

Voices of Female International Graduate Students: Feminist Arts-Based Study at University of
Victoria Graduate Students' Society

by

Fatma D. Dogus
B.Ed., Univeristy of Cukurova, 2006

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

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This study explored female international graduate students' experiences in the Graduate Students' Society (GSS) at the University of Victoria. The overall question that guided this study was: How does female international graduate students' involvement with the Graduate Students' Society shape their learning experiences? I used an arts-based methodology, and collected data through collage and photography and discussion in a series of three focus groups. Findings showed that GSS was an invaluable space of learning for women about culture, about organisations, about diversity and also, a place to acquire organisational skills. Learning, however, was almost all done 'individually' and there are challenges around exclusion, and sexism. Understanding the issues of sex and race needs to be addressed and collective learning environments need to be created within the organization.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures	vii
Acknowledgements.....	viii
Dedication	ix
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose and Objectives	4
Background/ Context	6
Literature Review.....	7
Methodology.....	9
Significance of the Study.....	11
CHAPTER TWO	13
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
Feminism.....	13
Internationalization.....	14
International students	15
International Graduate Students	16
Graduate Student Organizations	18
Leadership.....	21
Women and Leadership.....	21
Feminine Principles and Traits	22
Informal Learning and Women.....	23
Feminist Adult Education and Learning.....	24
CHAPTER THREE	26
METHODOLOGY	26
Feminist Research.....	26
Arts-Based Research	28

Images and Photo Elicitation	29
Collage.....	30
Purpose and Objectives of the study.....	31
Recruiting the Female Graduate International Students.....	32
Data Collection.....	32
Workshop 1.....	33
Workshop 2.....	35
Workshop 3.....	36
Data Analysis.....	37
CHAPTER FOUR	40
FINDINGS.....	40
The Issue of Anonymity.....	41
Support and Belonging.....	42
Isolation and Exclusion.....	43
The Question of Age	44
No place at the table.....	45
Living out of focus.....	46
Challenges.....	48
The 'student' label	48
Language	49
A clash of expectations: The steep learning curve	51
Learning Culture.....	52
Diversity	53
Learning empathy: Stereotyping and bias	54
Skills Development.....	56
On Being Female	57
Feminism.....	57
Women's Power and Leadership	58
The Story of the Collage.....	61
CHAPTER FIVE	62
DISCUSSION.....	62
The Personal/Politics of GSS	64
Forms of Feminism.....	67

The Potential and Challenge of Learning	69
Metaphor and the Arts	72
CHAPTER SIX.....	75
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	75
Learning from the study.....	76
Arts- Based Research	79
Women and Leadership.....	81
Recommendations	81
References	84
Appendix A :Participant Consent Form.....	92
Appendix B: Telephone/Email Script	95
Appendix C: Image Release Form	98
Appendix D: Certificate of Approval	99

List of Figures

<u>Figure 1- Along Road</u>	43
<u>Figure 2- Table</u>	45
<u>Figure 3- The Earring</u>	47
<u>Figure 4- The Escalator</u>	51
<u>Figure 5- The Colorful Tomatoes</u>	53
<u>Figure 6- Collage</u>	59
<u>Figure 7- Boat</u>	60

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Dedication

For my late grandmothers:

Fatma Dogus and Fehime Kilisli

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Four years ago, I neither imagined what experiences an international student might have had at a university nor what the factors that shaped this experience would be. However, after being a female international student for almost four years, I have begun to reflect more deeply about my own complex experiences, as well as those of other women, and the elements that shape who I and they have become. A major impetus for this research on women students' leadership experiences in higher education was a panel I participated on as a guest speaker. I shared the challenges I have been experiencing as an international student, as a female student, and as a 'leader' on student council. I was also able to listen to other students as well as faculty experiences and challenges in terms of having international students in the classroom. After the panel, I felt that changes are needed in University of Victoria and University of Victoria's policy.

I focus in this study on female international students who, within the past five years, have played leadership roles in the Graduate Students' Society and as Graduate Representatives. I have been part of Graduate Representative Council since April 2011, and I think my involvement on Council has transformed and shaped my experience as a female leader. My aim is to uncover how and what this experience looks like for other women, how it has shaped their experience, and the importance of this experience for providing leadership opportunities to female international students.

Statement of the Problem

Although there is a great deal of literature on women's leadership and learning, and on the experiences of graduate students and international students at university, there is a paucity of research on graduate student leadership in student organisations and even less on the experiences of women. Moreover, few studies of international students use art-based research methods, although adult education researchers see the arts as powerful tools to tap into women's imaginations and creatively render visible their stories and experiences (e.g. Butterwick, 2002; Clover & Stalker 2007). One exception to using arts-based research as a method with international students is Etmanski (2007) whose doctoral study used popular theatre as a methodology. She, however, did not focus solely on women although we know women's experiences of learning and leadership are often quite different from men's (e.g. Clover & McGregor, 2012).

Other scholars have focused on graduate school experiences and the challenges that graduate students face. Corner's (2006) M.A. thesis investigated how involvement with the Association of Graduate Education Students (AGES) at the University of Victoria affected graduate students' experiences. Studies indicate that international students leave behind their social networks of family and friends when they come to live and study in another country and this has a major impact on their lives. Living in another culture is itself a complex and difficult experience, but international graduate students must also navigate their way through "being a graduate student." By this I mean that there are spoken and unspoken rules around, for example, supervisory relationships, academic calendars, registration, and even health and other services

provided. These rules are critical to every graduate student but Canadian students are somewhat more familiar with them simply because they live here and are functioning in their first language. However, neither Corner (2006) nor any other scholars have focused specifically on female international graduate students, what they learn from playing leadership roles in students' organizations, and the impact this has on their social and academic lives as women and graduate students. I think taking this research focus is important because, as feminists argue, women's leadership experiences often differ substantively from men's experiences.

As noted above, I have spent more than four years as an international graduate student at UVic. During this period, I have met many graduate students, have been involved in many student organizations, have sat on many committees, and have attended countless events. I wanted to learn more about the culture of academia, what I called above the unspoken rules, and what was available to graduate international students. What I mean here is that there is an important informal learning experience beyond the classroom at UVic that needs to be explored. I realized that I was learning a great deal about higher education and leadership, from my peers and from attending meetings and/or events. As a result, through GSS, I have learned about the culture and ways of academia, as well as things about the administration of UVic, my rights as a graduate student, and so forth. I have also thought a lot about ways to improve things for other female international graduate students.

I have also attended sessions offered by the Learning and Teaching Centre, taken part in panels about international students, and attended the university's diversity conference. In most cases, I was the only international graduate student. Some of my fellow international graduate students were active members like me but others were not. During those activities, I had the chance to communicate with many of them. However, when I think about our conversations

now, I realize our conversations were predominantly about “back home” and the differences between here and there. While homesickness is certainly understandable, and international students face numerous other barriers I have just identified, I cannot help but wonder why they do not focus on ‘here’, meaning where they are living and studying. What are the spaces and activities that turn living and studying abroad for women into an advantage? What is the potential of the informal learning through leadership practice to empowering female international students?

I have learned a lot from my involvement with different organizations, events, and activities at UVic. However, I made a significant and long-term commitment to Graduate Students’ Society (GSS). While there have been moments full of excitement, and even empowering moments, there have also been moments of frustration on my journey. As such, I believe that many layers of my experience are waiting to be unfurled. In this regard, I believe my own experiences, and those of other female international graduate students involved with GSS, have much to offer. However, female international graduate students’ involvement in student organizations has not been explored. Although, as noted early, there are studies that focus on graduate students’ experiences of graduate school (Corner, 2006; Farr, 2002; Holdaway & Winchester, 1995; Kim, 2010; Marsh, Rowe & Martin, 2002; McAlpine & Weiss 2000) and students’ organizations (Corner, 2006; Millar & Dirx, 1995; Smith & Griffin, 1993), research on female international graduate students’ informal learning, challenges and leadership roles they play in student organizations is scarce.

Purpose and Objectives

My study focuses on a group of female international graduate students' and their experiences of learning and leadership in GSS over the past five years. I chose to focus on GSS because I held a position in GSS executive board for one year and also volunteered in the organization previous to that. My involvement in GSS inspired me to look at other female international students' experiences in GSS. I used an arts-based methodology. There were three main objectives to this research. The first was to understand how female international graduate students understood their experiences as leaders, the pros and the cons - in GSS. What did leadership mean to them? What have been their successes and their challenges? The second was to explore with them what and how they have learned nonformally or informally in GSS. The third was to understand the impact of their involvement as leaders and women on their and sense of self. What have they learned through these experiences that have helped them become better leaders, students or simply, to live in another culture?

The primary question that guided this study was: How did female international graduate students' involvement with the Graduate Students' Society shape their learning experiences? There were three elements in this study: female international graduate students, the GSS, and also, UVic as a whole. These main bodies are interconnected and impact upon one another. Unfolding and looking at these relationships closely was important to this study. Sub questions I used to address the primary question of this study included: How do female international students make sense of their leadership role within the GSS? How does the GSS respond to international graduate students' involvement with GSS and to their roles as leaders and as representatives of graduate students? How do their roles within the GSS influence policy and procedures at UVic? Underlying all of this is their learning: What and how are women learning?

What impact does this have on them as leaders, as students in higher education and women living in a different culture?

Background/ Context

An important body that supports international graduate students at the University of Victoria is the Graduate Students' Society (GSS). GSS is an autonomous, not-for-profit society that strives to promote the interests and represent the views of UVic graduate students. The society is democratically organized with members having a say through elections, referenda, general meetings, and the Graduate Representative Council. In this regard, GSS offers many opportunities for graduate students to share their concerns with other graduate students and with several other bodies at University of Victoria. Moreover, GSS provides many services to graduate students.

The Graduate Students' Society has its own constitution and bylaws. According to the bylaws, "members of Society shall be all students enrolled in the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University" (GSS, 2011, p. 3). Members of the society can be part of the decision-making process by voting, attending general meetings, being a graduate representative, or serving on the Executive Board. General meetings are held in October and April and all members of the society are welcome to attend and be part of the decision-making process. Moreover, every department elects one graduate representative to attend monthly Graduate Representative Council meetings and general meetings. The bylaws of the GSS indicate that the "Graduate Council will provide a forum for members to discuss issues of relevance to grad students i.e. education, research funding, university policies and procedures" (p. 7). Being an Executive Member provides another opportunity for graduate students to be part of the decision-making process. There are six members of the Executive Board: Chair, Director of Communications, Director of Finance,

Director of Services, Director of Student Affairs, and Executive Director (ex-officio, non-voting). All members of the Executive Board of GSS are elected members. However, there is paid staff in the GSS office, such as the Executive Director and the Service Manager, who is not necessarily graduate students. The primary aim of GSS is to provide the chance for students to serve on several university committees and represent graduate students.

In my second year at UVic, acting upon my friend's recommendation, I decided to become involved with the GSS. Consequently, I attended most events offered during the 2010–2011 academic year. Moreover, I was a volunteer on a team of four that organized and promoted events. I enjoyed being a volunteer since it provided me with an opportunity to interact with other graduate students and it increased my knowledge about the services that GSS provided. As a result, in March 2011, I put in my nomination for a position on the Executive Board. I was elected and subsequently began my term as Director of Students Affairs. This experience has not only changed my own life a great deal, but has also provided me with a lens to look at graduate student issues in a different way since it provided opportunities to meet many people representing a number of different groups and committees at UVic. Having been inspired by my own experience with the GSS, I decided to explore the impact of GSS on other female international students.

Literature Review

To frame my study, I focused upon five areas of literature: studies on internationalization in higher education and graduate international students, studies on student organizations, studies

on women and leadership, studies on informal education and learning, specifically focussing on women and feminist adult education and learning.

Internalization is an important part of higher education in Canada and the World. One of the results of internalization is an increasing number of international students (Guo & Chase, 2011). According to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the number of international students who attend to universities and colleges in Canada has increased in last few decades. Parallel to this growth UVic also saw an increase in enrolment of international graduate students.

According to research, international graduate students experience many difficulties from language barrier to culture shock (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Guo & Chase, 2010; Kim, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003). Universities have several bodies to assist international students in this transition period. One of those bodies that graduate students' benefits from is students' organizations (Corner, 2006). Students' organizations provide opportunities to network and socialize for graduate students (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). However, the impact of international graduate students' involvement to students' organizations has not been explored yet.

Graduate students' organizations also play political roles in universities and students' lives (Coulter, Goin & Gerard, 2004). Graduate students organizations are established to advocate for graduate students. This unique position of graduate students' organizations gives an opportunity to students who are involved in the organization to explore leadership possibilities.

In this study I focused on women who were involved to in the Graduate Students' Society in UVic. According Reinharz (1992) feminist research focuses on women and the issues they face. Focusing on women and the leadership role they played in GSS makes this study a feminist research. Research shows that women bring different values to leadership positions than men

(Blackmore, 1999; Helgesen, 1990; Marshall, 1993; Parker, 2005). Helgesen (1990) describes these characteristics as being caring and nurturing. She goes further and argues that “[...] integration of female values is already producing a more collaborative kind of leadership, and changing the very ideal of what strong leadership actually is” (p. 249). She highlights what women’s value can bring to an organization and leadership position.

Methodology

To explore the informal learning that GSS and broader university leadership engagement provides for female international graduate students at the University of Victoria, I used a feminist art-based methodology. Reinharz (1992) defines feminist research as “looking at the world through women’s eyes and seeing how the lack of knowledge is constructed” (p. 248). The aim is to make “the invisible visible, bringing margin to centre, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men – all continue to be elements of feminist research” (p. 248). The goal in my study, as noted previously, was to explore those themes by focusing on female international graduate students’ experiences through the leadership roles they play in student organizations and the larger university system. Most feminist research is linked to social change (Joyappa and Martin, 1996, Reinharz, 1992). This study aims towards social change by elevating the learning and contributions of women international students. Arts-based research is defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies (McNiff, 2008, p. 29).

Arts-based research values ways of knowing through stories, experiences, and emotions, and conveying them creatively by using different art forms or genres (Clover & Stalker, 2007). Feminist art based research suggests provides a safe space where women can imaginatively, through symbol, metaphor, story and creativity tell their stories and experiences, identify challenges they face and make meaning from these (e.g Butterwick, 2002; Clover & Stalker, 2007). By using a feminist art -based approach, I created a space for the imagination to come through, for female students to share their experiences not only verbally, but also through visuals and thereby capture the fuller essence of their experiences and challenges in their informal learning and leadership roles at UVic.

One arts-based method I chose was photo elicitation. Photo elicitation is defined by Bignante (2010) as “one of the most widely known and frequently used techniques; Based on the fairly simple principle of using one or more images (photos, but also videos, paintings or any types of visual representation) in an interview and asking the informants to comment on them” (p.2). Several scholars have used photo elicitation in their research (Alcazar & Dyck, 2011; Banks, 2001; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Harper, 2002). They believe that looking at different photographs evokes deeper thoughts that people do not usually articulate during an interview (Alcazar & Dyck, 2011; Banks, 2001; Harper, 2002). Alcazar and Dyck (2011) take it further and argue that “combining photos with in-depth interviews offers an alternative medium of communication that can open up issues that might escape the spoken word” (p. 109). Likely, the reason that I used photo elicitation is to give participants the opportunity to explore their unspoken experiences as female international graduate students.

I also chose to use collage as a method in this study because, as Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) argue, it is exciting and not as intimidating as other arts methods. It does not

require as much artistic abilities as other arts-based methods do. Collage is an arts-based method that based on cutting, sticking, and combining images onto cardstock (Butler-Kisber, 2008).

Norris (2008) defines collage as “arts-based research approach to meaning-making through the juxtaposition of a variety of pictures, artefacts, natural objects, words, phrases, textiles, sounds, and stories” (p.95). Collage allows participants to respond to research question by creating an art form. Participants have a chance to pick the images, use their imaginations, and hands as well as design them on the cardstock to express their understanding of the issue in a creative way. The power of using collage as an art form encourages participants to pursue their own thoughts, ideas, and meanings (Butler- Kisber, 2008).

The individuals who participated in this study were three UVic female international graduate students who hold or have held a position on the GSS Executive Board, or who have represented their departments on the Graduate Representative Council for at least one term. The data collection included three focus groups.

Significance of the Study

Exploring female international graduate students’ experiences within the Graduate Students’ Society from a feminist perspective is meaningful for three reasons. Firstly, I think that this study will have impact not only on international graduate students but also policies and practices at the Graduate Students’ Society and UVic. Secondly, it contributes to feminist art-based research, as well as to research about/with international graduate students. Finally, this research thesis changes me as a researcher, international graduate student, and woman.

I envision that this study provides a better understanding of international graduate students’ experiences at UVic. International graduate students have been part of the Graduate Students’ Society since it was established. However, no study has been done on the role that the

GSS plays in the life of international graduate students. Through this study, I enlighten the practitioners and the community and invite them to take action to enhance international graduate students' experiences with the GSS and at UVic.

This study also has the possibility of contributing to the field of feminist art-based research and studies on graduate studies. My research shows that while many studies have looked at international graduate students, none of these studies has used feminist art-based research or specifically focused on graduate student societies and the leadership role they provide for international students. This journey began with me being an international graduate student. Thus, I believe this study will help me to understand and explain my own and other international graduate students' experiences. Furthermore, this study also allowed me to learn more about feminist theory and art-based research. Feminist art-based research is an approach to which I was introduced during my studies at UVic. Even though I have been interested in this approach, I have never had an opportunity to incorporate it into my research. Incorporating art-based research and a feminist approach in my study is very significant since I have passion for these two ways of knowing, understanding, and making sense of the world in which we live.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter identifies the theoretical framework I employed for this study as well as the areas of literature and the studies that provide the platforms and analytical lenses. I begin with a discussion of feminism, including the key principles and ideas that I believe made it the most appropriate lens for my study. I follow this with a discussion of the contemporary phenomenon of ‘internationalization’ in higher education, including studies that focus on international graduate students. From there, I explore literature on women and leadership, particularly in higher and adult education contexts. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the complex discourse of informal adult education and learning, drawing particularly from works by feminist adult educators.

Feminism

Despite the fact that Feminism has been described by many scholars, still today it continues to be a debate on what feminism means (Bloom, 1998; Hooks, 2000; Reinharz, 1992). There are different approaches within the theory of feminism (Reinharz, 1992). Subsequently during my research I could not find a general description of feminism. One of the definitions that I encountered was that offered by bell hooks (2000). hooks (2000) defines feminism as "[...] movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. 1). Her description clearly states the foundation of feminism. The target here is to stop exploitation of women and to create a society where women have equal rights.

To end oppression of women is the purpose of feminist theory (Hooks, 2000). Discussion about feminism evolved and change direction through the time. First wave of feminism included movement and fight for “[...] right to vote for women, rights to property, and access to education” (Burns & Chantler, 2011, p. 70). Second wave of feminism focused on women’s experiences of inequalities in everyday life and gaining equity (Burns & Chantler, 2011). Critics of second wave of feminism such as Fonow and Cook (2005) suggest that “feminists have moved well beyond the analysis of bias and exclusion and toward more contextual forms of theorizing about the intersection of gender with other categories of social difference and place and time [...]” (p. 2230). As discussions of feminism changed so to the strategies. Empowering women, seeing the world from women’s lens (Reinharz, 1992), giving women a voice to make their stories and struggles heard, increasing their self-esteem, and encouraging them to think critically are key concepts of feminism. Key concepts of feminism not only provide a ground for feminist research but also it aims to create a change in the society. Similarly, women and the change they create in GSS, UVic, and the society as leaders will be the core of this study.

Internationalization

The past decade in particular has seen an increase in focus on the concept of internationalization. Today, internationalization in higher education pertains to “[...]teaching, research, scholarly activities, and services; and provision of education courses and programmes” (Guo & Chase, 2011, p.307). Internationalization also includes international research partnerships, international programmes, internationalization of the curriculum, and student mobility. While this practice is complex and multidimensional, my focus is on literature on one

important aspect of internationalization as it relates to international graduate students with an emphasis on international female students.

International students

According to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2007), the number of full time international students changed remarkably from 30,000 in 1990 to 70,000 in 2006. Foreign Affairs and International Trade (2009) notes that international students contributed over 6.5 billion to the Canadian economy in 2008. According to the BC International Survey Result (2009), 49 percent of the students who study in Canada are from Eastern Asia, and 64 percent of these students are between the ages of 18 to 24 years old. McLachlan and Justice (2009) discuss how “each year, international students uproot themselves from their home countries, families, friends, and other key people within their social support networks to pursue study at universities around the globe” (p. 27). What are the reasons that students choose to study abroad—what drives young students to leave their home countries? According to the BC International Survey Result (2009), 39 percent of these students indicate that they came to experience a life in a foreign country, 23 percent of the students think Canada has better programs designed for their major than what they can find in their hometown, and 22 percent of the students came to Canada to learn English. One of the ways to explore another country and culture is to become an international student. As I mentioned above 39 percent of the students revealed that they go abroad to expand their vision and their understanding of other cultures. It should be noted here that students also expect to use their experience abroad as a means to find better jobs when they return to their home countries. Bearing in mind that English is the dominant language of today’s world, learning English is another significant reason that attracts students to continue their careers in Canada. While all graduate international students have to pass the Test of English as a

Foreign Language (TOEFL) to start their studying at UVIC, living in English speaking country is an opportunity for them to improve their English skills.

The University of Victoria (UVic) has also experienced an unprecedented growth in its international student body. The UVic strategic plan (2011) states that “The University of Victoria has seen a 48 per cent increase in the number of graduate students during the last decade, and there has also been an impressive growth in new graduate programs” (p. 4). As the graduate student population increases at UVic, the need to respond to their specific needs also grows. Yet Corner (2006) emphasizes the difficulties such as funding and space that universities encounter as they attempt to accommodate this current increasing number of both homegrown and international graduate students. In parallel with increasing number of students, universities need to increase the amount of funding, academic support, and number of staff.

International Graduate Students

Graduate school is a unique academic environment for all graduate students. Adjustment processes for students include navigating through academia, developing relationships with their supervisors and colleagues, and learning about their specific department in a university setting. While graduate students are attempting to understand this new environment, they also need to deal with everyday issues such as finding accommodation, either renting or being part of a family along with finding employment. For international graduate students this transition process is difficult because of language barriers and cultural differences (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Guo & Chase, 2010; Kim, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003). The social and academic environment of these universities along with the support universities provide for graduate students, plays an important role during a student’s transition period.

Scholars emphasize the challenges that international graduate students face during their study (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Guo & Chase, 2010; Kim, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003). Their research shows that international graduate students experience isolation, marginalization, culture shock, anxiety, stress, along with problems related to family members, accommodation, funding, language barriers, relationships with their supervisors and colleagues (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003).

One of the biggest areas of study exploring the difficulties for foreign students is around English as their second (or third) language. Studies find that graduate students are expected to communicate and function in everyday life while producing academic work in their second language. This means they experience major difficulties with classmates and supervisors, academic writing, and classroom presentations (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Kim, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003). Speaking English as a second language not only influences academic life, but also affects students' social life as they attempt to adjust to host countries' culture and environment. Matters as simple as learning how to take the bus to finding ways to adjust to a unique culture, another climate, and new norms, can be both a frustrating and a challenging process for international graduate students.

But academic challenges are not limited to language barriers for international students. In addition, these students have to deal with an inadequate ability to manage academic workloads (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Johns, 1997; Myles & Cheng, 2003). As foreign students continue to work in relationship with supervisors, these components are identified as factors that influence students' adjustment and success in host countries' culture and academia (Brown, 2007; Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Lee, 2008; McClure, 2007; Myles & Cheng, 2003).

Graduate Student Organizations

As international graduate students face these obstacles, how can universities support them during this transition period? There are several different university organizations with strategies that aim to provide academic and/or social support for graduate international students; one body that every university has is a graduate students' organization. Although this organization does not particularly target international graduate students – its role is to represent and support all students in the university - this body play a significant role for foreign students.

Involvement in students' organizations is an extracurricular activity as are all of the activities outside the classroom (Morgan, Solomon, Lido, May & Stuart, 2011). Extracurricular activities include, but are not limited to, participation in clubs, organizations, and societies on campus. Gardner and Barnes (2007) were particularly interested in recounting the ways that graduate students became involved. They note that

In general, studies and commentary about involvement tend to encompass time spent in co-curricular activities, such as clubs, social and honorary organizations, and time spent volunteering and participating in community activities, but may also extend involvement to include any interactions within the campus community and the campus setting overall (p.369).

Students' involvement in extracurricular activities is a broad term that encompasses a great many activities and organizations.

Several studies have been conducted in regards to the success of students involved in extracurricular campus activities, citing that involvement meets with success (Astin, 1993; Baker, 2007; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1993; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, Trezini, 1999). In

particular, Tinto's *Theory of educational Departure* (1993) suggests that there is a strong correlation connecting extracurricular activities with student success. According to Tinto, students who are involved in extracurricular activities are more likely to integrate into campus life—in this way, they are more likely to be successful. He therefore illustrates the importance of these activities in developing a student's sense of belonging to the college while providing support for these students in their new environment.

Another study that addresses international students and their involvement in extracurricular activities was initiated by Tokoyawa and Tokoyawa (2002). According to them, involvement in extracurricular activities does have a beneficial effect on international students' academic and social life. Their research focuses on the link that connects extracurricular activities to adjustment in a host culture. Tokoyawa and Tokoyawa found that extracurricular activities create a chance for international students to socialize with students from the host country which makes exploration in the host culture much more accessible. They argue that “in sum, for international students engagement in extracurricular activities is considered an important social context in which they may develop social networks and learn social skills, values and customs in the host society” (p. 374). While Tokoyawa and Tokoyawa explore the socialization part of the involvement in extracurricular activities, different aspects and factors of international student involvement have yet to be explored.

What the studies outlined above have in common is their focus: ‘undergraduate’ students. There is in fact a paucity of studies that specifically target the participation and experiences of graduate students. For example, Corner (2006) conducted a study of involving graduate students affiliated with the graduate students' organization called Association of Graduate Education Students (AGES) at UVic. Her study suggested that being part of AGES and making connection

with peers and faculty has also had positive influence on students' experiences. In a study conducted by Gardner and Barnes (2007) ten doctoral students were tracked in order to understand the influence of their involvement. Their study illustrated that "[These] students clearly saw the socializing dynamic that involvement [provided] them; [they were more] purposeful in structuring their involvement to further develop skills and opportunities that [would] be needed in their chosen future professions" (p.382).

While many of these studies focused on different aspects that impact graduate students' experiences—socializing, accepting opportunities for networking, and reaching out to a supportive environment for student involvement, there are other aspects of integration that need to be examined. Gardner and Barnes (2007) discuss the role specific departments in a university play. For example, they found that student experiences vary from one department to another. Corner (2006) focused on the Faculty of Education in order to get a better understanding of graduate students involvement in the university itself. Unfortunately, none of the research that has been conducted has focused solely on international graduate students, nor have they explored the experiences of female students.

But there are other factors to being involved. Research has clearly shown the positive results of involvement as it pertains to social life; however, the political aspect of the involvement has yet to be explored in any depth. The three key political roles that graduate students' organizations play is described by Coulter, Goin, and Gerard (2004): they "a) advocate on behalf of students, b) identify issues that are important to graduate students, [and] c) ensure that the concerns of graduate students are addressed" (p. 17). Another political advantage that graduate students' organizations provide, I would argue, is the opportunity to experience leadership possibilities.

Leadership

Leadership is a paradoxical term. Everyone believes they understand what it means, but there is not a general definition of leadership (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007). Three things that are common to the early literature on leadership include a focus on a person, a focus on a position and a focus on men, given they occupied the vast majority of leadership positions. However, more recently, scholars have become interested in very different aspects of leadership. Grint (2005), for example, challenges us to see leadership as: a person, a result, a position, and a process. Helgesen (1990) takes us further, suggesting that we focus on more existential factors of leadership, as well as processes based in and on: participation, non-hierarchical structures, flexible and caring, and collective and group-oriented. These attributes and processes are most often associated with women and there are a number of studies in this area that provide a platform for my own study.

Women and Leadership

Many feminist scholars (Blackmore, 1999; Helgesen, 1990; Marshall, 1993; Parker, 2005; Taber & Gouthro, 2006) have asked the following questions and looked for answers. Why are women not filling top positions in their places of work? What about the fact that more women work in non-profit organizations than in big corporations? Why are there not more women who are in positions of power? If, as the “female principles” suggest, women make organizations better places, why aren’t there more women in such organizations? How can the situations of women be improved? How do women effect change in the organizations and the societies they are involved in? And most importantly, how can women contribute in an effective way to a process that would alter traditional male hierarchical leadership?

According to Parker (2005) the idea of studying leadership through a feminist lens did not really begin until the late 1960s and early 1970s. The impetus was the increasing number of women in management positions. But as Taber and Gouthro (2006) argued, most of our institutions were “created by men for male purposes” and women could not really hope to “gain equality without changing institutional, patriarchal structures in society” (p.63).

Feminine Principles and Traits

In the past, feminist scholars suggested that women had decidedly different values and qualities from their male counterparts (e.g. Helgesen, 1990; Marshall, 1993; Grant, 1989). They referred to these as “feminine principles”— and these included aspects such as caring and nurturing. In her work, Helgesen (1990) evaluates the distinct tenets that the women bring to leadership positions. One attribute she focuses on is how women tend to create webs of interactional relationships which she argues are distinct from the male tendency to create hierarchical relationships. According to Helgesen (1990) “[...] I became aware that the women, when describing their roles in their organizations, usually referred to themselves as being in the middle of things. Not at the top, but in the center; not reaching down, but reaching out” (p. 46).

However, one aspect that has been problematic has been the essentializing of women, that is, studies that attribute certain characteristics such as caring, non-dictatorial, group-oriented to ‘all’ women (Blackmore, 1999; Helgesen, 1990; Marshall, 1993). Not all women bring and implement feminine principles to the leadership position they are in or these does not necessarily mean that men do not value or incorporate feminine principles into their organizations and life. According to Due Billing* and Alvesson (2000) it should be noted that “masculinity and

femininity are not static traits but change over time and over the life time of the individuals and vary with class, race, occupation, organization, age, and individual conditions” (p. 152).

Informal Learning and Women

While the education and learning that happens in institutions is called formal education, there are learning that happen both inside and outside the institutions i.e., non-formal and informal education. Schugurensky (2006) argues that “non-formal education refers to any organized educational activity that takes place outside the formal education system (e.g., short courses, workshops, professional development, et cetera)” (p.1). Key to non-formal education is that there is an educator or a facilitator who leads the process. Malcom, Hodkinson, and Colley (2003) define informal education as “learning through everyday embodied practices, horizontal knowledge, and non-educational settings” (p.314).

The influences of informal learning in women’s life have been discussed by a number of scholars. Their investigations showed that informal learning might be a transforming and empowering process (English 2002; Foley, 1999; Jackson, 2010; Mojab & McDonald, 2008). English in particular (2002) conducted a study with 13 female adult educators in order to explore how informal and incidental learning transpired in the course of their work experiences as international adult educators. One of the findings that English (2002) observed was that during their experiences overseas, international adult educators were engaged in a lot of informal and incidental learning. English (2002) in fact describes this informal and incidental learning as the “most significant learning” the women did (p. 245). She goes further, arguing that being abroad in a foreign country “supported and forced the participants to learn coping, self-knowledge, and lifelong learning skills” (p. 245). English’s research shows that informal learning played an important role in female international adult educators’ lives.

Foley (1999) is interested particularly in the struggles and learning processes in diverse organizations. Of particular interest to me is his focus on Brazilian women's organizations. In this chapter he looks at women's organizations in Brazil and informal learning that happens in these organizations. As a result of women's involvement in these organizations informal learning occurred. Women had a space to talk about everyday issues they face and solutions in their meetings. Years later women realized that talking and asking for a day care facility did not mean that they would have one. Women found the solution in taking actions. According to him women "[...] became involved in a range of campaigns –for elementary schools, health care facilities, and day- care" (p. 95). Because of the experiences in these campaigns Brazilian "women learned how to deal with government agencies" (p. 95). They learned that how powerful it is to be organizing and advocating for themselves (Foley, 1999).

In both research studies above women engaged in a lot of informal learning during their struggles. In English's (2002) research women learned about themselves and how to deal with complex situations from their experience abroad. In Foley's (1999) research, being involved in an organization and the learning process they went through during their involvement changed their lives and also future of their communities. Informal learning is inevitable in everyday life. However, certain informal learning experiences can be significant. I think understanding informal learning experiences of women is one of the main points of this study. Looking at women's informal learning experiences provided directions to this study as this study is also about women's experiences in an organization.

Feminist Adult Education and Learning

In order to understand women's experiences in GSS, I used feminist adult education and learning as a lens. Feminist adult education is a study of women (Clover, 2007). Feminist adult educators focus on women's experiences, lives, and issues they face in everyday life (Clover & Stalker, 2007).

The process of empowerment and change has been explored by many feminist adult educators (Clover & Stalker, 2007; Walters & Manicom, 1996). The main element of feminist adult education is to empower women in order to stop oppression and transform women's lives (Clover & Stalker, 2007; Walters & Manicom, 1996). According to Clover (2007), "fundamental to this transformation is the active participation of women in their own learning and empowerment in terms of the sexist and oppressive practices and ideologies ingrained in the fabric of society" (p.84). Clover (2007) highlighted the active participation of women in their own learning and empowerment. Feminist adult educators give women a voice to allow and encourage women to think critically and to make their stories heard. As a result, as Clover (2007) says "women learn to break the silence, become economically independent and explore social justice" (p. 83).

I believe in the power of feminist adult education and the benefits it brings to women's lives. Therefore, I think adopting a feminist adult education as a lens to this study has provided me with guide to uncover how female international students' involvement to GSS as well as this study itself has empowered and transformed them, their lives, and their communities.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

For this study, I used a feminist arts- based approach, employing two different arts-based methods in three workshops to explore the experiences of female international students in GSS. In this chapter I outline the methodology I used, the methods and how I analysed both the written and the visual data.

Feminist Research

There is literally no one definition of feminist research for it is quite complex and diverse (Bloom, 1998; Olesen, 2000; Reinharz, 1992). Indeed, according to Reinharz (1992) “the fact that there are multiple definitions of feminism means that there are multiple feminist perspectives on social research methods” (p. 241). However, although, there are differences, constants at the centre of all feminist research are a focus on women’s lives, stories and voices, an understanding of the social construction of gender and an aim to empower or make the lives of women better in some way (Bloom, 1998; Lather, 1991; Reinharz, 1992). Reinharz (1992) calls feminist research “looking at the world through women’s eyes” (p.248). I chose a feminist methodology because my study investigated female international students’ involvement in GSS—an association that aims to provide students with a way to be heard on campus. My study was an opportunity for a group of female international students to tell stories of their experiences during their involvement in GSS. I also chose a feminist lens because as Joyappa and Martin (1996) argue, investigations of women’s lives enhance the possibilities of uncovering adult

education and learning practices of women. My goal was to explore how and what this group of women, including me, had learned through GSS, including myself, and to reflect upon the impact this had had on their/my social and academic lives. In addition to giving a voice to women, another key element of feminist research is to encourage women to think critically—primarily, as noted above, about the social construction of gender and power and how it influences women's lives (Joyappa & Martin, 1996; Lather, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Walters & Manicom, 1996). In this sense, all feminist research is power/empowerment-oriented in that it seeks to unmask hidden dimensions and power and help women lead work for change (Joyappa & Miartin, 1996; Reinharz, 1992). Leading for change is, or should be, a role played by the women in GSS at the University of Victoria but is this what happens?

Another important aspect of feminist research is its embracement of the idea of accepting a researcher's personal experiences (Reinharz, 1992). In feminist research personal experience of the researcher often is the starting point of the study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reinharz, 1992). Researchers are inspired and guided by their own experience and their curiosity to find answers to their questions. Some researchers not only use their experiences as starting points but also they use their experiences as data just like other participants' experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). They became a participant in their own study. However, Reinharz (1992) suggests that "while valuing the researcher's personal experience, feminist researchers are careful to differentiate their "own experience" from the experience of "other women" (p. 262). As researcher and a participant in this study I adopted this lens in order to try to separate my experience from the participants.

A final important characteristic of feminist research is its capacity to work with or include a diversity of methodologies and methods (Joyappa & Martin, 1996; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1990).

Arts-Based Research

Arts-based research is a qualitative methodology that uses art as a medium to collect data, and to engage participants in more creative, artistic and experiential and unique ways (Clover, 2007; Eisner, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008; McNiff, 2008). There are multiple definitions of arts-based research, as well as multiple terms used (Clover, 2007). Moreover, there is a diversity of art forms or genres including, but not limited to, “visual methodologies, performance enquiry, image-based research, installation art-as-research, story-work research or lyric inquiry” (Clover, 2007, p. 3).

I chose to use an arts-based approach for three reasons. Firstly, using arts-based research to explore women’s lives, experiences, and the challenges they face is argued to be an empowering, feminist adult education approach (e.g. Butterwick, & Dawson, 2006; Clover, 2007). Secondly, Finley (2008) argues that arts-based research is a creative and often very visual means to uncover social inequities that the international students of GSS may face. Thirdly, as alluded to above, arts-based research encourages active use of creativity and imagination, often through symbol and metaphor (Clover, 2007; McNiff, 2008). Eisner (2008) refers to this as “the emancipation of meaning through the process of creative expression” (p. 40). Feminist scholars have of course long encouraged women to engage their creative faculties in their quest to understand the world and social issues they face (Butterwick, 2002; Clover, 2010). Finally, I am not a professional artist, but I believe, like Clover and Stalker (2007), that “arts matter in our

lives, in adult education and learning, and in bringing about social justice and transformation” (p.1).

Images and Photo Elicitation

Although there are many forms of arts used in arts-based research (e.g. Cole & Knowles, 2008), the word *images* is what comes to mind when I think about art. And many researchers see using images as one of the most effective means of inquiry (e.g. Banks, 2001; Bignante, 2010; Weber, 2008). Weber (2008, p.44- 47) in fact outlines “ten good reasons to use art-related visual images in research.” These include things such as an ability to capture what is “ineffable, the hard-to-put-into-words” (Weber, 2008. P. 44). In this study, I was working with a group of women who did not share a common language. The art very much became the common language, a means by which we could all speak without that put us on the same communicative level (Clover & Stalker, 2007). Further, images can make us pay attention to things in new ways, make things more memorable, communicate more holistically and creatively as through metaphor and symbol. Weber (2008) also believes that images can carry theory elegantly and eloquently, facilitate reflexivity in research design and also encourage creative action for social justice.

One image-based method I chose was photo elicitation, a technique I had developed an interest in during a graduate class. Since that class I have had the occasion to use photo elicitation in two workshops at UVic and therefore, I am very comfortable with this research process. I also witnessed first-hand the effectiveness of photo elicitation to encourage delegates to talk about their involvement with Graduate Students’ Society.

Photo elicitation is defined by Banks (2001) as a method that “involves using photographs to invoke comments, memory, and discussion in the course of a semi- structured interview” (p. 87). There are several ways to use photo elicitation in research. In some cases

researchers have taken photographs and presented them to the participants during the interview. Others have allowed participants to take the photographs (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). According to Alcazar and Dyck (2011) allowing participants to take the pictures encourages them to become actively involved in the research. As the participants take control of what pictures they want to include, they directly contribute and expand the research question. Because I wanted the participants to become actively involved, I allowed participants to take pictures.

Collage

A second image-based practice I used in this study was collage. Butler-Kisber and Poldma, 2010 suggest that photo collage is both exciting and not as intimidating as other forms that demand more artistic abilities can be. Collage has a long history as an art form (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; Butler-Kisber, 2008). The root of word collage derives from French word *coller*, which means to stick (Butler-Kisber, 2008). “Collage is an arts-based research approach to meaning-making through the juxtaposition of a variety of pictures, artefacts, natural objects, words, phrases, textiles, sounds, and stories” (Norris, 2008, p.95). Collage is created by cutting, combining and sticking or grouping different images together (Butler-Kisber, 2008). While some researchers have used images from magazines and other printed material to create a collage, others have included different elements to make a collage such as textiles and natural objects. Since magazines include pictures, images, and words, I provided some magazines to participants. I think collage gave participants a chance use their hands and imagination in the process of understanding their involvement in GSS.

Purpose and Objectives of the study

When I first started this programme, I was not sure how I wanted to proceed in the research portion of the programme. By the end of my first year, I decided to write about international students' experiences at UVic. I wanted this research to convey the experiences and the stories of female graduate international students, including my own as in my second year I had become involved in the Graduate Students' Society. My involvement changed my life and I wondered if others had had the same experience.

The question that guided this study was: *How has female international graduate students' involvement with student organizations, particularly the Graduate Students' Society, as well as other activities around the campus, shaped their learning experiences?*

There were three objectives that I wanted to achieve in this study. The first objective was to understand how female international graduate students understood their experiences as leaders, the pros and the cons - in GSS. What did leadership mean to them? What have been their successes and their challenges? The second was to explore with them what and how they have learned nonformally or informally in GSS and other student gatherings. The third was to understand the impact of their involvement as leaders on their learning and sense of self on other committees or at events and activities across the university. What have they learned through these experiences that has helped them become better leaders, students or simply, living in another culture?

Recruiting the Female Graduate International Students

I began to recruit for my study by looking for potential participants. It was a difficult process because I needed to find specific female graduate international students who were involved with the GSS over the past five years. I say it was difficult because often, international graduate students either move back to their own country, or move to another province in search of employment. In addition, in order to use arts-based methods to collect data, I needed my participants to be physically present during the three focus group sessions. This aspect of the study narrowed down the number of potential participants.

Since I was part of this organization in the past, I became familiar with the history of the GSS, and the people who were involved in this organization. As I was familiar with the female graduate international students who were involved in GSS, I began by approaching those students as potential participants. I handed them a recruitment letter, inviting them to participate. Fortunately most candidates were eager to participate in this process that used arts-based method and a total of three took part.

I also included myself into this study, a major practice of feminist research as noted above, since my initial inspiration for this research was my own experience and involvement in GSS. Being both a researcher and a participant in this study was power-levelling (Reinharz, 1992) as the participants saw me as the researcher, but also as one of them..

Data Collection

After I recruited the participants, I contacted them in order to organize workshops. As the participants were very enthusiastic about the study, finding time for all three workshops was a smooth process. We agreed to do the workshops in October. We came together three weekends

back-to-back, and by the end of the month of October, the focus group sessions were finished. Each of the workshops were audio recorded and then fully transcribed.

I accommodated the workshops at my house. It was a convenient location for the participants who all agreed to come. In order to provide a relaxed atmosphere, I prepared food for each workshop. The gathering was comfortable and because the workshops all ran over the 1.5 hours I had initially planned, we had time to chat not only about the GSS but also about our everyday lives, our cultures, and experiences in Canada.

Since the method I used to collect data was arts-based, I used different materials and equipment to collect data. Cameras were used to take pictures, and magazines, and cardboard were used to create collaborative collages.

Workshop 1

The plan I had in mind for the first workshop was to provide an introduction to the study, go over the consent form together, answer the questions the participants may have about the study, and finally, begin a discussion by going over the questions I had prepared for the first workshop. But as soon as participants arrived for the first workshop I welcomed them, and we began by discussing how traditions change from country to country in terms of being a guest in someone's house versus being a host. These conversations created an inviting atmosphere lending the group a comfortable way to discuss our varied cultures.

I began the more formal part of the workshop by providing background regarding the study. I explained to the participants why I had decided to conduct this study, how I got inspired, and how ideas developed as to how I put this study together. I explained step by step what we

were going to do in each workshop. Then I made sure that participants understood the consent form.

In first workshop my aim was to get glimpse of the participants' experiences from their involvement in GSS. In order to encourage the participants to share their experiences I asked the following questions:

- 1) What is your work and academic background and how did you get involved in the Graduate Students' Society (GSS)?
- 2) What roles, if any, did you play for GSS and for how long?
- 3) How would you describe your experience at Graduate Students' Society?
- 4) What kinds of difficulties have you experienced during your term, and what have been the best or most important experiences?
- 5) Do you feel being a female has had an impact on your participation? Did you ever feel discriminated against on that basis? Did being a female help you in any way?
- 6) What were the challenges or benefits of being an international student?
- 7) Would you describe your experience in GSS as a learning experience? If no, why not and if yes, what have you learned and how did you learn it?
- 8) What role have you played in providing direction for other female international graduate students' at the University of Victoria?
- 9) Would you describe yourself as a leader? What does the term *leadership* mean to you in relation to GSS?
- 10) How has the role you played, and what you have learned in GSS affected you in the different aspects of your life: academics, social life, employment, standing in the community, etc.?

Following our discussion of the questions, I talked about what we are going to do during the next workshop. For the next workshop the participants would be asked to take pictures that best described their experiences in GSS. I handed each one the image release form, making it clear that if they were to take a picture of a person, they would need to get the consent of the person. Excitingly, one of the participants suggested that we go for a field trip all together to take the pictures before the workshop. We agreed to meet downtown for the next workshop.

For me the first workshop was very successful. We met at 2pm in the afternoon. When the participants left my house it was past 6 pm. Even though we have spent more than 4 hours, I was not able to ask all the questions I had been planning to ask. The conversations took longer than I thought. Participants had so much to talk about, and also there was a familiarity between the participants since we were all from the Faculty of Education so we shared this experience as well.

Workshop 2

For the second workshop we met in downtown Victoria and walked through the streets to take the pictures that we would use to represent our experiences and learning with and through GSS. Participants' suggestion of meeting and taking pictures together showed me that they were attracted to the research. It was unfortunate that I did not have an audio recorder to record the discussions we had while we were taking the pictures but it would have been difficult to hear the recording because of the noise in the middle of the city. We agreed to take three photographs each. Once each participant had what she felt best represented their role, journey, and experiences within GSS, we returned to my house to examine and analyse the pictures and the ideas or stories they told.

I again provided food, which seemed to bring us even closer and made the workshop more fun. The atmosphere of this second workshop was like having a conversation with friends. I also think that this more comfortable setting made it safe for participants to reveal their thoughts and share their stories.

Even though distinct themes emerged from the first workshop, I did not want to influence the participants to talk specifically about them. Instead I wanted to see where the participants would go with the pictures in order to see what was on their mind when they took them. The same technique is used in photo elicitation; the researcher gives participants an opportunity to explain what they see in the pictures. For this reason, I showed each picture, and asked the person who took the picture to tell us why she took the picture and what this picture represented for her. Posing open-ended questions allowed participants to share their ideas. Each participant joined in the discussion making comments about pictures that had been taken by other participants.

As noted above, during this workshop I realized that we had become closer and more comfortable with each other. We shared more about our lives and our encounters in what could be called a foreign country.

Workshop 3

Workshop three was dedicated to arranging the thoughts and themes that had emerged in the past two workshops together in a collaborative art-work. I chose to use collage as this art form that does not require artistic abilities, as scholars had argued above. In collage the participants simply cut and paste images from magazines onto a cardboard while sharing their stories. This part of the workshop was exciting. Everyone enjoyed the idea of using their hands

to create an art-work together. I also asked the questions that I was not able to ask during the first focus group.

Once again I hosted this workshop in my house, and though it was not required or expected, one of the participants wanted to bring soup to this workshop. This dish was a very delicious Thai soup while I prepared a very traditional Turkish soup. We shared our foods and our stories. While we were having our lunch, we talked about the collage, and I explained how the workshop was going to be conducted.

For this workshop I gave each participant several magazines and different colours of cardboard to choose from. Participants picked the yellow cardboard for the collage. I told participants to think about the previous workshops and the topics we talked about, and to pick the images that best represented their experiences while they related their stories within GSS. After the participants cut some images, they pasted them on the cardboard while they described what their images represented to them, and why they placed them on the cardboard.

Data Analysis

The data analysis uses a combination of different approaches, methodologies, and methods since this was not only a qualitative study, but also a feminist arts-based study. Keeping that in mind, I did a fair amount of research on how to analyze the data. I began by looking at various models on how to read qualitative data. I continued looking at feminist and arts-based research. In the end I realized that this study was too complex to adopt any one model to analyze my data. I needed to incorporate specific parts of a few models into my analyzing process.

As stated, I began my research looking at different approaches on how to read qualitative data. I read Mason (1996), Kirby and McKenna (1989), Ryan and Bernard (2000), Silverman

(2000), and Weitzman (2000). All these researchers guided and inspired me during the data analysis process. Even though I was interested in Weitzman's ideas on using software in a data analysis process, since I had art pieces to analyze, I used software programs very little. I used software programs in transcribing, storing, marking the words, texts, and paragraphs.

Before I started my analysis, I came across Mason's (1996) points on thinking about "what counts as data or evidence in relation to [my] research questions" (p. 108). I thought about all focus groups interviews, the interview that I carried out with one of the participants, the pictures that were taken by the participants, and the collective collage art data in this study. I began my analyzing process by transcribing the discussions from the three workshops. While transcribing, I realized that I had a great deal of data, but that I needed to remember Mason's (1996) 10 points, and look for the data that pertained to his research questions.

I wrote my research questions on a piece of paper in capital letters and put them on the wall above my desk. That helped me to see and keep in mind my research questions while transcribing the data as I was not only transcribing, but also analyzing the text. Ryan and Bernard (2000) points out that during text analysis "investigators examine words, sentences, paragraphs, pages, documents, themes, ideas, meanings, paralinguistic features, and even search for ideas missing from the text" (p. 789). As I transcribed the interviews, I marked the words, sentences and paragraphs that were related to the research questions. Then I really looked at these words, sentences, paragraphs, themes, and what they meant, and how they related to my research questions. Kirby and McKenna (1989) emphasize that participants may not give the answer that the researcher is looking for; however, this too, is germane to the researcher. Kirby and McKenna's point made me look at my data more holistically.

While keeping these points in mind, I created flow charts (to provide a better understanding) in which to analyze my data. Transcribing, while marking words, sentences, and paragraphs helped me to identify recurring themes. For each workshop, I created a chart that included words, sentences, and ideas that connected these themes.

In terms of making meaning of the art pieces, I allowed participants to describe and to relate their experiences and images at GSS. During the second workshop each participant had a chance to take pictures and further describe what her pictures meant to her in relation to GSS and why they took those pictures. While participants were creating the collective collage, each participant talked about the images, and what they meant to her. The interpretations of the art pieces were formed by the participants. The text that I analyzed came from transcribing the two workshops; the data analysis, as explained above, was focused on the bigger picture—the concerns of female international students and the stories and experiences they had during their involvement in GSS.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

As noted in the previous chapter, I used three focus group workshops to collect the data for this study. In the first workshop, we discussed a series of questions that generated initial discussion and ideas around the research question. The second and third workshops included the creation of the artworks and further discussions, plus collective analyses.

This chapter begins with a description of what I call ‘the issue’ of anonymity. Although not a finding per se, it had an impact on the study and is therefore important. After addressing this issue, I outline the major themes of the study that emerged from our collective discussions and analyses of the artworks. The first thematic area is *Support and Belonging* and in this, I look at the place of GSS in graduate students’ lives and also issues of isolation and questions of graduate student age. The second thematic area I have titled *Living out of Focus*. In this theme I explore the issue of culture shock for the graduate students. The third major theme is *Challenges* and within this theme I explore issues of student ‘labels’, language barriers and clashes of expectations. The fourth major thematic area is *Learning Culture*. In this theme I illustrate data showing how learning happens around stereotypes and biases and the value or importance of being ‘open’. The fifth thematic area is *Skills Development*, and in this section I look at what skills participants learned and developed as a result of their experiences. The final thematic area is *On Being Female*. In this section, I look at the advantages or problems raised by the participants on being a female graduate, how they spoke of feminism and also ideas around women’s power and leadership. I include a photograph in each section as this art form was fundamental to the study and captures the themes so well.

The Issue of Anonymity

Before I move into describing the themes as they emerged from the workshops, I need to discuss the issue of ‘anonymity’ as it arose in my study. Research ethics is very clear about protection of human subjects as, I would add, is feminist research and there were some interesting challenges around anonymity in my study (e.g. Reinharz, 1992).

As noted in the previous chapter, I worked with a small group of female international graduate students at UVic. It was impossible to recruit more participants because so often, students conclude their degree and return to their home country or move to another country or city. Having fewer participants than I expected, and working with this small organization (GSS) made anonymity difficult. However, participants made it clear that they did not want to be identified. They wanted to protect their relationship with the people in the organization, which is also very feminine, something I will return to this in the following chapter.

I asked each one to choose a name or pseudonym they wanted me to use in this study. However, even with the use of pseudonyms, anonymity was difficult to maintain. After the participants read through the transcriptions, they expressed concerns relating to anonymity. We had conversations about this via email where I made it clear they could remove anything they did not want to share or felt would identify them. Therefore, participants removed some parts wherein they believed they could be identified. However, I could feel that they were still concerned. I reread the transcripts and highlighted sections where I believed they could be identified; my suggestion was to remove those sections. Participants agreed, and I went ahead and removed all controversial sections.

Despite losing some of the data, I still believe this was a valuable study and many significant ideas around women international graduate students and their learning and leadership emerged from the workshops. I now move to these.

Support and Belonging

The first question I asked during the first workshop was how and why we all got involved with GSS. The responses of the participants were very similar and they all focussed on finding supportive spaces and what we called ‘belonging’. In fact, the GSS building has two rooms students can book for free and part of the restaurant is separated for graduate students who want to study, chat, or play games.

Sarah stated that she decided to attend sessions at GSS simply because it was a “place to go. There was not a place for graduate students to hang out. I just went to activities sponsored by the GSS.” Others talked about the importance of GSS in terms of providing a physical place for graduate students. For others GSS was a place to make friends and/or find companionship. This was particularly true for me. I had found it difficult to make friends, yet paradoxically, and like the others, I knew a lot of international students from attending classes, talks and other types of activities. But I wanted to make friends, and this for me, for all of us actually, was seen to be a place to do it.

Equally importantly, we were all looking for a place to go after finishing class. Many noted they did not have offices or study carrels on campus and working at home alone, as I will discuss shortly, is lonely and disconnected. And we all knew that we were going to spend a lot of time alone writing.

Isolation and Exclusion



Figure 1- A Long Road

Behind the need for support and a sense of belonging were feelings of isolation and loneliness which we all discussed in the workshops. These problems are of course well represented in studies of international graduate students' experiences in general (e.g. Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Guo & Chase, 2010; Kim, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003).

The image in Figure 1 metaphorically illustrates or captures these feelings we shared through own conversations. The image emerged while we were walking in the downtown area of Victoria, taking pictures for the second focus group. I took this picture as a way to express the essence of loneliness I often felt upon arrival in Canada. To me, it was like walking down an empty street, a long road that seemed to go nowhere. This picture, as I explained to the group, is also about sadness, about being alone, about a change. The path is empty of people and even animals. It is autumn and the trees are turning from green to yellow. Summer is ending. I used

this change of season to represent the sense of loneliness and sadness that I felt because of the vast cultural change of Canada.

Having said this, aesthetic visuals and images are never ‘static’, never continuing solely with only one meaning but are ‘made’ upon each reading (Rose, 2001). Images of a new season and an empty road can also imply a new beginning, a new adventure in life; the excitement of a journey. The roles we played in GSS helped us to make connections, develop friendships, and learn every day. This was true for others and I will return to this later in this chapter.

Through our conversations, we uncovered two main reasons behind our sense of loneliness and sadness. The first was language. Many of us spoke English as a second language, and although we joined GSS to learn how to be leaders and advocate on behalf of graduate students, the difficulty of working in English inhibited our abilities to grasp fully the policies or the rights we had as students which in turn we felt limited our leadership possibilities. I will return to the issue of language later in this chapter, but let me continue now with the issue of leadership and how it expands the issues of loneliness and isolation.

The Question of Age

What is interesting, or perhaps better said surprising, in this study, is that one student spoke about the challenge of age in relation to isolation and this is not something I came across in the literature. Sarah was an older student than the rest of us and she noted how: “Being from so far away *and older* is isolating.” Her age became a source of isolation and she said that “I did not fit in there, and I was not young.” She was talking about programmes and activities that target international students in general but she argued “the voice of mature students is missing on

campus and yet the demographic of graduate students is totally changing. Students are a lot older now. I think universities need to be extra sensitive to that.”

No place at the table

Figure 2 is an image by “Y”, her chosen pseudonym. While it also speaks to a sense of loneliness, of isolation, it also metaphorically questions our place and role within the leadership of GSS.



Figure 2 -Table

Y took this photograph when we were together in a mall. The image of a large table represents part of her experience as a leader in GSS. She described it like this:

It is such a big table, yet no one is sitting around it. Everyone is walking by and it is busy.

It felt the same [at the GSS]. It is a busy place but you are alone. There is this big table.

People are supposed to sit down, talk, and discuss everything, but sometimes I felt that at

GSS not everyone has the equal right to talk, to make decisions, and to express opinions. At the beginning you thought it is place everyone could talk and share their ideas.

It was interesting just how many of the women in the study felt lonely even though many people surrounded them in GSS, and they had a 'responsible' position within the organisation. The place that was supposed to provide companionship, where we went to for support and that sense of belonging - and of course did provide this at times - was also a place of isolation, of empty chairs, of emptiness. The reasons for this were complex but they basically came down to feeling, as international students and women, that we were somehow and often, paradoxically, left out of decision-making. Y referred to this as being in a leadership role but in essence, not having "any power within the organisation." It is therefore very fitting that the image she chose to represent this was a table at which she did not sit, a leader of no one.

Living out of focus

One of the big issues that international students experience is what they call 'culture shock' and this aspect is again well presented in the literature (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003). Scholars argue it is perhaps inevitable that the majority of people who move to another country – although this can also happen when moving from rural to urban areas in ones own country as well – feel an acute sense of 'shock'. One can also argue that the discourse of culture shock, whilst helping to explain, may also create a self-fulfilling prophecy and I will return to this in the next chapter. This image metaphorically represents the concept of culture shock, or what I have called 'living out of focus', as we explored it through the camera lens.



Figure 3- The Earring

It is not so much what is in the photograph, although that matters too, but rather, the ‘art’ of the photograph that illustrates the sense of culture shock, of what I call ‘living out of focus’. If you look carefully at the image, you will note that flower in the earring is upside down. You also note that the image is quite blurry, deliberately out of focus and lacking clarity of detail. Taking this further, the weave gives one the feeling of riding on a rough sea; it is not all sailing on the calm of a beautiful sunny day. Alternatively for Sarah this image metaphorically brings different cultures together; her metal earring from Mexico rests on Y’s soft scarf from China. Juxtaposing of the metal – metaphorically the difficulties and challenges – with the soft fabric – finding

friendship and companionship, a warm place of caring speaks to the good and bad of experiences new culture.

Extending the metaphor, we can think of the earring as ourselves and the blanket as GSS. GSS is what is known in Canada as a non-profit organization and I had not had any connection in Turkey with these types of organisations – nor had many of my participants -- although they do exist. In addition, GSS is a student run/lead organization. None of us had been part of the student bodies in our home countries during our undergraduate years.

Reading the transcripts I have realized we also talked about the weather as being different, with Sarah noting how she missed lightening. “It kind of struck me that the weather here [in Victoria] is moderate. They don’t get anything big here.” We also talked about food and traditions and how it changes from country to country. We were excited to be able to share the things we missed. We recognized how this feminist research process provided us a basis to talk about home, about things we were seldom given the opportunity to talk about. It was a useful sharing process for both participants and the study itself and I will speak to this in the final chapter.

Challenges

The ‘student’ label

During the first focus group, participants brought up the issue of ‘student’ label. They wanted to clarify the differences between being an undergraduate student as compared to being a graduate student. In one discussion Sarah and Y commented on the power dynamic that being a student situation created. Sarah pointed that “...since you are labeled ‘student,’ they treat you like you have not been out in the world and you do not know as much as them.” In this

conversation Sarah as a mature graduate student expressed that she needed to be treated as a graduate student, which is different than being treated as an undergraduate student. Similarly Y also mentioned that her ideas and thoughts were not taken into consideration. She thinks that this also because of the 'student' label.

As I mentioned in previous chapters, international graduate students all have a bachelor degree and some work experience. Their experience of life gives them some knowledge and experience which should not be ignored or underestimated just because they are students. Unfortunately I have seen many friends going through the same experience which is being treated as an undergraduate student.

Language

Another significant barrier or isolating factor for graduate students, according to studies and our own experiences, was language. This is of course well represented in the literature on studies of international students as well (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Kim, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003).

Since English is our second language, for me and one other participant, speaking English was a barrier and a challenge during our involvement in GSS. Y noted that "Also the language was an issue. Sometimes people talk and you do not understand. They talk too fast. Also if they are talking about different terms, it is difficult." I agreed with what Y said during the discussion:

The language was a barrier. Also during the committee meetings, I advocated for several changes that were important for graduate students. It was so difficult since it was not my first language. It was difficult to find and use appropriate language. Sometimes I could

feel that people do not understand what I mean, and they get nervous. I did advocate for graduate students but it was difficult.

This finding is aligned directly with other studies. In the literature, one of the biggest challenges that international students experience is speaking and understanding the language of host country (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Guo & Chase, 2010; Kim, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003).

Interestingly in this study, however, speaking English as a first language was not always an advantage. One of the participant's first language is English and this had its own disadvantages:

(...) people forget I am an international student. I do not get a lot of explanations. People think I already know certain things. They do not realize it is not only different country, it is also an island. That becomes a hindrance. I am often left out, because a lot of the international stuff is geared towards people who need help learning the language.

Differently, however, from other participants she did not have a problem with understanding what people were talking about or representing her ideas. Yet she is not from Canada and she was experiencing culture shock similar to other international students, meaning that culture goes beyond language. In addition, there is an emphasis on UVic's campus on helping international students with their language skills. The International and Exchange Students' Services and Writing centre has special workshops and activities that target international students' language skills. These services are necessary and critical for international students. There need to be other activities that go beyond language skills if we are truly address the issue of culture shock in or through UVic and GSS and I will return to this in the final chapter.

A clash of expectations: The steep learning curve

While I was reading the transcripts, I sometimes felt a sense of disappointment and confusion. Participants had such high hopes for GSS before they began their role in that organization, only to be confronted with a dashing of their expectations. Their experiences were different than their expectations. The image below explains this situation:



Figure 4- The Escalator

This picture was taken at the mall by Y. She thought that the picture of the escalator explained her experience at the GSS.

When I was running for my position, I was really nervous. I was kind of on the bottom of the escalator. In front of 50 people, I talked and got elected. The moment I got elected, I was so excited. I thought that I have a place to talk for myself and people chose me. I was on the top of the escalator. Everything was so excited. After that everything had started. I

did not know what my position is all about. I did not get any information from anyone. I did not know what to do. They started to have the meetings. I did not have any idea about what they were talking about. I did not know the rules. How the chair host the meeting. I did not think I can talk anything.

Metaphorically, Y felt she was on the top of it the moment she got elected. She is illustrating visually how it felt to be successful. However, this feeling did not last very long for her. She soon discovered that she had little idea how GSS worked and was also confused about the role she played in the organization. Also Sarah explained her experience: “I had never been on a board before. They needed some help at GSS, and I wanted to try it. It was good. I never experienced being in a board. I did not know how a board works, or Robert’s Rules. They gave me a binder when I started. I read everything in the binder” (Sarah). Y was not alone as we all talked about not really knowing what we were getting into and about how we had to ‘learn’ constantly and also, alter our expectations to suit the reality.

Learning Culture

Education and learning are central to feminist adult education and leadership discourses. Scholars argue that for women, these should be empowering; feminism should provide them with the ability to understand root causes of issues and problems, to think critically, to problem-solve, to build language and community skills, and to develop their own self-esteem and sense of agency (e.g. Clover & Stalker, 2007; English, 2002; Walters & Manicom, 1996). Informal learning through organisational commitment, scholars such as Foley (1996) argue, provide just such an empowering experience. Of course, organisational experiences, as noted above, can also be very ‘disempowering’ – knowledge, or status, is not always power.

I have divided this broad theme of learning culture into two sections.

Diversity

The first sub-theme in learning culture is learning diversity as illustrated in Figure Five below.



Figure 5- The Colorful Tomatoes

Y cut this picture of tomatoes out of a magazine during the collage-making session of the workshops, and placed it on the card stock with other black and white images. She described the overlay of the image in relation to what she has learned through GSS:

In this picture you can see different colours, and shape of tomatoes. It looks beautiful. If it is only one [shape and colour], you cannot appreciate it and tell the difference. All the difference [shapes and colours] make them pretty. It stands for the multicultural [population] of the GSS and the university. All people are from different background. It can be different board members on the board. Collaboration and being together makes everything beautiful.

In other words, this image represents the beauty of multiculturalism. Even though diversity and multiculturalism are broad terms, participants' understanding of diversity and multiculturalism focused on cultural background, nationality, and race. They did not see these terms in their political contexts (e.g. multiculturalism as a Canadian government term). The choice of colourful tomatoes speaks to the fact that we are not all same, although we are all equally valuable. We have different backgrounds, traditions, cultures and colours – a diversity that in fact is very powerful. This image is overlaid on black and white images. Y and Sarah actually worked together to create the collage of the black and white images to represent the difference between having colour – diversity -- and a lack of diversity. For Y, living and working with such a diverse population, for the first time really in her life, has meant learning to embrace multiculturalism and understand the benefits that can be derived from it Different approaches should indeed be welcomed and taken into consideration in GSS.

Learning empathy: Stereotyping and bias

Nestled within our conversations about learning and diversity were questions around stereotyping and bias, by others but more particularly, ourselves. James and Shadd (2001) write

“everyone stereotypes because it helps us to categorize a vast amount of received information about others” (p. 6). This means that stereotyping is an inevitable part of life but it is something that we may not be totally aware of. While I was expecting participants to talk about the difficulties they had experienced, participants talked about how being an international student made them learn to be more open to understanding of other cultures.

We talked about being on the receiving end of bias, and what we had learned from that as Sarah’s quotation illustrates: “I think that one of the benefits is that our awareness of the difficulties we face made us more compassionate for those going through that experience. It makes you think in a way that other people may not think. I think it is a huge benefit to learn that.” We also acknowledged, however, that we were on the giving end, as Y admitted openly: “There is a history between China and Japan and also China and Taiwan.” I in fact consider myself an open-minded person, but I had biases and assumptions that I brought with me or actually may have formed upon arrival to sort through the vast amounts of information bombarding me and my biases emerged sometimes through my encounters with so many students of different nationalities in GSS. Y shared how, through her role in GSS, she was trying to work as an ‘advisor’ to them, trying to help them become what she called “open and respectful.” We explored together where and how our own stereotypes are formed. Y noted that “in China you hear different things from media and government, but here you can think outside the box.” Media bias is of course true outside China as well. Today’s international politics are complex, and stereotyping is rife. We all depend on what we hear from the media, and therefore learning some critical media skills would be an asset, although there is little space – dare we say appetite? - within GSS to do something like this.

We realised that through our experiences in GSS we were learning to feel a deep sense of empathy for other international students based on our own challenges, in terms of how we were viewed or labelled but more particularly recognising how we might have labelled them.

Skills Development

Another area of learning we explored was in the area of skills development. For Y, GSS enabled her to develop skills she could use later in her life, on the job: “I think it totally helps you. You had the experience of organizing events, and it definitely helps your résumé.”

Similarly for me, my involvement was a great experience to have on my résumé. However, having a position in GSS also contributed to other aspects of my life. It provided me with many opportunities: networking, making friends, improving my understanding of how a non-profit organization works, and how a university works. All of this gave me ideas as to how to conduct this research. The GSS became a big part of my research.

For Sarah, GSS was a place that, although feeling silenced and out of the decision-making as noted above, helped her to augment her communication skills and did provide her with a platform to build her self-esteem:

It just allowed me to be in front of people again. It reminds me that I’m definitely good at public speaking and helping present an idea. . . . To experience being on a board and being able to put forward your ideas, and to have power, and show how to use it . . . that a female can have a voice. . . those have been really good.

In other words, her involvement in GSS allowed her to rediscover her own sense of power, as a student but more importantly, as a woman. For Y, the experience of GSS was

empowering because for the first time, she was able to enter the democratic process, and come out on top: “I competed with other people during the election. It built my confidence. I can win an election. I cannot speak perfect English. Even [though] I am an outsider. I can win an election. I can answer the questions they have.” She attributed this success to having overheard people say that she was “more easy going.” Moreover, she also said that she made people laughed during her speech and she thought that “she can do it”. This was an experience that made her aware of that she is a good public speaker.

On Being Female

Feminism

As an aim of this study was to explore the ‘female’ experience of being international graduate students, I asked whether or not being a female had had an impact on their participation – if they had faced gender discrimination or bias? Even though I did not mention the word feminism in the question, the participants brought up the issue of feminism, how they were treated as women, and also how difficult it is to talk about feminist issues.

Today it is common to think that men and women are equal; however, the responses of the participants indicated that there is still long way to go. Discrimination against women continues to be happening, even in the confines of GSS and the University of Victoria. For example, Sarah underlined the dynamic between men and women in UVic and GSS: “I found the roles that men and women are supposed to play are very old-fashioned compared to what I am used to. It is very much structured for the men to be running things.” She connected this with feminist movement and she noted how she felt, “feminism is viewed as something negative.” Similarly I found that being a woman and talking about feminism was difficult: “It is as if you

are not allowed to talk about it. If you talk about it, people say, what do you expect? Do you expect to be treated differently?” On the other hand, for Y there were no advantages or disadvantages of being a woman. Later during the third focus group she talked about women and the power and I will continue with this section.

Women’s Power and Leadership

During the third focus group, one of themes that emerged was women and power. Participants selected pictures that show women’s power, and what women are capable of doing. They picked these images by thinking about their experiences in GSS. Here are the images they picked to paste on the cardboard:

capture with this image is that women from different backgrounds can play leadership roles and be successful.

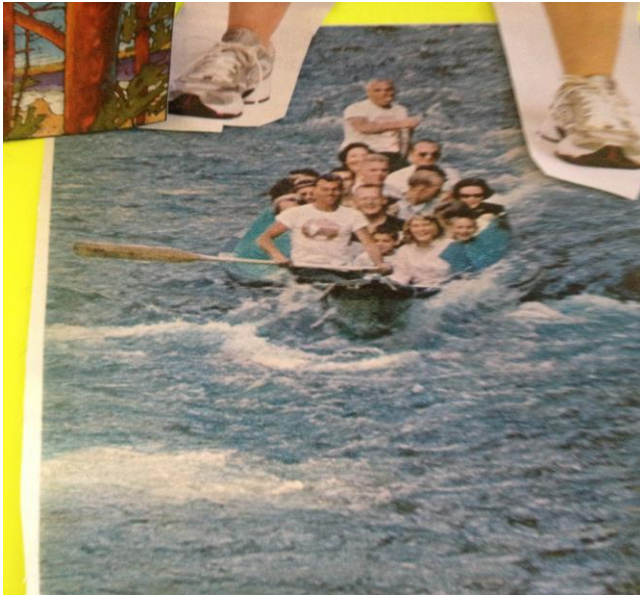


Figure 7- Boat

I agreed with the participants—that women have power and strength to do things in life. As Sarah mentioned before the role that women play was described one more time by this collage as being traditional. To change that we need to have more women who are feminist playing leadership roles in the GSS and in the Society. Sarah concluded this conversation by referring to the boat image in the Figure 7. She said that “In this picture, look at who is at the front and at the back—men. What are the women doing? Women are in the middle. There is power and strength in it, but we need to start putting women in this boat”. What Sarah wants to explain is that there are women in the boat but they are in the middle of the boat, they are not leading. She wants to see more women who take the lead.

The Story of the Collage

The images in this collage work represented participants' experiences in the GSS and at the University of Victoria. We decided to work together on this piece of artwork, because, as scholars argue, individual artwork tells 'a' story, collective arts works can bring us together and provide a collective story, what I call the bigger picture of our experiences (e.g. Clover & Stalker, 2007). Individual experiences, as feminists argue, can be in fact shared experiences, while they are deeply personal, they are also highly political (English, 2002; Walters & Manicom, 1996). What I mean by political in this study is the power dynamic in the organizations, leadership roles female graduate students play, and advocacy work they do in the GSS. For example, during this study participants brought up the issue of power with the metaphor of empty table which stand for not being part of decision making process.

In general, for me, what this collage represents is hope for the future. Participants chose the bright yellow colour card stock. I felt, it is a vibrant and happy colour. This represents the fact that overall, as alluded to above, our experience in GSS and UVic have been good for all of us. Further examination of the collage shows an image of sunset or sunrise at the left side of the card stock. Whether it is a sunset or sunrise it represents the new beginning. Our term in GSS has ended and that means new experiences are ahead of us. At the end of the process of making the collage Y mentioned that "our conversation every week evolves to something" and the collage was the last part of that process and it kind of summarized our three weeks journey.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

I conducted this research to explore female international graduate students' experiences in Graduate Students' Society at University of Victoria. I was involved in GSS for two years before I acquired a position on the Executive Board and became interested then in the experiences of other women who are involved in GSS. During my involvement I faced many challenges, however, overall, my experiences have had a positive effect on my social and academic life

As a participant and researcher of this study, and having been inspired by my own involvement in GSS, my involvement showed me that every student's experience is unique—a discovery that made this study rich and meaningful. While I was writing the chapter that discussed the results of my enquiries, I learned to accept, and further, welcome the diverse experiences of each participant. In fact, during the first workshop I began by simply asking questions I had prepared – my 'set' agenda which perhaps could be seen in some circumstances as not all that 'feminist'. However, using the art-based methodology allowed me to let go; it became a means to enable the participants themselves to change the questions in a co-constructed manner and to reveal experiences in ways that I had not foreseen, making it both challenging and exciting and for me, more feminist (a co-investigator, equal power, etcetera). I took a feminist stance in this study. According to Burns and Chatler (2011) one of the feminist researcher's characteristics is that "[...] researcher and researched sharing the same gender or on the basis of similar experiences..." (p. 72). In this research as a female international graduate student, I focused on experiences of female international graduate students. This situation created a more

equal power dynamic in the process of data collection and greater understanding during the data analysis as is suggested by feminist researchers (Reinharz, 1992).

As noted in Chapters Two and Four, many scholars have conducted research on the complexities of graduate international students experience adjusting to host countries' university system and culture, although few on women have been represented (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Guo & Chase, 2010; Kim, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003). My study aligns with many of their findings, suggesting on the one hand that some experiences are normative; What I mean by normative is female international graduate students experience loneliness, isolation, marginalization, barriers such as culture shock, and speaking English as a second language. This is not surprising and it is part of being an international student. But on the other hand, we need to make changes. This study in particular looked at female international graduate students' experiences in GSS, therefore, the changes I suggest will focus on female international graduate students and their role in GSS. In this chapter I explore key aspects of the exchange of ideas amongst the participants, including myself as a researcher-participant, relating these experiences to theories in Chapter two and the impact on their/our own lives. I focus on four areas. The first is the role GSS play, in particular, inherent sexism and its implications for change and women's leadership. The second is feminism, how it was taken up in this study and what it means for the above. The third is learning. I discuss how we 'learn'. In particular, I take up the potential of this learning vis-à-vis diversity and difference, but also, the potential problems of these individualized processes. The fourth area is the arts. I speak about the value of metaphors and the arts and explore how they contributed to other research with international students.

The Personal/Politics of GSS

Studies show that student involvement in extracurricular activities has a positive effect on student academic success, and in their lives in general as students in terms of their well-being (Astin, 1993; Baker, 2007; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1993). Others acknowledge there is a political aspect to all student engagement in on-campus organisations. For example, Coulter, Goin, and Gerard (2004) identify the political role that students' organizations, and therefore, students play: "a) advocate on behalf of students, b) identify issues that are important to graduate students, [and] c) ensure that the concerns of graduate students are addressed" (p. 17). What I mean by politics of GSS is the leadership and advocacy role that female international graduate students play in this organization, and power dynamic and decision making process of the organization. So where does my study fit and what does it add to these understandings?

To begin, what GSS provided for us was a place to go to on campus, a place that provided networking for career enhancement, but more importantly friendship opportunities. Many of the participants in this study were drawn to the organization, as the photographs illustrated so well, because they were lonely, culture shocked and in need of a support group. With the opportunities of networking, socializing, and sharing it has been a personally fulfilling space, not the least because of the learning that occurred, something I take up later in this chapter. This means to me that spaces such as GSS can and are important to the well-being of those who find themselves amongst strangers.

GSS was also a place where we were able to explore the challenge of the 'student' label in terms of power and empowerment, using arts-based strategies such as the image of the empty

table, International students, and I am speaking now of graduate students, are highly accomplished people. UVic in fact has high requirements for entry and we bring valuable work and life experiences. However, literature is lacking on graduate students' knowledge and abilities. I feel this is an issue that needs to be looked at closely and I will return to this in the conclusions. GSS is not a place where the 'student' label is a problem. We are in fact powerful in that organization because we are students – it is our organization and in and through it, we have a strong collective voice. I will refer to this strength later in this chapter. The question, therefore, is how do we reach out to more female international graduate students, and bring them into GSS and make this a positive experience for them. I share some ideas on this in the final chapter. However, there can be little doubt that all is not well in GSS. There is a 'politics' that has a very negative impact and needs to be highlighted and named.

Equally importantly to meeting personal needs, my participants and I joined GSS to make a difference in the lives of other graduate students. In fact, we joined the Executive Board, and did not just remain as 'members' specifically to advocate on behalf of graduate students. In other words, our reasons for joining, whilst personal on the one hand, were in fact quite political. We wanted to have power, the power to make changes on the campus on behalf of students who had/were confronting the same challenges we ourselves faced. But having a power to speak up and advocate for students was often thwarted and this is where one of the problems lies.

Feminist leadership scholars and adult educators often speak of the 'silence' of women (Clover, 2007; Walters & Manicom). While some argue quite rightly that silence can be seen as a form of defiance or resistance, more often and more problematically, women have been socially conditioned, particularly from Asian countries in the case of this study, to keep their ideas to themselves, to stay in the background. And in fact, participants spoke a great deal about speaking

out. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, we joined the GSS Board because we felt we had ideas, we had something to say and to share, thanks in part to the feminist movement which is highly complex and opportunities and the strength it had given us as women. However, time and again, as noted in Chapter four, we talked about the difficulty of getting people to listen to our opinions or to take our ideas into consideration. The women in this study, including myself, attribute our exclusion and silencing to many facts but a key one is that we are women. My participants drew attention to the fact that when the men spoke up in meetings, there was a very different response – they were listened to. In fact, in many situations it is all too stereotypical. Language is clearly an issue here, and that was acknowledged in this study and also, in studies by other scholars (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Kim, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003). There is no doubt that a lower capacity to function fully in the vernacular leads to marginalization, whether in the classroom, GSS or the community. However, marginalization based on the inability to speak English fluently was challenged in this study. Remember, one of the participants was fluent; English was her first language. She was articulate, relatively unafraid to speak out, and a member of the board with ‘power’ and standing. Yet she too felt marginalised and excluded. Again, we could raise the question of her being ‘international’ – she was not Canadian, but then neither were some of the men on the board.

There is another reason for marginalization. We could also say that non-familiarity with the rules of being on a board was detrimental, as highlighted in Chapter Four. But we learned those rules, we studied the manuals and read the minutes and yet, there was still ‘something’ missing between us and the power and respect we had expected from being on the board. So when we remove or challenge these variables, we are left with the conclusion we came to in this study – pervasive and embedded sexism. Of course, one of the problems in saying this is that

there are no studies on women graduate students and therefore, nothing I can turn to, to support this assertion. However, I stand by my interpretation even though this study is singular and quite small.

Forms of Feminism

Having argued this, I need to turn to women and feminism and how this was manifest in this study and the implications. Even though the issue is highly complex, the reason that participants felt excluded, marginalized, silenced was mainly because they were women. Yet I remember a moment when I was discussing my learning experiences through GSS when Sarah made it clear that her experience was very much different from mine. What I take from this is that while we had the common ground of being 'female' our individual experiences were not the same and as feminists argue, we cannot ever simply reduce everything to 'gender'. By that I mean that, in addition to being women, there are questions of race, ability, nationality, sexual orientation, and so forth in the equation (e.g. Manicom & Walters, 2012). We must never forget that 'women' is not a homogenous category, that inter-sectionality defines who we are and the challenges we will face individually. This leads me back to the above and to a broader, albeit troubling discussions of feminism.

My findings showed that gender issues found in GSS and on campus were a very important factor for the participants. In the third focus group, participants picked many images that related to women and gender issues. Because looking at the role of women in was an important piece of my research, I was not surprised by the images that were chosen by the participants, nor by the conversation we had surrounding gender issues. Even though participants did not openly reveal whether they are feminist or not, one of the participants made it clear that feminist movement is missing on campus and the role men and women play is stereotypical.

Other participants talked about how the feminist movement is seen as something negative on campus. Every participant addressed ideas of feminism, and women's role in the organization and on campus; they discussed the power, or lack of it, for women, and women in leadership positions within the contexts of GSS and beyond. These discussions exposed the importance and the significance of investigating experiences from women's perspectives.

Feminism/feminist adult education and research are basically about improving women's conditions, encouraging them to think critically about oppression and domination and to see themselves as agents of change in their own lives and the society (Bloom, 1998; Hooks, 2000; Manicom & Walters, 2012; Olesen, 2000; Reinharz, 1992). Participants expected to see feminist considerations on campus. What I mean by feminist consideration is creating an environment where women are not excluded and marginalized and are powerful enough to speak. However, participants said that over time they found in conversations in GSS and on campus that feminism seemed to be viewed as a negative concept. Even though participants did not give specific examples, they stated that they experienced a sense of opposition from the community at UVic when they brought up gender issues or feminism. Their big concern was what they sensed as the absence of feminist movement and approach in the communities in which they lived. They wanted to see more women playing leadership roles in the university and the community, even if not all of them end up with feminist stand. After all, not every woman is a feminist. Any sense of a feminist or women's movement was missing in the community they were. Equally important, participants raised the issue of diversity such as seeing more women from different backgrounds working together. As I mentioned above gender cannot be seen in isolation from race and other social constructions.

Hooks (2000) believes “feminists are made, not born...like all political positions one becomes a believer in feminists’ politics through choice and action” (p.7). She draws attention to the role of education and how it can exclude and silence or be a space of empowerment and consciousness raising, although it can act as both at the same time if we take GSS that empowers us on one hand, but silences us on the other. How can GSS move towards a more feminist understanding and thereby, empower its members and promote an equity stance that includes feminist principles across campus? I do not know the answer, but my understanding from the data is that it is a critical question to address and consider for GSS and UVic. Raising the question today also challenges views of many people who think that the feminist movement happened decades ago and therefore, no longer applies.

The Potential and Challenge of Learning

The above discussion quite naturally brings me to the issues of education and learning, because education and learning plays an important role in women’s lives Clover and Stalker (2008) and other feminist scholars such as Manicom and Walters (2012) explore oppression and empowerment in women’s lives. In their discussions related to women and power, they highlight the importance of learning and of education in terms of the roles they can play in helping women to find their own voice and sense of self/agency.

When my participants and I first joined GSS they/we spoke of having a deficit in terms of understanding how student organizations worked, and also, for most of us at least, in communicating effectively in English. However, as time went by the women in this study learned informally about the organization, and its policy, rules, and regulations by attending to meeting, talking to colleagues, and reading the organizations’ policy. I remember reading the

policy of the organization and the university several times in order to be able to play a better my role in the organization as did other participants. We were motivated to learn because I/we felt empowered as we learned more about the role we played. Clearly, we were self-directed learners, determined to take our own learning in to our own hands and become as knowledgeable about what was needed as we could. We focussed heavily on this pragmatic, individual practice of learning. Also simply being involved in the organization created many informal learning opportunities to practise and improve our communication skills and our knowledge of the organization, during the board meetings, committee meetings and even social events. For example, during the events and meetings we had a chance to talk to other graduate students. Indeed, GSS is a good space for individual learning opportunities for the participants. Individual learning, self-directed learning is considered by many scholars to be a key aspect of adult education and in many ways it was for us (Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003). We learned everything informally, from graduate students' rights to how to advocate for them on campus, from how to organize events to Robert's Rules of Order.

Participants' individual learning experiences were also not limited to GSS per se. We learned about diversity from being in the multicultural environment of GSS. James and Shadd (2001) suggests that "it is often said that 'everyone stereotypes' because it helps us to categorize a vast amount of received information about others" (p. 6). However, people are not usually aware of their biases, and this was our case. We were not, I feel, fully aware when we came together of the biases we faced and also held at least not the larger picture. But being international students in the multicultural environment of GSS presented us with an experience and a situation that taught us the dangers, and pain, of judging and stereotyping and being judged and stereotyped. There was not a formal learning on diversity. Participants explained that they

learned not to stereotype because they interacted with people from all over the World and realized that ideas they have about other cultures or people from other countries do not match their experiences. Also I and other participants experienced that people were biased towards us, the country, and/or the culture to which we belonged. These experiences taught us to think about how we ourselves judged or stereotyped. I think this was one of the most significant learning experiences that we had had as women, and it made us better for it.

Yet, learning the rules, and learning as individuals is not enough to counter deeper problems. While some feminist adult educators argue that it is of primary importance that we focus on the individual processes of learning and growth, others believe that the end product for women must be systemic changes and this emerges from intentional, collective learning (Walters & Manicom, 1997). And yet the women in this study seldom found the time because of other responsibilities such as being a graduate student, being part of the executive board, and also roles they play as women in their family and society. Also they did not have the places or opportunities, to come together to learn, certainly nothing like the opportunity this small research project allowed. Can we make the changes required just by learning or do we need (collective, intentional, educational spaces)? I think having a place for women to come together and learn collectively is very important. For example, women should come together and discuss the role they play in GSS and this would be catalyst for change. It is a question I will return to later in the recommendation section.

Metaphor and the Arts

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the arts. A growing number of feminist scholars are helping women to use the arts to explore the issues they face more creatively (Butterwick, 2002; Clover, 2010). What I did in my study, as I noted in the review of literature, was very different from most studies of international graduate and undergraduate students. Those studies were often qualitative, but they seldom – Etmanski (2007) a notable exception - included the arts as a means of making meaning and understanding our lives and volunteer work in an organization. But I believe that using the arts is important for four reasons as they emerged from this study.

To begin, using arts- based research in this study as methodology provided a deeper understanding of the experiences of participants as women, and of how they saw the world metaphorically. In the first focus group I did not use arts as a method, as I aimed to get a basic and general sense of participants' experiences. Our conversation was more general and even. In second group with the help of photo elicitation we had a chance to develop a deeper understanding of the issues we faced and create metaphorically what this female international graduate students' experiences looked like. Metaphor allows us to use our imaginations and creativity to express our thoughts and experiences. In our daily life and also in various arts forms we use metaphors to describe a situation, person, or object. In this study participants used metaphors to explain their experiences using images such as photographs to talk about women and power

In other words, as Alcazar and Dyck (2011) suggest, arts-based work such as photo elicitation using photos to enable participants to think differently, can capture the 'unspoken' ideas, things we cannot necessarily put in to words or when in words, do not convey the depth of

emotion such as pain or excitement or exclusions that metaphoric images can, such as the single, lonely table, the empty road ahead. Moreover, suddenly with cameras in hand, participants were able to capture concepts such as power dynamics in the organization, and self-development and these are the themes that are really important and reflects their experiences, things they did not articulate well but metaphorically captured powerfully. The sense of empowerment they felt and the ways in which it encouraged and deepened the conversations made me realise how important this creative activity was to their ability to articulate complex ideas and make links between abstract concepts – marginalisation – and the concrete – e.g., an empty place at the table.

But the artwork was not just about cognition. During this process of making collage participants not only used their imaginations but also their entire bodies, to move about the room, choose different images from the magazines, cut them out, glue them together and so forth. The arts provide an embodied way of learning that I think I was not quite cognizant of until I undertook this study. The process of using images allowed participants to use their hands and artistic abilities to create an art piece that proved to be a more holistic response to complex issues. The aspect of embodiment is well highlighted in feminist literature (e.g. Butterwick, 2002) and deserves closer attention in future studies.

The arts also provided us with the opportunity to go beyond the words and discover new meanings about our experiences. Scholars argue this is something valuable when working with people who speak different languages (Clover, 2009). Using arts provided us an environment where we could communicate without thinking about the barriers of speaking English as a second language. Instead we used images to reflect our opinions.

Finally, participants had fun. They were very excited to take pictures, use their hands, creativity, and imagination. There was lots of laughter. Arts educators such as Hooper-Greenhill

(2007) suggest we learn better and remember more if we are motivated through enjoyment. Indeed, talking about difficult issues such as exclusion is challenging and personal; therefore, bringing in humour and creativity can help people to reflect upon these in more positive, less personally debilitating ways. Humour, fun and creativity do not take away from the seriousness; they simply provide a more engaging and enjoyable means to explore issues of personal importance (Roy, 2000). I would also argue that as a result of having fun together we became closer, quickly more familiar with each other and eventually developed strong and lasting friendships. For women it is important to make connections with other women to change the world and end the oppression of women.

Through this study, my knowledge of arts-based research has been expanded greatly. And to see the possibilities that arts could create was very powerful in developing deeper understandings of issues for female international students and in encouraging systemic change.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final chapter I share my final thoughts, make some suggestions for future research, and give recommendations to the Graduate Student Society.

This study explored female international graduate students' experiences in the Graduate Students' Society at the University of Victoria. This journey started when I questioned my own experience in the Graduate Students' Society as a female international graduate student. I became curious and eager to learn about what this experience looked like for other women. As noted in the introduction, my main inspiration to focus on female international graduate students' experiences was a panel where I attended as a guest speaker. I had a chance to talk about the challenges I had been experiencing, but I felt that these issues needed be explored further. Yet, in early stages of this research I realized there was a gap in the literature: The female international graduate students' involvement in students' organizations, particularly in the Graduate Students' Society at University of Victoria, had not been explored. To provide better a service and to improve the conditions and success of female international graduate students, this research was needed.

This research explored the learning experiences of the participants, and their understanding of feminism and GSS politics by using an arts-based methodology. The overall question that guided this study was: How does female international graduate students' involvement with student organizations, particularly the Graduate Students' Society, as well as other activities around the campus, shape their learning experiences?

Recruiting female international graduate students who were involved in GSS in past five years was difficult because usually international students do not stay in the City of Victoria after their graduation. Since I used arts-based methods I needed my participants to attend three focus groups that I conducted. Three international female graduate students, including myself were involved in this study. I was a participant and a researcher at the same time. Even though the number of the participants was limited, this aspect of the research did not impact the amount of data I collected. The data collection process included three focus groups; in the first focus group I collected data through questions and group discussion. Photo elicitation was used to collect data in the second focus group, and participants created the collective collage in the third focus group.

Learning from the study

My idea of research was transformed through this process. I had an agenda before I started this study. However, as I engaged in the process, my experience and findings shifted beyond my expectations. As noted above, the reason I engaged in this research was my own experience, my own involvement in GSS. I was in the executive board for a year, previous to this position I also volunteered in the organization. All these experiences, familiarity, and knowledge certainly shaped this study. At the beginning of the study I thought that participants' experiences would be similar to mine, and while at times this was true, at others, it was not because each of us experienced something different at some point or another. When I look at the questions I prepared for the first focus group and my findings chapter, I can see how my ideas evolved about the result of this study. What I learned from this experience is to welcome and make a room for different ideas and point of views. To shift my understanding was a difficult but beneficial experience. I think every researcher encounters unexpected situations and results, however, in

my case I was a researcher and a participant and this allowed me to explore my own experiences. This was an important skill that I learned during this study; to enjoy and to learn from others, and the process itself.

This study also contributed to enriching my knowledge of the arts, feminism, and student organizations. I have been an international graduate student for the past four years. I have an idea about the problems that international graduate students face. In general, as many scholars underlined, students experience loneliness, isolation, and culture shock (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010; Guo & Chase, 2010; Kim, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003). This study was a confirmation of these facts but it also brought a different approach to the issue. First of all international graduate students are a diverse population and universities need to address this fact and respond to students' needs accordingly. In this study particularly the feelings of isolation were beyond having or not having English as a second language, they were a result of age but more specifically, gender dynamics.

As many researchers underlined there is a strong connection between involvement in extracurricular activities and students' success, arguing the positive effect this can have on their studies and in their lives (Astin, 1993; Baker, 2007; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1993; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, Trenzini, 1999). This was confirmed in my study. Being part of GSS gave them/us a sense of belonging, a place to go, opportunities for career development and networking, and a ground to improve their self-esteem.

Furthermore, informal learning itself took place during our experience in the GSS as well as in the focus groups. Involvement in student organizations is not deeply explored; especially the experiences of female international students within organizations. There is little research on

female international students' involvement and its effects and contribution to their learning processes. It was clear that participants learned informally about how a students' organization works by having a role in the organization. Mostly what they did was pragmatic and individual learning such as reading the policies and rules. Equally important they gained some important life skills and went through a process of self-discovery. Most importantly, participants were exposed to diversity in the multicultural environment of GSS. The women in this study, including myself, revealed that they became more open to other cultures and learned from the diverse populations of the GSS as a result of the involvement.

Scholars believe that exposing women to informal learning provides them with the opportunity to grow and change (English, 2002; Foley 1999). Although the women in this study went through somewhat of a transformation in their involvement with GSS, their experiences were not entirely empowering. Many still felt silenced, powerless and could not fully play the political role they had taken. They had difficult time to get people to consider and to listen to their opinions. This situation occurred for several reasons: As I mentioned in chapter five not being Canadian, speaking English as second language, and most importantly being a woman were the main facts that made participants feel silent and marginalized.

The research study became a strong, empowering, and transforming experience. We became more comfortable with one another, and had in-depth conversations during the focus groups. I remember one that went on for four hours. This showed me how much we were willing, or perhaps desperate, to talk, to share our experiences and stories. I was happy to see that this research provided a space for participants to talk not only about their experiences in the GSS but also to share about their home country and culture. What happened during these focus groups was as Clover (2007) says "women learned to break the silence" (p.84). In fact, sharing problems

collectively and out loud sometimes is difficult, but these processes allow women's voices to be heard. This process provided us with an opportunity to talk and critically think about our experiences which is a first step for transformation in women's lives. Equally important as participants shared their experiences, they realized how their experiences are similar and the most importantly they are not alone in this journey. This was very empowering for them as well as for me. We talked a lot about how this experience changed us in terms of our understandings of GSS, power dynamics, and women and leadership to name but a few areas. It also inspired us to think about the next steps we are going to take in our lives.

Feminist adult education aims to empower women and to transform their lives (Clover & Stalker, 2007; Walters & Manicom, 1996). At the beginning of this study I could not imagine the impact that feminist adult education create on the participants. However, I have witnessed and experienced the possibilities of feminist adult education. It was so powerful that during the process participants shared stories, listened, empathized with each other, and most importantly felt that there were other people out there who had similar experiences. As a result some of us felt empowered and took actions in our workplaces. Having a feminist adult education lens in this study created a ground for empowerment and transformation for the participants. I am sure the change they create will open the door for many more possibilities.

Arts- Based Research

Arts played an important role in this research. I used arts-based research to explore experiences of female international graduate students. Even though there is various arts forms available to use in arts- based research, I chose to focus on metaphorical explanations of images. I used photo elicitation and collage as an inquiry. I gave participants a chance to explore their

experiences metaphorically through creating and picking images. Using arts as a research method contributed to this study in four different ways

First of all using arts-based research as a methodology provided a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges that female international graduate students' face. I used photo elicitation in the second focus group. Participants were in charge of taking photographs, they were the photographers and this allowed participants to capture as Alcazar and Dyck (2011) suggest "unspoken" ideas and beyond that powerful images that explain their situations the best. The themes that they did not articulate during the first focus group such as power dynamics in the organization and self-development came up through using images and participants' interpretation of what images stands for metaphorically. I realized that with the help of images and metaphorical explanations our conversation deepened and help participants to identify the complex ideas and they were able to make link between abstract – marginalisation – and things concrete – an empty place at the table.

Although the metaphorical lens applied to images provided a deeper understanding, I also realized that participants not only used their imaginations but also their entire bodies. Participants looked at different magazines and images, cut them and glue them together to create an art piece. To explain the situation participants used combination of things imagination, artistic abilities, and hands was a more holistic approach. Embodiment is highlighted as valuable by feminist adult education scholars (Butterwick, 2002) and this was my first chance to explore embodied ways of learning with this study. A second aspect of using arts is that it is an inclusive method. The one reason I chose to use an arts-based method was to cross the language barriers that are of course, something the women in this study raised. It was clear that we did not need to worry about articulating our ideas with words. We had a chance to put our ideas forward with

images that we created. Thirdly the arts provided a fun and safe environment where we developed friendships. Participants were excited about this project and using different arts methods. Some of the interesting conversations, discussions, and laughter happened because we were a group of women making art together.

Women and Leadership

It is obvious from the themes that emerged, that the roles that women play in the GSS and the University of Victoria are very important. The participants, particularly during the collage, picked the images that were related to women. There were four images, and they addressed the issues that women faced very well. The themes that participants identified were women and leadership, diversity of women, power of women, and women working together to create change. Participants want to see more women playing leadership roles on campus. It is important for them to see trust in women's power, abilities and skills; to feel that women in leadership positions are getting support. In addition they underlined the importance of having a diverse population of women on campus, women from different backgrounds, and the harmony they can create is significant for those women. Clearly participants want to see feminist perspectives and movement in the university and the community they live in.

Recommendations

As I believe that the Graduate Students' Society at the University of Victoria is an important space, albeit one that needs to change, I make a number of recommendations.

First of all, even though GSS's contribution to students' social lives and networking is unquestionable, the political structure and the power dynamic of the institution are barriers for

female international graduate students' to make their voice heard. This study shows that female international graduate students are silent for several reasons. Speaking English as a second language and not having experience of working in students' organizations played an important role in that. The process of functioning in a second or third language is a long process and the organization itself does not play a role in that process; it is not part of its responsibilities to help students in this matter. The GSS does not have a responsibility for providing more support to students who have difficulties in understanding the structure of the GSS and also their role. Although, GSS has some training for executive board members and the memory book that previous members pass on to the new members, clearly more needs to be done. My suggestion would be to look at some possibilities with female international graduate students to make this process less challenging. Instead of just individual learning, international spaces where women could come together to learn more about the organization and advocate to make their transition smoother would be most useful. Together, they can better learn, question, and critically think about the role GSS plays and the role they play in GSS. This collective voice can make them stronger and help them to feel if not more empowered, at least not alone.

Secondly encouraging more female international graduate students to be involved to the GSS is very important for both the organization and the students. For the organization they must develop a support system where they encourage women executive board members to be able to truly play the critical role they have, they can be more active in their role as leaders and can provide a better service to other graduate students on campus. Also the students' self-esteem will increase, and they will want to create more change in the society. Moreover, more students will be involved to the GSS.

Of course, what these two recommendations lead to is the last recommendation. The issues of sexism and exclusion in the organization must be acknowledged, understood, and dealt with. The issue of race and gender are difficult to talk and be aware of. As discussed in previous sections usually people are not aware of their biases. However, this study shows that those issues need to be addressed. One more time my recommendation will be creating a collective learning and discussion environment where people can specifically talk about those issues and how the structure of the organization itself create and perpetuate them. This will be for sure a bigger challenge to take for the organization and also a subject of bigger study. However, if we, as graduate students, want to live in a just society and create a change, we have to start talking about those issues and make our voices heard without fear.

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Appendix



Appendix A :Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Voices of Female International Graduate Students: A Feminist Art Based Case Study of the University of Victoria Graduate Students' Society* conducted by Fatma Didem Dogus.

Fatma Didem Dogus is a Master of Arts Candidate in the department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria and you may contact me if you have further questions at [REDACTED].

As a Graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in MA masters. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Darlene Clover. You may contact my supervisor at [REDACTED].

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research is gather qualitative data on your insights on being a female international graduate student who has been involved with GSS. The study is interested in understanding the contributions playing a leadership role GSS has made to your academic, social and work life. The study will also explore your learning experiences as a member of GSS.

Importance of this Research

Although there is a growing focus in the literature on women's leadership and learning, and on the experiences of graduate international students, there is a paucity of research on female graduate international students' leadership and learning. Yet women international students who take on leadership roles play an important part in ensuring the academic and social health of the University of Victoria as a whole, and the place of graduate students in particular. There is also little connection made in studies between women student's leadership and their nonformal learning, although we know from studies that nonformal learning is vital to women's sense of self, agency and empowerment. Further, there are few studies that use arts-based research methods with women international students, yet the arts are now understood to be critical tools for giving women a voice and helping them to story and visualize their own experiences, particularly those who struggle with language/writing. This study is important because it will raise the profile of women international students on campus in terms of their leadership roles, contribute to the discourses of community leadership and adult learning and provide a new context for art-based research.

Participants Selection

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a female international graduate student who is or has been involved with GSS at UVic. Your participation is totally voluntary and you have the right to withdraw anytime during the research. Although the study will use an arts-based method, you do not need to be an artist in anyway.

What is involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include three focus group sessions; each will be approximately 1.5 hours in length for a total of 4,5 hours. This research will use an art-based method. You will be given a full introduction to using this method at the first focus group of the study. You will be asked during the first workshop to take photographs of people or other things symbolic of your leadership and learning experiences and you will spend maximum 30 minutes to take pictures. In the second and third workshops, you will join a collaborative collage making activities and group analysis activities. In addition to that, you will spend approximately 30 minutes to go through each transcript and in total will be three transcripts from three focus group sessions. In total you will spend 1.5 hours to go through the transcripts during this study. Your time commitment to this study will be 6.5 hours in total. You need not be an artist or a photographer.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time you need to spend in the focus groups, taking photographs and reading over the transcripts from focus group sessions. The focus groups will be arranged at the time convenience and location of the participants. If you choose to take photographs of people, you will first discuss the research with that person and then have them sign an Image Consent Form that will be distributed at the first workshop. These photographs will be used for discussion purposes only and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

You as a participant involved this study will have a chance to explore collectively with other women how involvement with GSS, leadership roles and learning have empowered them academically and socially, but also, strengthened the work of GSS and UVic as a whole, particularly in terms of incoming international women graduate students. The transcripts will be shared with you as well as the final product of the study if you wish to see this latter.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, you will be asked for your consent to use of data collected from you up until your withdrawal. It will be your decision to agree to my use of data or not. If you do not agree, your parts in the focus group transcripts will be removed.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, in any papers, publications or presentations made in relation to data collected in this project a pseudonym will be used and any descriptions identifying you or people related to you will be changed. You will be asked in the first focus group to take photographs of people or things symbolic of your leadership and learning. These photos will not be used outside the research process.

As this is a group process, you will of course not be anonymous to the other members of the group. However, we will agree during the first focus group not to discuss the study outside the group in any way that you could be identified.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data (including photos of people) will be protected by any recorded data being stored in a locked filing cabinet. Any typed data will be held in a password protected computer storage device. All photographs will be destroyed once the study is complete (2013).

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: My Master thesis, class presentations, presentations at scholarly meetings, directly to participants and published articles or chapters. Anonymity will always apply.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of within 5 years.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include researcher, Fatma Didem Dogus at [REDACTED] and the supervisor of this research Darlene Clover at [REDACTED].

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher



Appendix B: Telephone/Email Script

My name is Fatma D. Dogus ([REDACTED]) and I am a Master of Arts student in the department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

I am conducting a research titled Voices of Female International Graduate Students: Feminist Art Based Case Study at University of Victoria Graduate Students' Society. Since you have undertaken an important leadership role within the Graduate Students' Society at the University of Victoria, you are invited to participate to this study.

You can find important details of the study and your participation below. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you would like to participate to this study, please contact me at [REDACTED] via email or [REDACTED] via phone.

Researcher:

Fatma Dogus, MA student, Department of Ed Psych and Leadership Studies, Faculty of Education; [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this research is gather qualitative data on your insights on being a female international graduate student who has been involved with GSS. The study is interested in understanding the contributions playing a leadership role GSS has made to your academic, social and work life. The study will also explore your learning experiences as a member of GSS.

This Research is Important because:

Although there is a great deal of literature on women's leadership and learning, and on the experiences of graduate international students, there is a paucity of research on graduate student leadership in student organisations and even less so on the experiences of women. Yet women international students who take on leadership roles play an important part in ensuring the academic and social health of the University of Victoria as a whole, and the place of graduate students in particular. There is also little connection made in studies between women student's leadership and their nonformal learning, although we know from studies that nonformal learning is vital to women's sense of self, agency and empowerment. Further, there are few studies that use arts-based research methods with women international students, yet the arts are now understood to be critical tools for giving women a voice and helping them to story and visualize their own experiences. This study is important because it will raise the profile of women

international students on campus in terms of their leadership roles, contribute to the discourses of community leadership and adult learning and provide a new context for art-based research.

Participation:

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a female international graduate student who is or has been involved with GSS at UVic. Your participation is totally voluntary and you have the right to withdraw anytime during the research. Although the study will use an arts-based method, you do not need to be an artist in anyway.

Procedures:

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include three focus group sessions; each will be maximum of 1.5 hours in length for a total of 4.5 hours. This research will use an art-based method. You will be given a full introduction to using this method during the first focus group of the study. You will be asked during the first workshop to take photographs of people or other things symbolic of your leadership and learning experiences and in the second and third workshops, join a collaborative collage making activities and group analysis activities.

Benefits to the Participant:

The participants involved in this study will have a chance to understand collectively how their involvement with GSS, their leadership roles and what they have learned have empowered them academically and socially, but also, strengthened the work of GSS and UVic as a whole, particularly in terms of incoming international women graduate students. The transcripts will be shared with you as well as the final product of the study if you wish to see this latter.

Risks:

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. Your name will not appear in any publications and reports.

Withdrawal of Participation:

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, you will be asked for your consent to use of data collected from you up until your withdrawal. It will be your decision to agree to use of data or not. If you do not agree, your parts in the focus group transcripts will be removed.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

In terms of protecting your anonymity, in any papers or presentations made in relation to data collected in this project your name will be changed and any descriptions identifying you or people related to you will be changed to protect your anonymity. You will be asked in the first

focus group to take photographs of people or things symbolic of your leadership and learning. These photos will not be used outside the research process.

As this is a group process, you will of course not be anonymous to the other members of the group. However, we will agree during the first focus group not to discuss the study outside the group in any way that you could be identified.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data (including photos of people) will be protected by any recorded data being stored in a locked filing cabinet. Any typed data will be held in a password protected computer storage device. All photographs, will be destroyed once the study is complete (2013).

Research Results will [may] be Used/Disseminated in the Following Ways:

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: My Master thesis, class presentations, presentations at scholarly meetings, directly to participants and published articles or chapters. Anonymity will always apply.

Questions or Concerns:

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include researcher, Fatma Didem Dogus at [REDACTED] and the supervisor of this research Darlene Clover at [REDACTED].

Contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria, (250) 472-4545
ethics@uvic.ca

Appendix C: Image Release Form

I consent to have my photograph taken by the participants and used for the purposes of the study titled **Voices of Female International Graduate Students: Feminist Art Based Case Study at University of Victoria Graduate Students' Society** being conducted by Fatma Dogus as a part of her MA thesis at the department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria.

I understand that my name will never be used in relation to my photographs. Also I understand and consent that the photographs of mine will only be used as data during research to create a discussion with the participants and will not be published or shared in any media. I consent my photographs to be used to as a data during the focus groups, although participants will be able to recognize my face.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study anytime, and if I do not say otherwise the photographs of mine will not be used during the study and will be destroyed.

My signature on this form indicates that I fully understand and consent to have my photographs taken and used in this research.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Certificate of Approval



University
of Victoria

Human Research Ethics Board

Office of Research Services
Administrative Services Building
PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria, British Columbia V8W 2Y2, Canada
Tel 250-472-4545, Fax 250-721-6960
Email ethbs@uvic.ca Web www.research.uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Fatma Didem Dogus	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER: 12-286
UVic STATUS: Master's Student	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 07-Aug-12
UVic DEPARTMENT: EPLS	APPROVED ON: 07-Aug-12
SUPERVISOR: Darlene Clover	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 06-Aug-13

PROJECT TITLE: Voices of Female International Graduate Students: Feminist Art Based Case Study at University of Victoria Graduate Students' Society

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: None

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: None

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications

To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals

Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures

When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.



Dr. Rachael Scott
Associate Vice-President, Research

Certificate Issued On: 07-Aug-12

2012-08-07 10:00 AM