ways in which these critical events and challenges have influenced your academic, professional and personal development.
3. In what ways has your doctoral experience exceeded and/or fallen short of your expectations?
4. What would have made the doctoral experience more meaningful for you?
5. What do you know now that you wished you'd known or been told before you began your program?
6. If you were to begin a doctoral program now, what things might you do differently?
7. What factors do you see as critical to the successful completion of the doctorate?
8. What impact has your doctoral experience had on your relationship with others in your life? (for example, your family, employer, colleagues, etc.)?
9. In what ways have you changed and in what ways do you see yourself differently as a result of your doctoral experience?
10. Would you please reflect for a moment, on what the experience of writing about your doctoral story has meant for you? Has reflecting and writing about your experience changed the way you think about yourself and your doctoral experience in any way?
11. How likely is it that you would have written your story on your own? How important was it for you to have an audience (albeit an audience of one) actively listening to your story?

The data collection phase of this study will begin in November 1994 and will conclude no later than the end of January 1995.

This study will be guided and bound by the regulations of the *Committee on Research and Other Activities Involving Human Subjects* at the University of Victoria.

These guidelines include the following:

- the subjects will be informed as to the nature of the research being conducted prior to their consent to participate in the study;
- a signed letter of informed consent will be obtained from each of the participants;
- participants will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time without explanation;
- the confidentiality and anonymity of the subjects will be protected;
- permission to audio-tape telephone conversations will be requested and that all subjects will be informed in advance, when such an audio-tape is to be recorded.

In addition to these guidelines every effort will be made by the researcher to uphold the dignity and worth of the individual participants.

## APPENDIX F

## Biographic Questionnaire

I am seeking the following information for use in my dissertation, primarily to assist me in writing individual biographies of the participants in the study. I will be looking for patterns of similarity and difference among the participants in terms of the length of time to degree (both registered and total), time between degrees/programs, the kinds of institutions women have attended and the ages at which women began their degrees, etc. All the information, particularly information such as the names of the institutions attended, will remain confidential, and as always, I will give you the opportunity of the final edit before anything goes to print.

Name:

Date of birth:

Address:

Home Telephone:

Year completed high school:

Type of program:

Undergraduate Degree(s)

Undergraduate degree title (BA, B.Sc., etc.) & major(s), minor(s):

Department:

Year undergrad degree was started:

Year undergrad degree was awarded:

Name of institution awarding degree:

(If more than one institution was attended please describe)

To what extent is your undergrad degree related to your Master's and doctoral research?

Master's Degree(s)

Master's degree title (MA, MFA, M.Ed, etc.):

Department:

Master's thesis description:

(If Master's degree was course work only, please describe the area(s) of specialization)

Year Master's degree was started:

Year Master's degree was awarded:

Name of institution awarding degree:

(If more than one institution was attended please describe)

Total number of months in which you were registered in your program:

Full-time:

Part-time:

Number of months/years in which you (stepped out or) temporarily were not registered in your program:

Please describe your reasons for temporary withdrawal:

To what extent is your Master's degree related to your doctoral research?

Doctoral Degree

Degree title (Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.):

Department:  
 Dissertation title/topic:  
 Year doctoral degree was started:  
 Year doctoral degree was awarded:

Name of institution awarding degree:

(If more than one institution was attended please describe)

Total number of months in which you were registered in your program:  
 Full-time:                      Part-time:

Number of months/years in which you (stepped out or) temporarily were not registered in your program:

Please describe your reasons for temporary withdrawal:

Please describe briefly the doctoral program in which you are registered at your institution.

To what extent do you see yourself as part of a cohort at your institution?

Describe briefly the current stage you are at in your degree progress:

Other Significant Events

Marriage(s)	Year(s):		
Number of children:			
First name:	Year born:	Sex:	
Separation(s)	Year:		
Divorce(s)	Year:		
Death(s)	Year:	Relationship to you	

Other major life events that affected your degree progress at any point in your academic career:

## APPENDIX G

## Follow-up Questions

Sent: Sat, 28 Oct 1995 12:34:18 -0800

1. Could you please describe the make-up of your dissertation committee with respect to the number and gender of the members and their approximate age in relation to yourself.

2. If you have completed your degree, to what extent did your advisor provide assistance or guidance in your search for a post-degree appointment?

If you have not completed your degree as yet, to what extent do you anticipate that your advisor will provide assistance or guidance in your search for a post-degree appointment?

3. Please describe some of the ways in which you and your advisor handled:

\* the task dimensions of your advisor/advisee relationship

\* the interpersonal dimensions of your advisor/advisee relationship including the balance or imbalance of power in your relationship and the ways in which conflicts were resolved.

4. How would you best describe your relationship with your advisor?

---

5.1 Could you please describe the occupations and educational level of your parents.

5.2 Please describe the expectations your parents had for you with respect to your education and employment.

5.3 Do you have any knowledge or insights into the nature of your advisor's own doctoral experiences?

5.4 On reflection, have you noticed any similarities or differences between your relationship with your advisor(s) and your relationship with your parents?

---

APPENDIX H  
DOC-TALK POST

From owner-doc-talk@quake.net  
Return-Path: <doc-talk-owner@quake.net>  
Date: Sat, 22 Feb 1997 19:40:37 -0800 (PST)  
To: doc-talk@asgs.org  
Subject: doc-talk Stolen Authorship  
Sender: owner-doc-talk@asgs.org

=====

DOC-TALK

=====

We posted the following request last time:

Please keep my name anonymous due to the sensitivity of my predicament.

I wondered if any students or post-doctoral graduates have had this type of problem with their mentor. I'd worked on a project in my mentor's lab for about 5 years and have published several manuscripts from that work. I'd done every bit of the work myself and have made a name for myself in the field...the field in which I'm continuing to work. The most important studies in my dissertation were under review for publication at the time I graduated, with myself as first author. It has been one year since graduation. The most important paper from the dissertation was reviewed and a few small experiments were added after I left. Because of this, my mentor has taken first authorship on the paper, without giving me the chance to rewrite or add comments or ideas...in fact the whole thing was done quite dishonestly. He has also taken first authorship on everything else pending. I wondered if others out there have had similar experiences and what they did about it. What do you do about a mentor whom you've looked up to and worked hard for after they've stabbed you in the back?

=====

From: "D. J. McCready, Ph.D." <dmccread@waldenu.edu>

There was an incident in Montreal a few years back where the student shot the professor for continually doing this - he is in jail BUT when that University had external investigation made, there were several reprimands for a number of faculty who had been doing that.

=====

From: Alex Vrenios <vrenios@enuxsa.eas.asu.edu>

Personally, so long as my name was still on the paper, I would let it drop, knowing I had a long career ahead of me. Your energy is best directed elsewhere, and there isn't much your complaint will add to his/her esteem anyway.

=====

From: michelle.worosz@ssc.msu.edu

first, let me congratulate you on the completion of your ph.d.!! you have much to be proud of and are very lucky to be recognized as an expert in your field.

i worked for a while as the assistant to the intellectual integrity officer at the university i am attending. from my experience i can, unfortunately, tell you that you are not alone. my first recommendation is that you try to resolve this issue peacefully. bringing any public claims against this person, who obviously has more power, prestige, and status than you, could lead to a disaster that you could carry with you for years (e.g., who wants to collaborate with a "trouble maker"). furthermore, this is much more complicated when the parties are a different institutions, which i assume is your case. at this university, when the parties are unable to resolve issues between themselves the integrity officer is not only willing to bounce around ideas with the complainant, but also serve as a mediator during any meeting that individuals attend. these types of meetings are confidential, "off the record," and aimed at peaceful resolution, especially since many of the situations like yours are more about communication than malice. conflicts about authorship tend to occur when departments and/or universities do not have clear policies addressing the rights of individuals (particularly the less advantaged graduate students). you should investigate whether this type of a policy exists at your institution . . . it may influence the next steps that you take. furthermore, you should peruse the journals in your discipline for guidance. many journals have addressed this issue specifically. while there are universal similarities among the disciplines, each has its own quirks that are rooted in the traditions as well as the research methodologies.

i encourage you to first seek the ombudsman who can help you navigate the various university policies and bureaucracy to identify the university integrity officer (the name at your institution may be different), grievance officer and legal council. when satisfactory resolution is not achieved through direct personal contact, as i've explained above, there are more formal procedures, grievances, and etc. that can be taken, but i must say the process is ugly for everyone (in my experience) and should be used as a last resort.

finally, my advice to you and anyone else reading this is that you talk to your research team TODAY to address authorship now and into the future. after your conversation, jot down a memo (very important) to each member outlining your understanding of how proper credit will be established. this is particularly important for those in the biophysical sciences where these issues tend to be more important.

good luck and keep us up to date on what's happening with your case.

=====

From: Diana Wright <wright@tmn.com>

Well, yes, there was one. Many years ago, in another school, when I had another name. A friend and I were both taking a class where we were aware the professor reailed our work. So we faked a little data & a couple of quotes, & let 'er rip. It bounced back on him quite satisfactorily. once he published it.

Diana Wright  
Catholic University of America

=====

From: J.Wolk@unsw.EDU.AU (Jael Wolk)

Dear Anon,

I suggest you stand up for yourself and politely but firmly negotiate an appropriate order of things perhaps via the use of a neutral third party within your school. If this does not succeed then move on to the next level. Your campus should have some sort of body that deals with these issues.

Before commencing these procedures, you need to document all sequence of events as a method of clarifying to yourself what is rightly yours and what is rightly the other person's. You can use authorship guidelines published by the relevant journals as a guide. Don't get caught up with the emotionality of "he stabbed me in the back" - that person may perceive that he should be first author - you need to let him explain to you why he thinks he should be first author and why you think it is not appropriate for him to be first author using a third source as a guide (e.g. journal guidelines). If you allow things to degenerate into an emotional slinging match nothing will be achieved.

Handling this issue in this manner will contribute to the process of your becoming an independent scientist who no longer needs a mentor and is able to negotiate this type of situation with colleagues. This incident will be the first of many that you will encounter in your future career so you may as well learn how to deal with it now.

You have to assert yourself as a person who must be recognized and not depend on others to always be looking after your best interests.

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From: charlesw@cse.unsw.edu.au (Charles Willock)

Disclaimer: The following information is not intended to imply any malpractice by any individual, Organisation, Department, School, Faculty or by my University. Nor is it intended to be a source of legal advice or recommendation.

I would recommend that first you have the situation reviewed by someone you can trust to give you an honest assessment.

That you have written to this list is an indication that maybe you have already taken the steps of

- (i) discussing your concerns with the individual
- (ii) approaching your student union
- (iii) discussing the matter with your University postgraduate advisory service and the ethics committee

It is appropriate to try each of them and any other formal channel available to you, phrasing each attempt in the clearest possible way. Doing so probably also helps in defining exactly what your concerns are. Unfortunately, these sorts of problems are often in the too hard basket for many people who should help ... and therefore they don't.

If the official channels don't work and you still want to pursue the matter, you are either in legal or whistleblowing territory (or both). Not to put too fine a point on the matter, the legal approach is generally OK if you have \*lots\* of money, otherwise public exposure

may be able to get the problem addressed. If you choose either route the personal toll on your health will be enormous. It will also likely cost many years of your life and, in the process, you are likely to lose many friends including those very close to you. You might also lose the battle and it could then cost everything you own on defamation.

Whistleblowers Australia have a web site at

<http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/dissent/>

This site contains a lot of reference sources and contact details. Corresponding organisations in other countries are Freedom to Care (UK) and the Government Accountability Project (US). The Australian site carries details of a case of disputed authorship which may provide valuable insight.

An important issue if you follow either the legal or public exposure route is that you need some way of dissociating your self from the situation and yet maintain the fight. Both are long duration, and short term responses such as losing your temper is a good way to get yourself into trouble / burn yourself up. It does no good to threaten action against people - just do it. You need detailed point by point evidence (diaries, lab notes, data from the computer etc.) if someone else is to make an assessment and provide a favourable ruling.

It might also be worth remembering before you take on someone legally or in public that you can always walk away (yes, even though it means loss of all your work to date). However, it becomes much harder to do that once you commence either route.

Best Wishes  
Charlesw

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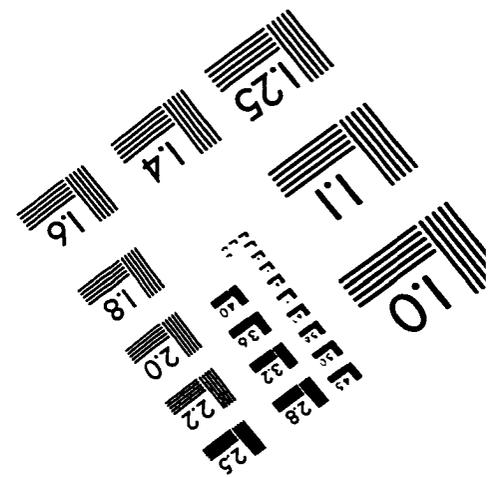
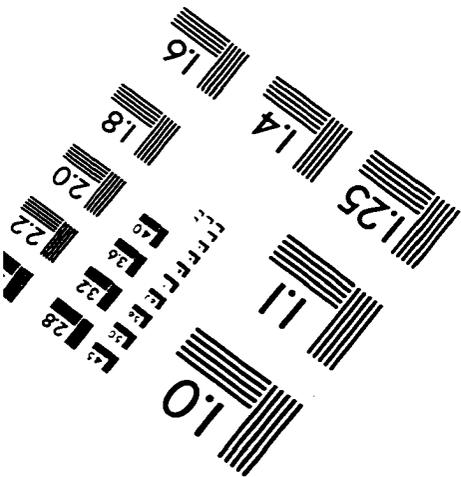
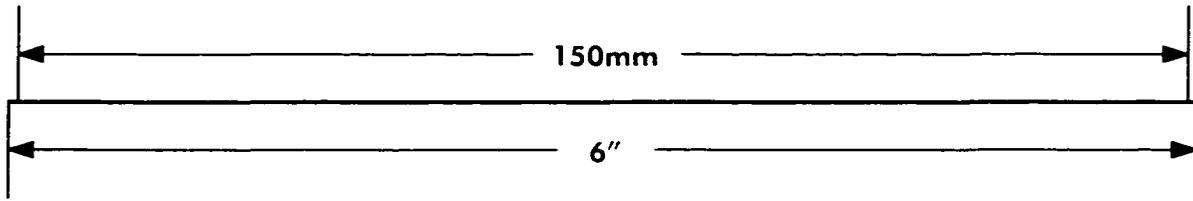
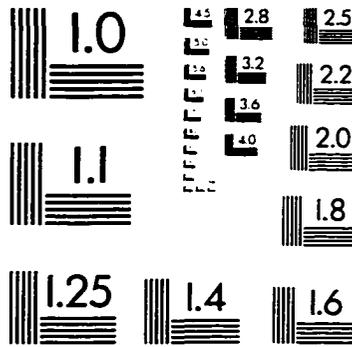
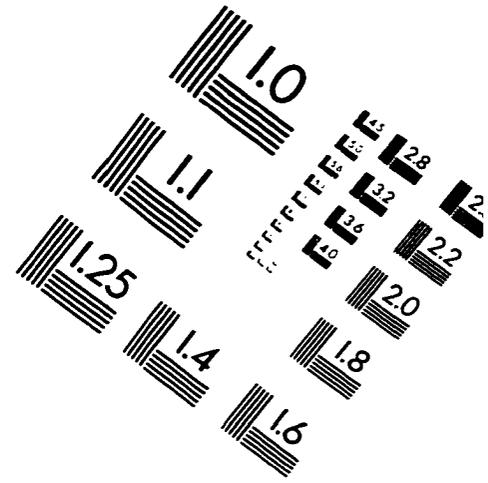
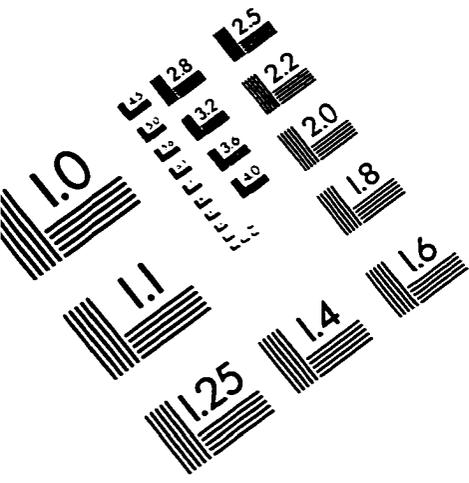
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